

INSIDE THE COMA OF WAYNE MORSE

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It will devastate two countries.

It will topple the president of the United States.

It will kill two million people.

And one man will try to stop it before it begins.

Author Bio:

Putting his degree in Electrical Engineering from the University of California at Berkeley to good use, Steve Lyons writes plays as well as unproduced movie scripts and is a homemaker for his wife Bree and son Riley. Mr. Lyons is the founder of Playwrights Cafe (www.PlayCafe.org), a theatre writing group in Berkeley, California. His one-act play *Conception* premiered at the Boulder Museum of Modern Art One-Act Festival where it was given the "Best Play" award. An excerpt from *Conception* appears in *221 Monologues for Women* (Smith and Kraus). It has been produced several times in the United States and at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe in 1999. His full-length comedy *Cockroach Infestation* was produced in San Francisco in 2002. His one-act *Peaches En Regalia* premiered at the Fritz Blitz Festival in San Diego where it was honored with the "Best Play" award. It has gone on to be produced in London, Edinburgh, New York City, Los Angeles and San Francisco.

Log Line:

It's 1974 and Senator Wayne Morse and a premature baby struggle with life and death as the Gulf of Tonkin incident of 1964 invades the coma of Wayne Morse.

INSIDE THE COMA OF WAYNE MORSE

Characters:

| | |
|-------------------|----------------------------|
| Wayne Morse | Male, 65 - 75 yo |
| Daniel Doyle | Male, 20 - 30 yo |
| Nurse | Female, black, 40 - 50 yo |
| Mrs. Morse | Female, 60 - 70 yo |
| Jessie Doyle | Female 25 - 35 yo |
| William Fulbright | Male, 40 - 45 yo |
| Lyndon Johnson | Male, 60 yo |
| Robert McNamara | Male, 40 - 45 yo |
| Doris | Female, 30 - 40 yo |
| Voice #1 | Male, 25 - 45 yo |
| Voice #2 | Male or Female, 25 - 45 yo |

The Dead:

Non-speaking parts for five to seven men, women and children. The script specifies five. The men mostly American and Vietnamese soldiers.

Note:

Doubling for production: Doris may double as Mrs. Morse; the Nurse may double as Voice #2; Lyndon Johnson may double as one of the dead.

Doubling for reading: No "dead" are required. Mrs. Morse may double as Jessie Doyle and Doris; the Nurse may double as Voice #2; LBJ may double as William Fulbright

The voices come out on stage when speaking. Sometimes the voices are indicated in the script as "Voice." Other times, the name of the person that the voice is speaking for is used. The director can then assign either Voice#1 or Voice#2 to characters as desired.

Synopsis:

Wayne Morse was one of two Senators to vote against the Gulf of Tonkin resolution in 1964, which gave Lyndon Johnson the authority to invade Vietnam. Now, 1974, Wayne Morse is close to death. He and a newborn baby struggle with life and death as the 1964 Gulf of Tonkin incident invades the coma of Wayne Morse. The senate hearing in the play is based on highly edited transcripts from the August 6, 1964 senate hearing on the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution. Other source material includes speeches taken from the Congressional Record, recordings of presidential phone conversations, a televised speech of LBJ, and a television interview with Wayne Morse.

Date: July 22, 1974

Time: 10 am

Setting: The ICU of Good Samaritan Hospital in Portland, Oregon. Medical equipment. Wayne Morse, barely visible under sheets, is in hospital bed. Mrs. Morse is at his side, asleep in a chair.

(moment)

(NURSE enters)

NURSE

Mrs. Morse. Mrs. Morse?

MRS. MORSE

(awakening) Oh, oh, Yes?

NURSE

I'm sorry. We're bringing in another patient. Would you mind stepping out for a while?

MRS. MORSE

Of course.

NURSE

It will just be a few minutes.

(NURSE helps MRS. MORSE)

You must be exhausted dear. Why not go home and get some rest for a few hours? We'll call if his condition changes.

MRS. MORSE

Thank you. You're right. I'll go home for a bit. Thank you.

(MRS. MORSE exits)

NURSE

(to Wayne Morse, while preparing room)

You are one lucky duck to have such a woman. You don't deserve her, and she sure as hell don't deserve the likes of you.

If you survive this thing, which you won't, but if you do, I'm voting for Packwood. And I'm telling everyone I know to do the same. Defeat your ass. Why drag that sweet lady to Washington again? That's no life. Freezing cold. Back stabbing people. Give her a home life for once.

(NURSE brings in gurney with Mrs. Doyle on it)

There we go Mrs. Doyle. Hope the ride down wasn't too rough.

MRS. DOYLE

I'm okay.

NURSE

You a little groggy?

MRS. DOYLE

I'm okay.

NURSE

That will wear off shortly, then I'll be back to give you something to help with the pain.

MRS. DOYLE

My baby?

NURSE

He's fine. He's great. Such a doll. We'll bring him in soon.

MRS. DOYLE

So he's okay?

NURSE

Everything went fine. They just have him under the UV lights down at the nursery. Standard procedure.

MRS. DOYLE

I want to see him.

NURSE

Of course dear. Real soon.

And from your chart it seems that Mr. Doyle...

MRS. DOYLE

Doesn't exist.

NURSE

Right. Never hurts to ask. You'll be getting a private room later today. But for now afraid you'll have to share a room with Wayne Morse.

MRS. DOYLE

The senator?

NURSE

The former senator, yes. But don't worry, he's in a coma.

MRS. DOYLE

A coma? But I'm voting for him in November.

NURSE

I really think you should reconsider. Packwood's a much better choice.

MRS. DOYLE

Bob Packwood? I've never voted for a Republican in my life.

NURSE

Mrs. Morse doesn't want to go back to Washington, DC. She needs a rest.

MRS. DOYLE

Oh, I see. Okay, I'll vote for Packwood.

NURSE

Thanks, dear.

MRS. DOYLE

Is he going to be all right? Gee, I would love to talk with him when he comes out of it.

NURSE

That might be difficult. First, I have seen this thing before, and no one comes out of it. Second, you don't exactly talk "with" Wayne Morse. It's more like he talks and you listen.

MRS. DOYLE

(yawns)

NURSE

There now. Get some rest. You and... what's your baby's name?

MRS DOYLE

Daniel.

NURSE

You and Daniel have had a rough 20 hour labor. C Section is hard on both the mommy and baby.

(DANIEL, played by male, 20-30yo, falls down from the sky. He is dressed in a parachuter's outfit, complete with parachute pack on his back and goggles. He swings around on the harness about ten feet above the floor. Perhaps a fan blows up at him to suggest falling through the air. He is slightly behind the beds, so the occupants of the beds can not see him without turning around.)

DANIEL

EEEEOWWWWW!! BABY!

NURSE

You both need your rest.

DANIEL

Rest hell, I been resting for eight months !!

NURSE

A premature baby like Daniel needs to be watched carefully. But we'll bring him down in a bit and see if he'll take a breast.

DANIEL

I'll take three or four, thanks. I'm starving.

NURSE

Try to get some sleep, Mrs. Doyle. We'll wake you.

DANIEL

Sleep? What about chow time?

(NURSE exits)

Mom? Mom?

(MRS. DOYLE gets comfortable and closes her eyes. She does not hear Daniel.)

Mom, come and get me out of this incubator down here in the nursery.

(pause)

I've got some questions for you about this whole thing. Mom?

I liked the womb. A lot. Mom, can you hear me?

Could we go back to the womb part? That was just fine, but this...

Mom, up here. We gotta talk. I feel like I'm falling. It's scary.

(Notices other bed and patient. Turns his attention to Wayne Morse. He swings close to Morse.)

Hello?

(MORSE leaps from bed, startled)

MORSE

What!?!

DANIEL

Can we talk?

MORSE

Who are you?

DANIEL

I'm Daniel. I was born this morning at 5 AM. That is my mother, Jessie Doyle.

MORSE

What! I'm not in a private room?

DANIEL

We're all in this private room together.

So, the scuttlebutt in the nursery is that this is it. No more womb.
That true?

MORSE

I really should be in a private room. Where's Midge?

DANIEL

Who's Midge?

MORSE

My wife.

DANIEL

Haven't seen her.

MORSE

What they say there in the nursery...

DANIEL

Yes?

MORSE

It's true. No more womb. This is it.

DANIEL

And this feeling like I'm falling. What's that?

MORSE

Life.

DANIEL

I really get this sense that I'm falling!

MORSE

You are.

DANIEL

This is life? Falling?

MORSE

Yes.

DANIEL

Gives me a crazy feeling in my tummy. I'm not sure if I like this.
Will I get use to it?

MORSE

No. Yes. Maybe.

DANIEL

Woaaaah! Does this falling ever stop?

MORSE

Yes.

When? DANIEL

When you hit the ground. MORSE

That's it? That's life? Falling and falling and then you hit the ground? DANIEL

Yes. MORSE

Oh. DANIEL
Are you sure?

Yes. MORSE

Is there... anything... DANIEL

You can do about it? Sure. See that cord? MORSE

This cord? DANIEL

Yes. That's called a rip cord. It releases a parachute. It will stop your fall. MORSE

Great - thanks. DANIEL

(DANIEL begins to pull cord)

NO! Wait! Not now. When you need it. It may be decades before you need to pull that cord. Just leave that be for now. MORSE

Okay. DANIEL
So, who are you?

My name is Wayne Morse. I was Oregon's Senator for many years. Lost my senate seat in '68 but I'm running for reelection. Or I was. This coma is really messing up my plans. MORSE

What are you doing here? DANIEL

MORSE
Hitting the ground, I think.

DANIEL
Oh.
May I ask you something?

MORSE
Certainly.

DANIEL
Is it worth it?

MORSE
Is what worth it?

DANIEL
Life.

MORSE
Ummmm. What are your other options at this point?

DANIEL
Well, let's say you had other options. Would you do it again? Life, I mean.

MORSE
Never thought about it. But, well, I'm not sure. Maybe.

DANIEL
You aren't sure?

MORSE
Well, life isn't always fair. People aren't always kind. And frankly, lots of things don't make sense.

DANIEL
So you wouldn't do it over again?

MORSE
No, guess not. But that's not the same as saying I'm sour on the first go round, I'm just saying I would have to think hard before doing it all over again. If some angel said, "I'm giving you another 75 years," I probably wouldn't sign up.

DANIEL
Is that why you don't pull your cord?

MORSE
Cord?

DANIEL
On your parachute.

MORSE

Oh. Oh that. Well, I guess I already pulled the cord. In 1951. I'll tell you something. In 1951 I was kicked in the head by a horse. I came close to dying. It was a very serious injury. But I pulled the cord. I fought. I fought for life, I needed to live. I wanted to live. Why? I'm not afraid of dying now. I wasn't afraid of dying back then. But I was afraid of all the stuff I would miss. I had three little girls at home, and I wanted to see how things would turn out for them. And I would have missed Midge something horrible. I'll still miss her.

But in 1951, you know what I was going to miss the most? The future! I didn't want to die because World War II had just ended and a new age was dawning. This is what we had been fighting for! We were on the threshold of a new era in nearly every facet of our lives.

I'll tell you, 1951 was no time to die.

DANIEL

What's World War II?

MORSE

Well, "war" is when--

DANIEL

No. I know what war is. I wasn't born yesterday.

MORSE

(pause) You made a joke.

DANIEL

I did?

MORSE

Yes! Did you do that on purpose?

DANIEL

A joke requires an element of the unexpected. For something to be unexpected, one needs a history with what is expected. Since I just got here, I have no history. *Ergo* I cannot make a joke.

I mean, that wouldn't make sense.

MORSE

(long pause as he stares at Daniel and takes this in)

World War II was a war that involved nearly the entire world during the 1940s.

DANIEL

Oh.

So if you had the option of being born or not, you would suggest that a person not be born right now?

MORSE

Look, these are very difficult questions. You really should be talking to your mother.

DANIEL

I tried, but...

MORSE

But what?

DANIEL

She's not in a coma.

MORSE

Comas do open the input channels, I admit.

Oh, that's ridiculous. You've got to be able to wake her.