

PERUSAL SCRIPT

NOTHING PERSONAL

A New Play by
Eric Samuelsen



Newport, Maine

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NOTHING PERSONAL

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Eric Samuelsen's *NOTHING PERSONAL* received its world premiere at Plan-B Theatre Company October 24-November 3, 2013. It was designed by Cheryl Ann Cluff (sound), Phillip R. Lowe (costumes), Jesse Portillo (lighting), Jerry Rapier (props) and Randy Rasmussen (set) with dramaturgy by Martine Kei Green-Rogers. It was stage managed by Sarah Mohr and directed by Jerry Rapier, with Kirt Bateman as Kenneth, Dee-Dee Darby-Duffin as Matron, and April Fossen as Susan.

NOTHING PERSONAL was one of 36 plays nominated nationwide for the American Theatre Critics Association/Steinberg Award for Best New American Play Produced Outside New York in 2013.

CHARACTERS

KENNETH — Bland, unflappable and efficient, fanaticism well under wraps

SUSAN — Blonde, middle-aged but still holding onto her looks, bright and tough

MATRON —

PLACE Susan's prison cell

TIME Then and now; somewhere between reality and fantasy

— at the end of a line means that the line is interrupted.

... at the end of a line means that there is an unfinished thought and a pause

NOTHING PERSONAL a play by Eric Samuelsen. 2f 1m. Prison cell, Contemporary prison costumes/legal type suit. About 80 minutes. **What Is Truth? Is it defined by power? If so, it may not be truth at all!** From 1996-1998, Susan McDougal, a woman from Little Rock, Arkansas, married to Jim McDougal, an S&L owner, was under investigation by Special Prosecutor Kenneth Starr for her alleged complicity in the Whitewater case. Because she refused to testify before Starr's Grand Jury, Susan McDougal spent eighteen months in federal prison, including 8 months in solitary confinement. David Hale, a main Whitewater witness, insisted that she had had an affair with Bill Clinton. She insisted that she had not done so, and would not lie about it in court. For that refusal, she was imprisoned. *NOTHING PERSONAL* is a play very loosely based on McDougal and her imprisonment. The idea that 'truth' is a function of power derives from Kenneth Starr. And the play explores a link between fundamentalist religious dogma and conservative politics. The play also echoes 9/11, symbolized by imagery of people leaping from the roof of a burning building. The play does describe 'Susan' as being mistreated in ways that Susan McDougal never was. No confusion is intended—the play simply needed to have a broader scope than the specifics of one case. But Susan McDougal was abused in ways that would be unconscionable now, especially with more transparency. It was possible for government to hide things then, that seemingly cannot be hidden now. The play's primary motivation is the exploration of human-rights abuses and the curtailing of basic civil liberties by government, and the people in power. **Nominated for the American Theatre Critics Association/Steinberg Award for Best New American Play Produced Outside New York in 2013. ORDER #3271**

Eric Samuelsen taught at Wright State University in Dayton, Ohio before joining the faculty at Brigham Young University in 1992. He became head of the Playwriting program at BYU in 1999. He has also taught as an adjunct faculty member in the Religion department. He retired from BYU in 2012.

As a playwright, Samuelsen has had twenty-seven plays professionally produced in Utah, Indiana, Louisiana, New York, and California. Some of his plays include *Gadianton*, which has seen three professional productions across the country, *A Love Affair with Electrons*, *Family*, *The Plan*, and *The Way We're Wired*. He is resident playwright at Plan-B Theatre Company in Salt Lake City, who designated their

2013-14 season a 'Season of Eric, including productions of six of his plays.

He is a member of the Playwrights' Circle, and the Dramatists Guild. He is three-time winner of the Annual Award in Playwriting offered by the Association for Mormon Letters (AML) and he became president of AML in 2007. In 2013 the organization awarded him the Smith Pettit Award for his lifetime work as a playwright.

He has been a staff writer for the on-line satirical magazine The Sugarbeet. He was also featured in the book *Conversations with Mormon Authors*, edited by Chris Bigelow. He is a noted Ibsen translator, and has also published scholarly articles on 19th and 20th century Scandanavian Theatre, and more recently, on LDS drama and film. He blogged at Mormoniconoclast.com. Eric died in September of 2019 after a long battle with polymyositis. This has left a huge hole in the Theatre Community within, and outside of, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

AUTHOR'S NOTE:

From 1996-1998, Susan McDougal, a woman from Little Rock, Arkansas, married to Jim McDougal, an S&L owner, was under investigation by Special Prosecutor Kenneth Starr for her alleged complicity in the Whitewater case. Because she refused to testify before Starr's Grand Jury, Susan McDougal spent eighteen months in federal prison, including 8 months in solitary confinement. David Hale, a main Whitewater witness, insisted that she had had an affair with Bill Clinton. She insisted that she had not done so, and would not lie about it in court. For that refusal, she was imprisoned.

In a sense, then, the character 'Susan' in my play *NOTHING PERSONAL* refers to Susan McDougal, and 'Kenneth' refers to Kenneth Starr. References in the play to 'David' mean David Hale, 'Jim' equals Jim McDougal and 'Bill' means Bill Clinton. *NOTHING PERSONAL* is a play very loosely based on McDougal and her imprisonment.

But not all that much of it. My initial impulse was to focus entirely (and factually) on McDougal and her imprisonment. But as I wrote the play in the darker years of the Bush administration, I became increasingly concerned about the loss of civil liberties taking place through a wide variety of measures and incidents. The Patriot Act, warrantless wiretaps, the illegal detention of terrorist suspects in Guantanamo and other 'dark sites' across the globe, all reflected an overall atmosphere of fear and paranoia, leading to the destruction of basic American constitutional provisions. I began to see Kenneth Starr's out-of-control Whitewater inquisition as an early symptom of that paranoia. Starr's self-righteousness, his prissy obsession with sexuality, his prurient obsession with McDougal's appearance and (as he supposed it) loose morals, it all seemed to reflect a similar narrative to the Bush/Cheney war on terror narrative. America under attack. America in terrible mortal but also moral danger. Because Bill Clinton was sexually rapacious, (hardly the case), because he had had an affair with Susan McDougal (which was completely untrue), America was morally threatened, morally bankrupt even, and McDougal's civil rights could be violated with impunity. I'll grant that that 9/11 attacks did constitute an actual threat to the American homeland. But by so routinely violating the fundamental human rights of detainees (most of whom were entirely innocent), we lost the moral high ground, and lost as well the opportunity to genuinely engage with the Moslem world.

The same arrogance and self-righteousness and contempt for rule of law continues today. I supported Barack Obama's candidacy because I saw in him the possibility for genuine change. But as our country continues drone attacks that kill non-combatants, and Guantanamo stays open, that assault on civil liberties continues. I supported the President in both his political campaigns, with both time and money. But friends tell friends the truth, and this President has also succumbed to fear, with its attendant violence.

So the play gradually shifts away from the specifics of the McDougal case, and begins to make reference to such 'enhanced interrogation techniques' as sensory deprivation and waterboarding, none of which actually happened historically to McDougal.

The third character in the play, the Matron, represents for me the law enforcement establishment, the soldiers at Guantanamo, the bailiffs in the courtroom, the jailers and cops and foot soldiers. She'll go along with Starr, but when he loses her, he's done. And she's deeply, personally and genuinely religious, which I have symbolized by having her speak entirely using glossalia.

The idea that 'truth' is a function of power derives from Kenneth Starr. And the play also explores a link between fundamentalist religious dogma and conservative politics. The play also echoes 9/11, symbolized by imagery of people leaping from the roof of a burning building.

The play does describe 'Susan' as being mistreated in ways that Susan McDougal never was. No confusion is intended—I simply want the play to have a broader scope than the specifics of one case.

NOTHING PERSONAL

SCENE ONE — SUSAN sits up. Enter KENNETH and MATRON.

KENNETH: Susan.

SUSAN: Kenneth.

KENNETH: (*Turns to MATRON.*) Session eighteen in our ongoing interrogation, usual boilerplate. Note the witness has consented to audio taping of questioning—

SUSAN: No, no...

KENNETH: Note that in writing, witness has consented—

SUSAN: I haven't consented to—

KENNETH: Also note witness has waived right to counsel.

(MATRON nods, takes no notes.)

SUSAN: I haven't.

KENNETH: Given that you have no right to counsel, given that this is a voluntary briefing regarding a grand jury proceeding in which counsel—

SUSAN: I haven't waived—

KENNETH: When you appear, when you finally do agree to appear—

SUSAN: I'm not going to appear—

KENNETH: You can be compelled to appear—

SUSAN: Yeah, you can drag me in there in my, you know, orange jump suit and handcuffs and, but, you can't compel me to you know say anything. About—

KENNETH: No. Well. That would seem to be the cause of our present impasse.

SUSAN: Bet your ass.

KENNETH: Which puzzles me, frankly. I see this, for example, from the FBI, an unsolicited affidavit attesting to your voluntary cooperation—

SUSAN: I cooperated, yes, I thought, you know, I didn't do anything, so—

KENNETH: So with that history, I'd say it's in all our interest—

SUSAN: No.

KENNETH: In all our interest—

SUSAN: In my interest. How in my interest?

KENNETH: A proffer is a—

SUSAN: I know about the proffer. I—

KENNETH: Legally binding...

SUSAN: I rejected your proffer, repeatedly I have reject—

KENNETH: Yes.

SUSAN: So what makes you think—

KENNETH: In the interest of exploring every possible avenue—

SUSAN: Why?

KENNETH: As part of our continuing proffer negotiation. So....

(Gestures to MATRON who turns on the tape recorder.)

SUSAN: So you're taping this.

KENNETH: Creating an impartial record of—

SUSAN: No no no. No, see, you ask me the same question fifteen different ways, and then you compare the maybe like slightly different answers and then it's 'you keep changing your story, why does your story keep—

KENNETH: But a copy of these proceedings will be furnished you.

SUSAN: Unedited.

KENNETH: Of course.

SUSAN: No, forget it, no. Every tiny inconsistency, and then you'll, no. No, and you'll be going over it looking for... no, this is more rope for me to hang myself, why should I trust the trained monkeys on your—

KENNETH: Note that the witness continues hostile.

(MATRON makes a note.)

Susan, as you're well aware, I've been trying to keep this as non-adversarial as—

SUSAN: Non adversarial, it's adversarial, I feel plenty adversarial—

KENNETH: As friendly, as informal—

SUSAN: I am in jail for contempt.

KENNETH: Yes.

SUSAN: Officially, legally, I hold you in contempt. Not just personally. I do that too, I feel contempt for you as a human, you know, as a person. But. As a legal, you know, whatever, legal position—

KENNETH: Certainly.

SUSAN: I mean, non-adversarial, I'm as pissed off as it's possible—

KENNETH: (*Mildly.*) Shall we proceed?

SUSAN: Why?

KENNETH: In a good faith effort to break up this logjam, I recommend—

SUSAN: You have David's testimony.

KENNETH: We do.

SUSAN: He hasn't changed it? He's still spinning the same line of bullshit—

KENNETH: David's testimony remains consistent.

SUSAN: And Jim.

KENNETH: Yes.

SUSAN: Jim, my ex, who I felt sorry for, pathetic old, who I chose to protect, who I-I-I... we were charged together, I could have, should have asked for a separate trial, but because I didn't want to-to-to....

KENNETH: Jim's testimony remains consistent.

SUSAN: (*Pause.*) So I can't. You've got this entire, like, false narrative thing and... I can't.

KENNETH: You've been asked to do your duty as a respectable, law abiding citizen of this country. Something you, a convicted felon, manifestly are not, but still, we have done you the courtesy—

SUSAN: I was convicted, no no no, that was part of the pressure you were putting on me to ... to—

KENNETH: You've been asked to testify to the grand jury as to what you did, what you saw, what you know. You have obdurately refused.

SUSAN: I haven't refused to—

KENNETH: You have obdurately refused.

SUSAN: I've said it repeatedly. I'll happily testify if you'll resign.

KENNETH: We both know that's not going to—

SUSAN: I don't trust you. I have no reason to trust you. Resign, and I will testify before your replacement.

KENNETH: I don't make deals with felons.

SUSAN: You, oh come on, you do too, you made a deal with David and—

KENNETH: I don't make deals in order to—

SUSAN: What's a proffer anyway but a a a deal you're—

KENNETH: Fine. Yes, there's a deal on the table, yes.

SUSAN: So quit. I'll talk to the next guy.

KENNETH: Susan. You dislike me. That's very clear. But you must know that I don't dislike you. This is nothing personal.

SUSAN: It's plenty personal.

KENNETH: Then I would advise you to set that aside. Take the oath, tell what you know.

SUSAN: Well, what am I supposed to... You won't be budged. You've got this absurd story—

KENNETH: No, the story, the only story, the story of you and Bill and Jim and—

SUSAN: I'm not going to change what I've said all along.

KENNETH: So you choose to remain here.

SUSAN: No.

KENNETH: You choose to—

SUSAN: Fine, sure. Yes, I choose to stay. Enjoying the amenities you've provided. At this fine establishment.

KENNETH: The door has a lock, and the key, you hold in the palm of your hand.

SUSAN: I have testified.

KENNETH: No.

SUSAN: I have told what I did and what I—

KENNETH: No.

SUSAN: I have said, in affidavit after affidavit—

KENNETH: No.

SUSAN: Okay, not in court, no, but still. You deposed me, that's still under oath, you have my truthful deposition.

KENNETH: No.

SUSAN: Regarding the, the specific questions—

KENNETH: Please stop this, it's an insult to my—

SUSAN: I have cooperated! And it got me a a a conviction, a felony conviction, based on lies told by David, corroborated by Jim, and—

KENNETH: And that can all go away.

SUSAN: So I've been told.

KENNETH: It can all disappear. No sentence has yet been imposed, nor will it until this small matter, this small, insignificant matter is resolved.

SUSAN: I told the truth then, and look what it—

KENNETH: Under oath, in a courtroom? No. You have not.

SUSAN: I wanted to.

KENNETH: No, Susan, we both know that you have neither cooperated nor truthfully testified.

SUSAN: I-I...

KENNETH: You had a chance to be sworn in, under oath, you—

SUSAN: I was advised, my attorney thought—

KENNETH: You have never allowed us to address the substance of the matter before us—

SUSAN: You want—

KENNETH: We simply want you to respond, under oath, to three questions.

(Pause.)

SUSAN: No. Bullshit. No, you want to hear, you only want to hear certain answers to three—

KENNETH: Your truthful—

SUSAN: Under oath, you want me to, under oath—

KENNETH: Describe precisely—

SUSAN: Tell you about me and Bill.

KENNETH: Of course.

SUSAN: And Jim and the the the—

KENNETH: Of course. Exactly. That is precisely what we want.

SUSAN: It's two against one.

KENNETH: Nonsense, you simply testify to what you, you personally—

SUSAN: David and Jim. Contradicting me, my testimony, ‘cause we would hardly be telling the same, the same—

KENNETH: Are you confessing to an intent to perjure?

(Pause.)

SUSAN: And there you go.

KENNETH: Are you?

SUSAN: (Deep sigh.) No.

KENNETH: You admit to committing perjury in your prior—

SUSAN: No.

KENNETH: You admit to a a a willingness to perjure your—

SUSAN: No, I’m not, I’m not admitting anything or—

KENNETH: All right.

(Pause.)

SUSAN: Hypothetically, though. Okay? Can we do it this way, hypothetically if—?

KENNETH: I don’t deal with hypotheticals.

SUSAN: No. Okay, but like you said, in an effort, you know, to break up this logjam—

KENNETH: Fine, yes, all right, fine.

SUSAN: Supposing I did testify. And I told the truth.

KENNETH: We would expect that you would—

SUSAN: No, my truth. My. Truth.

KENNETH: There’s only truth, there’s only—

SUSAN: What if I said something different from what you’ve already... you know?

KENNETH: Another fairy tale.

SUSAN: But. See? What if I—?

KENNETH: This is useless.

SUSAN: Jim’s got immunity. Right?

KENNETH: Limited. He'll still serve—

SUSAN: No, but, okay, you're still committed to believing him.

KENNETH: He was your husband. Have you found him to be untruthful?

SUSAN: He's sick and he's scared and he doesn't want to die in jail.

KENNETH: He continues to cooperate with our investigation.

SUSAN: So, I testify, under oath.

KENNETH: That's really all we're asking for.

SUSAN: I tell you that Jim would would would say he'd been raped by space aliens if he thought it would keep him out of jail. I tell you that David, David—

KENNETH: There's no need for personalities to—

SUSAN: That David is this lying insane weasel, this complete bastard who's had a hard-on for Bill since, I don't know, since Bill cleaned up this state, got his kind out of the courthouses and back under their white robes where—

KENNETH: This is a legal proceeding, personal invective—

SUSAN: Your star witness! Your star witness against Bill, and he's a a a conman and a fraud and borderline Klan and—

KENNETH: Counter-productive, unnecessary—

SUSAN: Okay, so, fine. I tell the truth. There was no bribe. David's lying. No three hundred million or five hundred thousand or—

KENNETH: You remain obdurate—

SUSAN: No, I'm saying—

KENNETH: Committed to protecting Bill even at your own personal—

SUSAN: Hypothetically, right, hypothetically, if I tell the truth, my testimony will contradict, you know, will contradict—

KENNETH: This is precisely the point where—

SUSAN: My truthful, truthful testimony will be that David is lying, and Jim is terrified and therefore supporting David's lies. That's it. And I'll be indicted for perjury, and since, and since—

KENNETH: Pointless—

SUSAN: And since David is a judge, he's Judge David—

KENNETH: That's really quite enough—

SUSAN: My attorney told me, perjury, it's a level, what, level fourteen felony. In a federal case? Three years?

KENNETH: We would be prepared to offer leniency—

SUSAN: No.

KENNETH: We have approached you with a proffer agreement—

SUSAN: No.

KENNETH: We can arrange—

SUSAN: No.

KENNETH: (*Sighs. Signals MATRON, who leaves.*) How are you? Are you comfortable?

SUSAN: Fine.

KENNETH: Can I get you anything?

SUSAN: Bake me a cake.

KENNETH: Cake?

SUSAN: With a file in the middle.

KENNETH: Ah. Humor. Good.

SUSAN: Love solitary confinement. Feel like Gandhi, all that meditation time. And death row, hey, we've all got this tapping code thing down, feels like the Hanoi Hilton.

KENNETH: You're not on death row, this is a simple contempt citation.

SUSAN: Ah, well, you know, thirty years from now, forty, fifty max years from now, we're all on death row more or less, so—

KENNETH: You're not on death row.

SUSAN: Plus, you wouldn't believe this, but, you can actually bend over the toilet and talk and, something about the pipes, it carries like three floors down. I'm having these great conversations. With all the other death row inmates—

KENNETH: Stop this self-dramatizing nonsense about—

SUSAN: I'm in the section of the prison where solitary confinement—

KENNETH: You in the role of innocent martyr—

SUSAN: The part of the prison with solitary is also where death row—

KENNETH: I meant a more comfortable pillow perhaps.

SUSAN: *(Pause.)* A pillow. Next time, I want my attorney, and

KENNETH: I'll take it under advisement.

SUSAN: No. I'm saying, I want legal representation sitting by my side whenever I—

KENNETH: We both know that's not in your best interest.

SUSAN: I'll judge what's in my—

KENNETH: And attorneys are not allowed in grand jury testimony.

SUSAN: Which is why you like 'em so much.

KENNETH: *(Starts to go.)* We both know that you can and must cooperate with this investigation.

SUSAN: Not gonna happen.

KENNETH: *(A tight smile.)* Tomorrow, then?

SUSAN: Up to you.

(He gets up, hesitates before leaving.)

KENNETH: How's your back?

SUSAN: Fine.

KENNETH: Do you require medical attention?

SUSAN: I'm fine.

KENNETH: Your pastor, perhaps? The minister from your church.

SUSAN: I don't much like my minister.

KENNETH: Why not?

SUSAN: Turns out, he's a Republican.

SCENE TWO — *SUSAN is sleeping. She wakes with a start.*

SUSAN: Who's there?

(Pause.)

Is anyone there?

(Pause.)

Look, I know I heard something. Who are you? What do you want?

KENNETH: It's me.

SUSAN: Shit. Kenneth.

KENNETH: Hello.

(Pause.)

SUSAN: You usually say something.

KENNETH: Do I?

SUSAN: Announce yourself. As soon as you come in.

KENNETH: I thought perhaps if I changed my routine—

SUSAN: Huh. It was just you, then. Sitting. Silent. Watching me.

KENNETH: You were sleeping. I didn't want to disturb you.

SUSAN: Really? That's not how you usually... . Never mind.

KENNETH: Perhaps I indulged in a moment of observation. If it troubled you, I apologize.

SUSAN: Peeping Tom.

KENNETH: Not at all.

SUSAN: Whatever. It's not like I'm anything special, dumpy middle-aged woman, no, you know, movie star or....

KENNETH: Don't underrate yourself. Your appearance.

SUSAN: Okay... . I don't suppose you're here to let me out?

KENNETH: That would depend, wouldn't it?.

SUSAN: Same as always, right?

KENNETH: Why would my requirements change?

SUSAN: The same. . . the ridiculous...

KENNETH: You remain obstinate, I see.

(Gets up to leave.)

SUSAN: Hell. Don't go.

KENNETH: Is there reason for me to stay?

SUSAN: I'm in solitary. Even sparring with you is better than...

(He starts to go again.)

Don't. Please. Why I do this, you're not even here, why I should invent a Kenneth even more disagreeable than the real— You're not here, right?

KENNETH: I am, actually.

SUSAN: Shit. I sleep so badly. My first thought: time to go! Time to leave...

(He stares at her.)

That was stupid. Asking if you were here to let me out. I should have known better.

KENNETH: Are you still in contempt?

(SUSAN laughs.)

Are you?

SUSAN: What do you think?

KENNETH: When you answer a question with a question, it suggests....

SUSAN: I'm still in contempt.

KENNETH: A shame. As I've told you, I'm prepared to be reasonable.

SUSAN: I don't doubt it.

(Pause.)

You have your own doubts about David, don't you?

KENNETH: David has cooperated fully with—

SUSAN: You've had to spend time with him, haven't you? You've had to be his pal.

KENNETH: *(Reluctantly.)* He presumes.

SUSAN: Does he ever.

KENNETH: He presumes a greater intimacy, a closer friendship... well.

SUSAN: Hey, be grateful you're male. He can get pretty grab-ass.

KENNETH: David remains a plausible and persuasive witness.

SUSAN: You know who he is. Come on, you're kidding yourself. And you'll see, I have told you—

KENNETH: *(Wearily.)* No, you haven't.

SUSAN: The truth.

KENNETH: What is truth?

(She doesn't answer.)

I've always thought it rather a shame, actually, that Pilate didn't wait for an answer to that question.

SUSAN: He thought he knew the answer.

KENNETH: He was a Roman prefect. He did know the answer.

SUSAN: His answer.

KENNETH: The answer.

SUSAN: He saw things his way. We all do.

KENNETH: Rome ruled the world. He'd risen to a high position in a ruthless world. He was a victor.

SUSAN: So he created the truth?

KENNETH: Truth, yes. Not ultimate truth.

SUSAN: Okay...

KENNETH: Look who he was talking to. He didn't know, he thought he was dealing with a recalcitrant prisoner, but look who he was really talking to. The truth, the real truth, would have made him free.

SUSAN: 'Cause Jesus won.

KENNETH: Ultimately.

SUSAN: And that's what's real. To you.

KENNETH: Well. Not what's real. Not reality. Certainly truth.

SUSAN: Reality isn't the same as truth?

KENNETH: I wouldn't think so, no.

SUSAN: If something's real then it's true, right?

KENNETH: Not at all. You've constructed a narrative in which I serve as villain, I've constructed one in which you're an adulteress.

SUSAN: Which I'm not.

KENNETH: (Shakes his head dismissively.) Don't...

(Getting back to the point.)

Anyway. I'm more interested in this point, the way both reality and truth imply a way outside subjectivity.

SUSAN: Okay. Like... When I was a girl, my birthday was a day my family moved to a new town. They forgot my birthday. I don't know, I was maybe seven. I sat in the car, wondering why nobody remembered my birthday, trying not to cry, and nobody ever did remember it: I just didn't get a birthday

that year. Except my Mom remembers that day vividly, stopping in a rest area just off the highway, surprising me with a cake, with presents. A happy memory. For her—for me, it never happened.

KENNETH: But truth suggests that something did happen. Either you celebrated your birthday or you didn't. Objective truth, from a universal observer.

SUSAN: God.

KENNETH: If you like.

SUSAN: Could be.

KENNETH: You don't believe?

SUSAN: I believe. I'm not sure in what.

KENNETH: Well, to start, in Someone who knows what happened on your birthday.

SUSAN: Yeah? In one of my earlier prisons, back when? Before solitary? There were these three Jewish women. Kinda looked down on by the other women, who had this whole Aryan nation Christian gangbanger thing that sustained them. Anyway, me and these Jewish gals got to be friends, and they'd tell me all about Judaism. I loved it. Sounded so: tolerant, loving. That's all I want from God. Kindness and compassion.

KENNETH: And I want truth. Hard and sharp as a diamond.

SUSAN: Figures. Anyway, for me the truth is I never got a birthday that year.

KENNETH: And that's reality. But truth is decided by victors. Your mom was an adult, she was in charge of you, her version must therefore be true.

SUSAN: Wo. I don't know about that.

KENNETH: Oh yes.

SUSAN: And suddenly Kristelnacht was the fault of the Jews?

KENNETH: Of course not. The Nazis lost.

SUSAN: But they were winning, and and and what you're saying is, like, Goebbels—

KENNETH: Let's try a less incendiary example, shall we?

SUSAN: Okay....

KENNETH: What do you think of, say, gravity?

SUSAN: Gravity. Like, what, you mean—?

KENNETH: Gravity.

SUSAN: The thing that holds us on this planet—?

KENNETH: Or God does.

SUSAN: God, okay. We don't float off. We're grounded, here.

KENNETH: But the truth. The truth would involve a definition. God. Gravity. Molecular attraction.

SUSAN: I think the truth is that we don't float off.

KENNETH: It's a fact that we don't fly off. That's a fact. But it's not truth. The truth is: why.

SUSAN: Well, we don't.

KENNETH: But if we needed to. To escape.

SUSAN: If we needed to float off.

KENNETH: Exactly.

SUSAN: Well. Too bad for us.

KENNETH: A conclusion that makes sense for you, given your prejudices.

SUSAN: You're calling gravity a prejudice?

KENNETH: Exactly. That's why truth is so compelling. If gravity holds us down, it also holds us back. Need, however compelling, can lead to nothing but despair. What if, for example, we needed to fly? What if the need was immediate and powerful? What if we're on the roof of a building, a very tall building, a tower say, on fire and about to collapse to rubble, what if gravity, as you call it, is about to kill us? There would be no recourse from gravity, no alternative to death. We'd fall, we'd jump, we'd die. But if it's God who clutches us to his earth, like a child clutches his mother's bosom, then, consistent with His will, we could fly. We could escape. The truth could quite literally set us free.

SUSAN: (*Amused.*) You think you're going to be raptured.

KENNETH: Oh. Well, as to that—

SUSAN: You do. You think you're one of the elect.

KENNETH: I have faith.

SUSAN: And it's set you free.

KENNETH: It's more like... Do you run?

SUSAN: Do I run?

KENNETH: For exercise.

SUSAN: In here?

KENNETH: I meant....

SUSAN: I know. Tried it a few times, never had much success. I'd jog, see a bakery, grab a Danish. Next corner, maybe a hot dog stand. Next thing you know I've gone five blocks, stopped for goodies four times. Had to quit—I was putting on too much weight.

KENNETH: I ran once. In high school, I ran. Years ago. Not any longer, office jobs, office chair spread... anyway, I ran. I competed. I'd be in a race, and I'd be behind, losing. And I cannot bear to lose.

SUSAN: Go figure.

KENNETH: But I'd make my move. My kick. And every step: I'd pray. Just "thank you Jesus." Every step. Thank you Jesus thank you Jesus thank you Jesus. It would propel me to victory every time.

SUSAN: Every time?

KENNETH: I was undefeated in high school cross-country.

SUSAN: And then you went to college, and, what, met some, like, Kenyans? Against whom Jesus was powerless?

KENNETH: Kenyans?

SUSAN: Yeah. Like, runners from Kenya. Don't they, like, win the Olympics basically every—

KENNETH: You're accusing me of racism?

SUSAN: What? No.

KENNETH: I'm not. I don't see race, or color, or....

SUSAN: No, come on. I'm suggesting Kenyans are good at distance running. And that believing in Jesus probably wouldn't help you much if you were trying to beat them.

KENNETH: But in court. When I was beginning my practice. Before opening arguments. Help me Jesus. Every time.

SUSAN: So you've accepted Jesus as your personal savior. Isn't that the language?

KENNETH: Indeed I have.

SUSAN: Me too. I guess.

KENNETH: Yes?

SUSAN: Oh, yeah. I don't make a big deal of it, but. . .

KENNETH: I remember, I saw that in your file.

SUSAN: But I don't know. What you said, stuck on top of a burning building. Or trying to outrace Kenyans. I'm pretty sure Jesus wouldn't, you know, intervene. He sure doesn't seem too very often. Or at all. I'd

say it would suck to be on that building.

KENNETH: Your limitation. Your failure of faith.

SUSAN: Yeah, but then you'd die and be in heaven. So maybe it's not so bad.

KENNETH: But if you needed to fly. If God wanted you to.

SUSAN: I'd like to. I'd love to float on out of here.

KENNETH: Ah. But in your case, God does not will it.

SUSAN: Or you, and you're not God.

KENNETH: I'm not, no. But we're talking about you right now. If you had faith sufficient for it, you could, as you say, float away from this prison. But you can't have faith sufficient, because faith depends on truth. And truth is decided by victors.

SUSAN: That's really what you believe?

(He says nothing.)

Look, I have faith.

KENNETH: In God? Or in gravity.

SUSAN: God and gravity.

KENNETH: And I believe in God. Only God.

SUSAN: And there we are.

KENNETH: But you needn't come all the way 'round. You can cling to gravity, you can make reason your faith. I don't require all that much of you.

SUSAN: Truth, in this case, being who I had sex with.

KENNETH: Not at all. You and Jim were partners with Bill and—

SUSAN: For one deal! Which went bust!

KENNETH: Business partners, and also partners in crime. Officials were suborned, bribes were paid, David has provided the details, and Jim has corroborated his testimony. Your testimony, though strictly speaking unnecessary, would be helpful in—

SUSAN: You want me to say I had sex with Bill.

KENNETH: You know precisely what we need you to tell us.

SUSAN: I had sex with Jim. My husband. Only Jim.

KENNETH: But you are an adulteress. You had relations with another man while still married.

SUSAN: After I left Jim! We were legally separated, I'd filed for divorce, and fine, okay, yes, I dated. You've met him; he's working on the case.

KENNETH: An adulteress and a fornicator.

SUSAN: A terrible marriage and a hard divorce, and then I met someone. And I'm telling you the truth about Bill. The truth.

KENNETH: The reality you're trying to sell.

SUSAN: And you're not buying.

KENNETH: I see the truth. And I look at you, and I see a woman far too alluring for Bill to resist, a woman far too voracious to resist his inevitable advances. Your story is contradicted by every part of your personal appearance.

SUSAN: That has to be the rudest, most disgusting compliment any woman has ever—

KENNETH: By every part of your—

SUSAN: You think I'm hot and that makes me a liar.

KENNETH: Your breasts say you lie, your thighs say you lie, your buttocks say—

SUSAN: How long were you sitting there?

KENNETH: Not long.

SUSAN: How long were you staring at me? How many hours, how many days?

KENNETH: So tiresome, this isn't about me—

SUSAN: How many fantasies, how much late night masturbation—

KENNETH: You and Bill were lovers, you cooked up this scheme between you, and you are in a position to—

SUSAN: You've even thought about that, our favorite position?

KENNETH: There's no need for that sort of salacious—

SUSAN: Grubby, disgusting—

KENNETH: Adultery, leading to fraud and perjury and obstruction of justice—

SUSAN: You want to fondle yourself right now, don't you?

KENNETH: Matron.

(MATRON enters.)

Ankle chains.

SUSAN: What?

KENNETH: You can't be trusted. You've asked for a file, the means to escape. You've indicated interest in 'flying out of here.' You're a risk.

SUSAN: You can't do this!

KENNETH: Ankle chains.

(As MATRON puts them on.)

SUSAN: Kenneth, this is ridiculous—

KENNETH: This prisoner offered me sex in exchange for her freedom.

SUSAN: No I did not—

KENNETH: In front of witnesses.

SUSAN: What?!?!?!?!?

KENNETH: You heard her?

(MATRON slowly nods.)

There you go.

SUSAN: Let go of me.

(As MATRON tries to chain her.)

Kenneth, come on, I said, we were talking about Bill, and this—

KENNETH: A consequence of your refusal to live by the simplest laws of civilized conduct—

SUSAN: I didn't offer you sex! You're the one, you're the one who... you know I'm telling the truth!

KENNETH: Susan. What is truth?

SCENE THREE — SUSAN lays on the floor, disheveled.

KENNETH: Susan, wake up.

SUSAN: Why?

KENNETH: Something's happened. There's been a development. We've talked to Bill.

SUSAN: Bill?

KENNETH: No one escapes us, you should know that by now.

SUSAN: You made Bill testify?

KENNETH: We did.

SUSAN: That's... impressive.

KENNETH: No one is above the law.

SUSAN: Yeah?

KENNETH: Anyway, he's slippery. He's gifted with words.

SUSAN: You just now figured that out?

KENNETH: We think we need to ask more specifically. Avoid ambiguities.

SUSAN: I thought this was about, you know, checks and payoffs and bank fraud—

KENNETH: The specifics of your crimes, yes, but we also look to motive.

SUSAN: Oh, yeah, I'm protecting Bill because we were lovers, sure.

KENNETH: You admit it.

SUSAN: It. Never. Happened.

KENNETH: Well, again, you say 'it' never happened. "It." More ambiguity.

SUSAN: Fine, 'it' means sex, so, okay, I say I've never had sex with Bill, how ambiguous—?

KENNETH: Ambiguous enough, as it happens. The meaning of the word 'is'.

SUSAN: I've told you the truth. I don't hide behind ambigui—

KENNETH: We need to eliminate the possibility. Have you had sexual relations with Bill?

SUSAN: No.

KENNETH: That's where we run into difficulties. It would appear that even a question worded so unequivocally reveals a potential for equivocation. Areas of definition and explanation. At least the potential to place words and phrases in what might be regarded as legal quotation marks.

SUSAN: Legal quotation marks?

KENNETH: (*Making quotation marks in the air.*) Have "you" "had" "sexual relations" "with" "Bill."

SUSAN: Wow. Bill's got you on the run.

KENNETH: You admire an adulterer hiding behind semantic niceties?

SUSAN: I admire Bill keeping his wits about him. And, also, he's no adulterer.

KENNETH: He is.

SUSAN: Not with me.

KENNETH: With you, and with many many other partners.

SUSAN: Consensual?

KENNETH: Not always.

SUSAN: You can prove that?

KENNETH: We can prove adultery, as defined by most Americans.

SUSAN: But non-consensual sex, that's rape, right? You can prove rape?

KENNETH: Given time.

SUSAN: Yeah?

KENNETH: You doubt me.

SUSAN: I know Bill. And I'm getting to know you.

KENNETH: Then you know I don't accuse someone lightly.

SUSAN: No, I really don't know that.

KENNETH: Can we begin?

SUSAN: Your dog, your pony.

KENNETH: Have you had sexual relations with Bill?

SUSAN: No.

KENNETH: By sexual relations, we mean has he placed his penis in your vagina and ejaculated.

SUSAN: Oh, you have got to be kidding.

KENNETH: That's how we've defined the term.

SUSAN: You had to define sex? I'm a formerly married woman, I know what sex—

KENNETH: We're eliminating any possible—

SUSAN: Do you get off on this, saying 'penis' and 'vagina?'

KENNETH: Certainly not. I find it as unpleasant a question to ask as you probably find it to answer.

SUSAN: You couldn't possibly—

KENNETH: Has he placed his penis in your vagina and—?

SUSAN: We're seriously doing this?

KENNETH: I apologize. I truly do, if it weren't completely necessary, I would never subject either of us to such a humiliating—

SUSAN: Yeah, okay, whatever.

KENNETH: Has he placed his penis—

SUSAN: No.

KENNETH: Wait until I finish the entire question. Has he placed his penis in your vagina and ejaculated?

SUSAN: No.

KENNETH: By 'no,' do you mean, he never placed his penis in your vagina or he never ejaculated?

SUSAN: Neither. Both.

KENNETH: Could you please say it, then?

(Holds up a recording device.)

For the record?

SUSAN: Turn that off.

KENNETH: I keep a record of all our interactions.

SUSAN: I don't want this whole humiliating—

KENNETH: I do understand.

SUSAN: Oh, well, you sensitive understanding man, thanks so much for—

KENNETH: I think you want witnesses, I think you want this testimony on the record.

SUSAN: I really don't.

KENNETH: Hear me out. You want a court recorder typing out a a a transcript, which I'll sign agreeing to it, and you want to keep a copy.

SUSAN: Okay....

KENNETH: I'm being your friend here. Legally, a recording—

SUSAN: Can be doctored.

KENNETH: I won't.

SUSAN: You already have.

KENNETH: I haven't.

SUSAN: *(Points to MATRON.)* What about her? She's corroborated your lying testimony already once and—

KENNETH: This is a deposition. Very different sort of—

SUSAN: I don't want to cooperate anymore.

KENNETH: I'll give you the tape. When we finish, I'll give the tape to your attorney.

SUSAN: I get to see an attorney?

KENNETH: Yes. This is very important to us, you can take it from the machine, and you can personally place it in the hands of—

SUSAN: He'll get me out of here.

KENNETH: No.

SUSAN: Then why should I—

KENNETH: As a special prosecutor, I have wide latitude—

SUSAN: But at least my attorney would have a record. Maybe for his appeal.

KENNETH: He would.

SUSAN: What makes you think he won't do it?

KENNETH: He's an officer of the court.

SUSAN: You trust that?

KENNETH: You ask if I trust an officer of the court?

SUSAN: Fine. Okay, then.

(MATRON enters, sits.)

KENNETH: Will you please record this session?

(MATRON nods, takes the recorder from him.)

Now, I need you to say it.

SUSAN: Say what?

KENNETH: Answer my question. Did Bill place his penis in your vagina and ejaculate?

SUSAN: No.

KENNETH: No, he never....

SUSAN: No. Bill never placed his penis in my vagina, and he never ejaculated, because he couldn't, because he never was with me in that way.

KENNETH: Has he placed his penis in your mouth?

SUSAN: No.

KENNETH: Or your anus?

SUSAN: No.

KENNETH: Have you touched his penis with either of your hands, or with both hands together?

SUSAN: No.

KENNETH: No, Bill never....

SUSAN: No, Bill never placed his penis in my mouth, or my ass, or my hand, or anywhere around me. He's my husband's friend. I hardly know him, and I've never even been alone with him, let alone in any sexual way whatsoever. At all. Ever.

KENNETH: Have you kissed him, have you hugged him, have you—

SUSAN: I shook his hand. Twice, as I recall. And that's it. Totally, completely it.

KENNETH: And you're certain of this testimony.

SUSAN: I am certain.

KENNETH: Of this....

SUSAN: I am certain of this testimony.

KENNETH: Thank you.

(MATRON leaves. KENNETH stares at her, completely satisfied.)

All this time and trouble, and suddenly a breakthrough.

SUSAN: What breakthrough?

KENNETH: This. Just now. Strange. You so willing to perjure yourself.

SUSAN: I didn't.

KENNETH: Just a deposition, sure, but still. We can make it stick.

SUSAN: Have fun trying.

KENNETH: We've already taken DNA samples from your panties the night we first questioned you.

(She recoils.)

Did you think we'd neglect so simple a step?

SUSAN: No. It's just—

KENNETH: You want to amend your testimony?

SUSAN: You took my panties?

KENNETH: Your possessions are forfeit to us, you know that.

SUSAN: I know. It shouldn't creep me out so much, not after everything else.

KENNETH: Ah.

SUSAN: But it does. You rent an apartment, you start moving in, suddenly, cockroaches.

(Shakes her head in disgust, vocalizes, øø, like the oo in good.)

KENNETH: Small wonder. You have to be aware that we have you now. We'll prove you a liar, and immediately start proceedings.

SUSAN: Based on DNA? From my panties. Go wild.

KENNETH: DNA doesn't lie.

SUSAN: Nope.

KENNETH: I don't blame you, you know.

SUSAN: For what?

KENNETH: Bill's an attractive man. Powerful men are often attractive, and he's attractive on his own. You're certainly not to blame for giving in to him.

SUSAN: I would be to blame, as it happens. When I met him, I was married, and so was he.

KENNETH: The world wouldn't blame you. Most people wouldn't. Not in today's world, not in all this seething corruption. You'd just be another...modern woman.

SUSAN: That's me. Thoroughly modern Susan.

KENNETH: Look, your situation just went from bad to hopeless. So why not just tell us everything now?

SUSAN: Tell you what you want to hear, you mean?

KENNETH: Let's say so.

SUSAN: I ask myself that, you know. What would I be out? It's not a crime. Jim and I are divorced. I hardly know Bill at all. Just admit to something and be done with it.

KENNETH: Matron?

(MATRON comes back in.)

SUSAN: No. I'm not changing my story.

KENNETH: I know that.

SUSAN: I'm not going to say I did something I didn't do. That's what it comes down to.

KENNETH: I could tell that's where you were going. "I ask myself," you said. People don't say "I ask myself" before they change their story. That's how they begin when they're sticking to it.

(The MATRON enters SUSAN's cage. We can't really see what she's doing, but SUSAN begins to scream.)

I truly do regret this.

(BLACKOUT on SUSAN screaming.)

16 MORE PAGES TO THE END:

(She stares at him. He nods. SUSAN looks at MATRON.)

MATRON: Go ahead and leave. I'll watch him for you.

(SUSAN exits, as MATRON looks down at him with a feral smile.)

REVIEWS:

NOTHING PERSONAL — Nominee, American Theatre Critics Association/Steinberg Award for Best New American Play Produced Outside New York in 2013

"Eric Samuelsen's unrelenting dynamo of a play [NOTHING PERSONAL]...offers some of the best performances we are likely to see this season."

- *The Salt Lake Tribune*

"Two Samuelsen plays [NOTHING PERSONAL and RADIO HOUR EPISODE 8: FAIRYANA] have been done so far in Plan-B's 'Season of Eric,' and one major point already is clear: his writing leads to some of the strongest performances ever to grace the company's stage."

- *Selective Echo*

Review: Plan-B's Nothing Personal

by Scott Renshaw (City Weekly)

"I'm not wrong!" Kenneth (Kirt Bateman) bellows at Susan (April Fossen); "I can't be!" It's the culmination of a battle of wills between these allegorical stand-ins, based on Susan McDougal's imprisonment on contempt-of-court charges by special prosecutor Kenneth Starr during the 1994 Bill Clinton/Whitewater investigation, because of her refusal to testify. And as the Susan in Eric Samuelsen's play is subjected to ever-harsher tactics by Kenneth in order to get what he wants, the play's title takes on a compelling meaning.

Because this isn't just about the irony of people's lives being shattered by procedural technicalities of an uncaring system. As Kenneth and Susan—terrifically performed by Bateman and Fossen—battle over the very concept of "truth" versus "reality," Samuelsen digs deeper into the notion that 21st-century civil-liberties violations from Guantanamo to NSA spying are based on something intensely personal in the minds of those who justify the actions. It's a collision between the world as they fantasize it should be—must be—and the world as it is.

Samuelsen tips his hand perhaps a bit too obviously by including a hallucinatory scene in which Kenneth accuses Susan of being part of a terrorist plot, and subjects her to "enhanced interrogation" of various kinds. But director Jerry Rapiere's intense staging—placing the audience on three sides of the stage space, and having Fossen pace around Susan's cell even as audience members enter, while sleep-deprivation sound pierces the room—builds a mood that punches through the moments of didacticism. This one small piece of revisionist history becomes an engrossing harbinger of the way fear has given us a lot more to be afraid of.