

45 Minutes to an Hour

**A Play in One Act
by
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Cast of Characters

<u>Wayne Shaw:</u>	Erstwhile action-movie superstar, 55
<u>Max Levine:</u>	Wayne Shaw's lawyer, friend, and adviser, 50
<u>Willie:</u>	Wayne Shaw's bodyguard, 35. A bowery boy.
<u>Edith:</u>	Max Levine's administrative assistant, 25
<u>Dr. Fritz Clausewitz:</u>	Wayne Shaw's German-born psychologist, 65
<u>Jay Toynbee:</u>	Independent movie director, 28

Scene

The offices of Max Levine, somewhere in Midtown Manhattan.

Time

The present.

SETTING: We are in the offices of MAX LEVINE, entertainment lawyer. A small outer room serves as a reception area: his administrative assistant's desk, a small couch for visitors, table, etc. A door leads into his office proper. The once elegant room is now cluttered with file folders, old copies of *Variety*, *People*, *Entertainment Weekly*. A small bulletin board sports several head shots; a bag of golf clubs sags in one corner. A stereo is lodged in a bookcase, speakers strategically placed in corners.

AT RISE: EDITH is sitting at her desk in MAX'S outer office. She's reading something on her phone. The lights are out in MAX'S inner office. Only the dim outline of a man curled up in a fetal position on the floor can be seen. He's whimpering. The pathetic figure, as we shall soon discover, is WAYNE SHAW, action hero. The door between the two offices is shut.

Enter MAX LEVINE, greatly agitated. He is nattily dressed and wears oversize, thick-rimmed glasses.

MAX

OK, where is he?

(EDITH points to the inner-office door.)

What'd he say?

EDITH

Nothing.

MAX

Nothing?

EDITH

He said nothing.

MAX

He had to have said something.

EDITH

Nothing.

MAX

He said *nothing*? The word *nothing*? He walked into the office and said, "Edith—nothing," and locked himself in my office?

Oh... No.

EDITH

Then what did he say?

MAX

Nothing.

EDITH

Not even hello? He was rude? The rude man waltzes in, says nothing, not out loud, and locks himself in my office?

MAX

Maybe hello.

EDITH

Then he didn't say nothing. *Hello* is something. To say *hello* is to say something and not nothing.

MAX

Don't make fun of me.

EDITH

I'm not making fun of you. How am I making fun of you? I just want a simple answer to a simple question.

MAX

What are you implying?

EDITH

Implying? I imply nothing. I'm speaking plainly. There's no subtext here. There's barely text. All I have is "nothing."

MAX

And I'm not speaking plainly? Is that what you're implying?

EDITH

Oh not this again.

MAX

Yes, I know, I have a speech impediment, Mr. Levine. Everyone knows. The whole world knows. It's called a stammer. A stutter. A communication disfluency suffered by one percent of the adult population. And it is not something I can control, and not something I should be judged for! I AM A VICTIM HERE!

MAX

For the two hundred and eighty-fourth time: You do not stammer. You do not stutter. You are not “disfluent.” You speak a pellucid and perspicuous prose.

EDITH

You’re just like my mother! Deny, deny, deny! I will be free of your delusional existence, sir, where there is room only for the perfect! I will be free of your omnicompetent beautiful people! I will be free to live as God has made me!

MAX

(gently)

Edith.

EDITH

Yes?

MAX

Is Wayne in my office?

EDITH

Yes.

MAX

What did he say?

EDITH

Nothing.

(WILLIE bursts into the office.
He’s attired in a black suit, black
shirt and black tie.)

MAX

Where have you been?

WILLIE

I was wit him.

MAX

Why aren’t you with him now?

WILLIE

He’s in there.

MAX

I know he's in there!

WILLIE

I'm out here.

MAX

Why? Why are you out here?

WILLIE

Where else can I be but where I am?

MAX

In there with him!

WILLIE

But I'm out here.

MAX

Then why isn't he out here with you?!

WILLIE

He gimme the slip.

MAX

He gave you the slip? I'll give you a slip—a pink slip. I hired you to make sure he didn't pull a stunt like this. He's going through a very rough period right now. He's highly vulnerable.

WILLIE

My heart is risible wit pain for Mr. Shaw.

MAX

Risible? Risible with pain? For your information, William Safire, risible means "provoking laughter." What you just said was that his pain provokes your heart to laughter. Is that what you meant to say?

WILLIE

Definitely not. (Pause.) What did I mean?

MAX

I'd need the Bowery Boys equivalent of the Rosetta Stone to figure that out.

WILLIE

I am a mystery even to myself.

(MAX crosses to the inner-office door and knocks.)

MAX

Wayne... Wayne, bubbie, it's me, Max. Open the door, sweetheart.

WAYNE

(Weakly.)

Go away, Max.

MAX

I can't go away, honey. It's my office. I gotta get in there. I've got some very important business to discuss with you. Come on, you can talk to me. I'm not just your agent—I'm your friend, your adviser. How long have we known each other?

WAYNE

This is it, Max.

MAX

What is it?

(to WILLIE)

What's *it*?

EDITH

Maybe it's nothing.

MAX

Don't you start!

WILLIE

Like what he said when he didn't say what he said when he first come in.

MAX

How do you know what he didn't say when he—oh, you two are out to get me today.

WILLIE

Or maybe...maybe it's hello. He's sayin' hello to you, Mr. Levine. Say hello back.

MAX

You think?

(to WAYNE through door)

Are you saying hello to me, sweetheart? If you're saying hello to me, I'm saying hello to you back.

(MAX pulls WILLIE to the door.)

Say hello!

WILLIE

Hello, Wayne! It's me Willie.

(MAX points accusingly at EDITH.)

MAX
 You! Hello!

EDITH
 (busy with her phone)
 Yeah. Great. Hello.
 (she laughs)

MAX
 What's funny?

EDITH
 (holding up her phone)
 There's this gif on Facebook of a YouTube video of a guy scrolling through his Instagram account looking for his LinkedIn password.

MAX
 If Alexander Graham Bell were alive today he'd kill himself.
 (to WAYNE)
 Wayne! Wayne, you have to save me from the crazy people.

WAYNE
 It's too late, Max.

MAX
 It's too late? What's too late?

WILLIE
It's. It's too late.

MAX
 But what's *it's*?

WILLIE
 Maybe it's too late to say hello.

MAX
 Why? Why is it too late to say hello? We just got here.

WAYNE
 This is good-bye, Max.

MAX
 (swatting WILLIE)
 He's not saying hello, you idiot! He's saying good-bye! Say good-bye.

WILLIE

Good-bye, Wayne.

MAX

(to EDITH)

You! Say good—what am I talking about? (to WAYNE) No good-byes, Wayne. We gotta talk! I've got great news!

WAYNE

I've got a gun, Max.

EDITH

Oh, yeah...

MAX

Oh, yeah? Oh yeah what?

EDITH

I forgot. He's got a gun.

MAX

You forgot? How do you forget something like that, a crazy man running around with a gun saying nothing?

EDITH

I was under a lot of pressure! My condition and the empathy it fails to generate causes me a tremendous amount of psychic pain. I'm barely able to remain conscious. I may need the rest of the day off.

MAX

If I don't get into that office in the next 30 seconds, you'll be free to take the rest of your life off.

EDITH

Threats to my livelihood are a form of violence. I may have to unionize.

MAX

Fine—why don't you go dig up Jimmy Hoffa and discuss the dental plan.

(To WILLIE)

And you—

(He swats WILLIE again.)

You're the bodyguard. You're the one who's supposed to have the gun.

WILLIE

That's Wayne Shaw. He don't go nowhere what he's not carryin'.

MAX

"What he's not carryin' "? Where did you go to school? Our Lady of George Raft?

WILLIE

He was afraid of bein' mobbed by his fans and one of dem takin' a shot at him.

MAX

Is that what he told you? He was afraid of being mobbed by his fans? Unless Webster's 10th Collegiate Dictionary now defines a mob as less than three, I wouldn't worry about it. The last time he was mobbed by anything, Bill Clinton was dropping bombs on pharmaceutical plants in Khartoum. He wishes he could be mobbed the way his last four movies performed.

WILLIE

Bill Clinton?

MAX

And they let you drive...

WILLIE

Oh, yeah, I can drive, but I can't park. Parallel park. I gotta put the car in the garage. Only I don't got a garage. So I park in a spot. I got a spot. But I'm on the list for the garage.

MAX

Why don't you go and tell your story to Edith. I think you just might have a very special Hallmark Christmas Movie on your hands.

(to the door again)

Wayne, open the door before I commit a felony.

WAYNE

I'm gonna do it, Max.

WILLIE

He's gonna do it, Mr. Levine.

MAX

Do what? What is he going to do?

WILLIE

It. He's gonna do *It!*

WAYNE

I'm gonna blow my brains all over your office, Max.

It's mine. I give it to him to sport wit.

MAX

To sport wit? Where do you get this stuff?

WILLIE

The Renaissance Festival. I am the Blue Knight.

MAX

Of course, you are. (rolls his eyes at heaven) Listen to me, you maniac: He does not have a license to carry. You know what kind of scandal we'd be dealing with if he were picked up drunk with gun? By the time the tabloids got finished with him, he'd make Jeffrey Dahmer look like one of Jerry's Kids.

WILLIE

Not a problem, Mr. Levine. I got the gun from when I was uh extra on an old *Law and Order* show.

MAX

And old *Law and Order* show? So it's a prop. A toy. He can't hurt himself with a toy.

WILLIE

He could try and stuff it down his own throat, like my brother-in-law. He could beat himself over the head with it, like my best friend Joe Kowalski in high school. He could break his own knee with duh butt, like my ex-wife's husband.

MAX

You know, your life could be another volume of the *Divine Comedy*.

WILLIE

Is that the one comes on after Jimmy Kimmel?

MAX

(banging on the door)

Wayne! Wayne, let me in!

WAYNE

Don't come in here, Max. You don't wanna see what's gonna be splattered all over these walls!

MAX

Wayne, the gun isn't real. Neither is this crisis. Open the door and we'll –

(An extremely loud GUN SHOT
is heard. EDITH SCREAMS.)

Wayne! Wayne! What did you do?!

(to WILLIE)

Which episode of *Law and Order* was this exactly, genius? The one where Sam Waterston blows his head off?

WAYNE

It's all right, Max.

MAX

(to the door)

What the hell is the matter with you?! I want you to stop this nonsense now! You have no business taking your own life. That is for a higher power!

WILLIE

Like the LAPD, right, Mr. Levine?

MAX

Will you shut up! (to WAYNE) Look, when your hour is up, your hour is up. But that is not for us to decide. Life, death, what it all means—these are mysteries, grand mysteries. And we're all on the great Mystery Train together, not knowing our point of departure, not knowing where or when we will disembark. But we don't jump off the train. Stay on the train, Wayne! Stay on the—you didn't put a hole in my new desk, did you, cub scout?

WAYNE

No. But I'd look into getting a new couch.

MAX

Will you please listen to me! I've got some great news for you. News that's going to turn your life around. A new beginning, Wayne. I have a new beginning ...

(He becomes distracted by the sight of WILLIE sucking on an eye dropper.)

... and a guy drinking his eye drops. What the hell are you doing?

WILLIE

Dis is red chestnut. It's uh liquid flower remedy my chiropractor give me for when I am in excess fear for the well-being of others. He says I suffer from uh excess of empathy.

MAX

An excess of empathy. You know, I was saying that to someone just the other day. I said, "You know, that Willie, if he doesn't suffer from an excess of empathy." Then I took my pills and I was fine.

EDITH

Don't make fun of him because he's in crisis!

(She pulls out an eye dropper of her own and begins sucking on it.)

Flower power, baby!

MAX

I'm trapped in an Andy Warhol movie.

WILLIE

And I paint, too. To de-stress.

MAX

Paint? Paint what? Houses?

WILLIE

(He pulls out his phone and searches through his photos.)
Here are some pitchers of my ahrt.

(MAX takes the phone and scrolls through.)

MAX

Well, I must say, I'm very impressed.

WILLIE

Thank you!

MAX

This one puts me in mind of the Sistine Chapel.

WILLIE

Really?

MAX

Yeah, the floor, after Michelangelo finished with the ceiling.
(He tosses back the phone.)
Consider Zoloft.

WAYNE

Max! Evolution may account for the brain, but it cannot account for melancholy!

MAX

How about we stay in our lane, bubbie, and leave evolutionary psychology to people who couldn't get into medical school.

WAYNE

I'm a bug! I'm a bug!

WILLIE

If you ask me, that is not a good sign.

MAX

If I ask you? Why would I ask you? You're the one who told me the gun was only a toy.

(WILLIE pulls a gun from his jacket pocket. He examines it carefully. He then puts it to his temple and fires. Nothing.)

WILLIE

I was in error.

MAX

You are an error. Go drink your flowers and leave me alone.

(to WAYNE)

Wayne, Jay Toynbee is coming here to meet with you. Did you hear me? Jay Toynbee. This guy is the hottest young director in the business. They say he's the next Quentin Tarantino.

EDITH

Is that true?

MAX

In a manner of speaking. At the Lakers game, on the line to the men's room. He was next ... after Quentin Tarantino. The point is he's got a camera and one of those stupid caps.

(to the door)

And he's coming here, Wayne. To see you. That's right. He's coming here to talk to you about being in his next movie. He's a big fan. He's seen all your action movies, he knows every episode of your old TV show by heart. There's just one ... hitch. He's heard rumors that your recent spate of — shall we say — bad luck at the box office has left you in a less than desirable frame of mind. Rumor has it that you're drinking again after the breakup of your third marriage. Rumor has it that you've put on a few pounds. Rumor has it that all the rumors have turned you into something of a recluse. Rumor has it that you're a little ... off. Where do people get these ideas, huh Wayne?

WAYNE

I'm a worm! A worm!

MAX

Bad attitude, munchkin. You see, Toynbee wants to meet you. He wants to see for himself how you're doing — you know, if you can handle the stress of the shoot. He needs to know that you've got it together, that you can come through. And if you try and kill yourself during our little conference, which —

(He looks at his watch.)

— by my calculation should be in about 10 minutes, well, that could be considered a strike against you.

WAYNE

Never trust happy people, Max. They don't have all the facts.

MAX

Yeah, I'm writing that down now—EDITH!

EDITH

I have a speech impediment—I'm not deaf!

MAX

Call Dr. Clausewitz!

EDITH

I called him a half hour ago, when all the looney-toons started.

MAX

And?

EDITH

He said you have to bring Wayne to the office. He said, "Tell Max that house calls went out with drive-in movies."

WAYNE

I'm not leaving this room, Max! I'm never leaving this room! I'm going die in this room! We're all going to die in this room!

MAX

Do you hear that? How am I supposed to get Norman Vincent Peale to Park and Sixty-seventh in that condition? Get that overpriced crank on the phone and tell him—well, you know what to tell him.

EDITH

So I already told him. He's on his way. Does he really do that?

WILLIE

Do what?

MAX

Whenever I need the good doctor's services after regular office hours and he starts giving me a hard time, I threaten to go straight to the papers and let it be known that a certain "Shrink to the Stars" has been leaking their very private admissions to the *National Enquirer*.

EDITH

He does that?

MAX

Of course not. But this is the American media we're talking about. Facts are fungible commodities. And since when does a rumor have to be rooted in reality — present circumstances excepted.

(WAYNE can now be heard
sobbing.)

What is that? Wayne? Are you crying? What's with the crying? Why are you crying?

WILLIE

It's the tears of blood and laughter.

MAX

Is that what it is? The tears of blood and laughter? Because you can never tell about these things. You see, I thought he was just OUT OF HIS FREAKING MIND!

WAYNE

(between sobs)

Max ... Max come closer.

(MAX puts his ear to the door.)

MAX

I'm here, puppy dog, talk to me.

WAYNE

Max ... come closer. Max ...

(MAX presses his entire body
to the door.)

MAX

I'm here, Wayne. What do you want from me?

WAYNE

Max ... closer. Max!

MAX

I can't get any closer, Wayne. It's called physics.

WAYNE

Then come down here.

MAX

Down where?

(WAYNE'S dim figure crawls to the door. His head rests on the floor as he talks through a crack at the bottom of the door.)

WAYNE

Down here.

MAX

I don't believe this. What I won't be reduced to.

(MAX gets down on the floor, his ear still pressed to the door. To Willie:)

You. Get down here with me.

WILLIE

I don't t'ink there's enough —

MAX

I don't care what you think! Get down here with me!

(WILLIE gets down on his knees.)

No, no, no. All the way down.

WILLIE

But what am I doin'?

MAX

You're listening to me listen to him, that's what you're doing.

(WILLIE descends to the floor, his chest hugging the carpet, his ear a millimeter away from MAX'S shoulder.)

All right, Wayne. I'm with you all the way. Talk to me.

WAYNE

(between sobs)

Life ... Life ... Life ...

MAX

Life, life, life — what?

WAYNE

Life ... is a voided contract on the soiled blotter of a corrupt corporate lawyer waiting for the hammer of justice to be wielded in the service of an implacable Fate.

MAX

That's what you've got me facedown on this flea-infested Sears Memorial Day Sale indoor/outdoor piece of crap carpet to tell me?

(to WILLIE)

Do you hear this?

WILLIE

(looking terribly uncomfortable)

Hah? Wha?

(MAX sits up; WILLIE remains
in his awkward position.)

MAX

Herr Nietzsche says life is — what?

EDITH

A voided contract on the soiled blotter of a corrupt corporate lawyer waiting for the hammer of justice to be wielded in the service of an implacable Fate.

MAX

(on his knees)

Five minutes ago you couldn't remember there was a crazy man running around with a gun, but *that* you recall verbatim? I can't believe this... The man who starred in three of the Top 20 most popular movies of all time, who was once the most highly paid action star in the world, who won six of those stupid People's Choice Whatchamacallit Awards, has decided that life is — what?

WILLIE & EDITH

A voided contract on the soiled blotter of a corrupt corporate lawyer waiting for the hammer of justice to be wielded in the service of an implacable—

MAX

Oh shut your faces!

(to WAYNE)

Listen to me, numbnutz. You think you're the first person to wake up one morning only to realize that life is a meaningless cycle of mind-numbing errands performed for the sole purpose of occupying space and time until we sink into a degenerate physical state only to collapse into the razor-tipped arms of an indifferent cosmos stinking of death and decay? That's on the Levine family crest! But just because we haven't been gifted with a simple faith in a benign Providence doesn't mean we still shouldn't **MAKE AN EFFORT!**

WAYNE

But why? Why make an effort?

MAX

(banging on the door)

Because we've got company coming!

(WAYNE starts to wail again. In walks
DR. CLAUSEWITZ. He's something out
of a bad Gothic novel, with pince-nez, pipe,
and cape.)

DR. CLAUSEWITZ

(in a thick German accent)

Which one of these deeply demented individuals am I here to rehabilitate?

MAX

(getting to his feet)

He would walk in on me in this position.

DR. CLAUSEWITZ

Please, don't rise on my account. Sometimes we must regress to an infantile state of development before taking that next leap forward in consciousness. It's what I call the "Two Steps Forward, One Step Back" approach to enlightenment. It's all there in my bestselling book, *What Fresh Hell Is This?*

(he pulls a copy out from beneath
his cape and hands it to EDITH)

MAX

Calm down, Kaiser Wilhelm. I lost a contact lens.

DR. CLAUSEWITZ

But you are wearing eyeglasses.

EDITH

That's why we called a psychologist!

(She laughs hysterically at her
own joke.)

MAX

(laughing along with her, then
stopping abruptly)

Why don't you go downstairs and keep an eye out for Toynbee. That arrogant little lump will expect some kind of to-do made over him. I swear, they con a few relatives into lending them 10K for a movie that gets honorable mention at the Des Moines Film Festival and they think they're among the immortals.

DR. CLAUSEWITZ

(examining WILLIE)

Fascinating. Is he ... is he ...

MAX

Homo sapiens? We haven't heard back from the Human Genome Project yet.

(He gives WILLIE a slight
kick.)

Earth to the Mole People! Time to emerge!

(WILLIE climbs to his feet.)

WILLIE

Mr. Levine, I think I should get comp time for all this distress.

DR. CLAUSEWITZ

(putting his arm around WILLIE)

Young man, we must sit down one day soon and talk about your childhood. Let me ask you, in your family, did you have an uncle that no one ever talked about?

WILLIE

Sure.

DR. CLAUSEWITZ

Tell me about him.

WILLIE

I can't. Nobody ever talked about 'im.

MAX

Can we please get back to the chaos at hand?

(to EDITH)

You—go downstairs and signal me when Alfred Hitchcock gets here.

EDITH

Signal you? How? With my trademark stutter! Is that what you're alluding to!

DR. CLAUSEWITZ

(quietly, to MAX)

What stutter?

MAX

Don't ask.

DR. CLAUSEWITZ

Interesting. An imaginary dysfunction transfigured into an agent of empowerment.

MAX

Hah?

DR. CLAUSEWITZ

She fakes a disability in order to intimidate the power structure.

MAX

You just described virtually everyone on Twitter.

DR. CLAUSEWITZ

(to EDITH, handing her another book)

You may find my latest work of enormous help.

EDITH

“You’ve Got to Be Freaking Kidding Me.”

MAX

What now?

EDITH

No, that’s the title: “You’ve Got to Be Freaking Kidding Me.”

MAX

(shaking his head in disbelief)

Try reading it as you walk downstairs. Signal me when Toynbee arrives. Let out one of your blood-curdling screams. That seems to be the theme for the day.

(EDITH gathers up some personal items, including a rather extensive makeup kit, and crosses to the door.)

You’re just going down to the lobby. The lobby in *this* building, not the one in the St. Regis Hotel.

EDITH

I could get discovered. There are people in this world who can see past my infirmity.

MAX

You couldn’t get discovered if you were featured on *America’s Most Wanted*.

(EDITH storms out of the office.)

DR. CLAUSEWITZ

(looking at his watch)

I want you to know that your hour began as soon as I received Miss Rumpmeyer’s call. That was 25 minutes ago. You now have 20 minutes left.

MAX

Wait a minute. An hour is now 45 minutes? Do the people at Greenwich know about this?

DR. CLAUSEWITZ

The very best in the profession offer 45-minute hours. The next rank of psychologists—a 50-minute hour. The mediocrities who advertise on the Internet—a 55-minute hour. And the complete retrograde public-college incompetent—a 60-minute hour.

MAX

If only Einstein had caught on to this scheme. He could've saved a lot of chalk dust.

(WAYNE is heard wailing.)

Do you hear that? There's a grown man locked in my office with a gun and two empty tear ducts. Willie boy—do your stuff. Break down the door.

(WILLIE positions himself at the end of the room opposite the door, ready to make a running start.)

DR. CLAUSEWITZ

Fascinating.

MAX

What's so fascinating, Mr. Spock?

DR. CLAUSEWITZ

You give the order and he obeys. In this age of rampant individualism and anti-authoritarianism, we have here a throwback to a feudal era, in which you play liege lord to his vassal.

MAX

Is that right? This, uh, vassal gets \$500 a day.

DR. CLAUSEWITZ

Plus expenses?

MAX

Yep.

DR. CLAUSEWITZ

(puffing on his pipe)

I'm in the wrong profession.

MAX

(shaking a thumb in the direction of his office door)

What was your first clue?

(to WILLIE)

Wait a minute, Godzilla. I can see this coming. You're going to run at the door, Rambo opens it, and you go flying out the window on the other end. So I suggest—

(WILLIE runs hard at the door —
And puts his fist through it. Which he
struggles to withdraw as Max drops his
head in utter frustration. EDITH sticks a hand
through the outer office door and dangles a key
ring.)

EDITH

(O.S.)

I have the keys ...

MAX

I hate everybody.

(He grabs the keys from EDITH'S
hand and slams the door. EDITH
lets out a howl.)

EDITH

(Screaming through the closed door.)

I'll have you know that hate isn't in my vocabulary!

MAX

Cat isn't in your vocabulary! *Pickle* isn't in your vocabulary.

DR. CLAUSEWITZ

Miss Rumplemeyer is correct! Hatred for others is but a projection of the hatred you feel for yourself.

MAX

Is that right? Well, right now I hate me so much, I'm prepared to make the massacre of the Midianites look like an episode of *I, Carly*.

(MAX unlocks the inner-office door
and pulls it open. WILLIE swings with the door
as it opens. DR. CLAUSEWITZ walks in quickly to avoid
MAX'S harsh glare. MAX flips on the
light. For the first time we get a good
look at this space, not to mention WAYNE,
who is curled up in a fetal position on the
floor with a gun to his head. A leather
couch has a gaping hole in it, stuffing
protruding.)

DR. CLAUSEWITZ

Wayne, stop this! You're making me look bad!

WAYNE

I'm sorry, Dr. Clausewitz. But it's time to die.

DR. CLAUSEWITZ

I've told you to stop reading the horoscopes!

(MAX grabs a picture off the wall and smashes it on WILLIE'S exposed fist, pushing it through the Other side. WILLIE lets out a wail and drops to his knees.)

MAX

Hey! Rise and shine.

(WILLIE slowly gets to his feet.)

WILLIE

(groggily)

Is it still today?

MAX

What's with all the grand philosophical questions?

DR. CLAUSEWITZ

(walks back to the outer office)

Speaking of which...

(he pulls another book from his cape and hands it to MAX)

MAX

"Why Is Everything Such a Goddamn Pain in the Ass?"

DR. CLAUSEWITZ

Already number 3 on Amazon in both the Self-Help and Extreme Dieting categories. Read the comments! It has already helped one young man overcome his morbid fear of forced-air ventilation!

MAX

You're a prolific son-of-a-gun.

(to WILLIE as CLAUSEWITZ retreats to the inner office)

Get up. We've got problems.

(MAX marches into the office; WILLIE follows, closing the door behind him. MAX surveys the mess.)

Will you look at this? Why? Why? Because you made a few bombs? All right, so they were dismissed as “mindless revenge fantasies,” even in the Middle East. Because your wife left you for your brother? You couldn’t stand your brother in the first place. Because a restaurant you invested in was shut down as a possible source of the Ebola virus? All right, so—

(He rushes WAYNE.)

Give me that gun, you loser!

(DR. CLAUSEWITZ pulls MAX off WAYNE.)

DR. CLAUSEWITZ

Don’t touch him! You could do untold damage to his psyche!

MAX

As opposed to a bullet to the temple?

DR. CLAUSEWITZ

Leave him to me. I have seen him in his state before. He is actually at a psychological crossroads. Wayne, what is going on inside of you right now?

WAYNE

Death is visiting me.

MAX

No!

DR. CLAUSEWITZ

Yes!

MAX

Hah?

DR. CLAUSEWITZ

What is death saying to you, Wayne?

WAYNE

He’s saying ... he’s saying ... he’s come to collect on the deal. He’s ... come to collect his property ... the contract is voided ... he’s coming ... for me ...

MAX

Tell death to shut up, Wayne! Tell death to go to hell!

(to WILLIE)

Will you do something! You’re his bodyguard!

WILLIE

WILLIE

Can I be a cop? I always wanted to be a cop. Like Serpico. Or Batman.

MAX

Are you still here? Why don't you go play Russian roulette with Christopher Walken.

DR. CLAUSEWITZ

I — I will be Death personified.

WAYNE

No-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o!

MAX

Oh, yeah, this is gonna go great.

DR. CLAUSEWITZ

(to WILLIE)

And you, my prehistoric friend, will be the Grave Digger.

WILLIE

(with grave dignity)

I will be duh Grave Digger.

DR. CLAUSEWITZ

And this —

(He grabs a golf club from the
bag in the corner.)

— this is the spade with which you will dig the earth to prepare Wayne's final resting place.

(WAYNE, still on the floor in a fetal
position, begins spinning around in a
circle, kicking his feet frantically.)

WAYNE

The earth is my bed! A rock is my pillow! The sky is my blanket! Ow! My back! The earth is my bed ... a rock is my pillow ...

DR. CLAUSEWITZ

(to WILLIE)

You will dig deep into the ground and then thrust the earth away. Dig! Thrust!

(He demonstrates with the golf
club.)

Here.

(He hands WILLIE the club. WILLIE
begins to make the digging and

thrusting motion in a very mechanical manner.)

MAX

This is what killed Vaudeville.

WILLIE

Like this, Doc?

DR. CLAUSEWITZ

Excellent! Don't stop until I tell you. Max —

MAX

I can't wait.

DR. CLAUSEWITZ

Max, you are the Phoenix, ancient symbol of rebirth. Here.

(CLAUSEWITZ pulls the head shots off the small bulletin board hanging on a wall behind MAX'S desk. He then pulls the bulletin board off the wall and tucks it under one arm.)

Here is one wing.

(He then grabs the blotter from MAX'S desk and tucks it under the other arm.)

And here is the other. You will flap, flap, flap your wings as you ascend from the ashes of despair unto new life. The new life that Wayne is struggling to attain for himself.

MAX

Oh, I gotta get into another racket.

DR. CLAUSEWITZ

Stand on your desk. You must hover over us all.

MAX

Are you insane? Do you know how much that desk cost?

DR. CLAUSEWITZ

Quickly! I don't have time to argue!

(pointing to WAYNE)

He's being consumed by the vortex of his own confusion. He must choose to live quickly or he will forever lose his grip on the concrete reality of his existence, and he will become caught irretrievably in a whirlpool of menace and regret!

MAX

(pause)

Oh, you're makin' that up.

WAYNE

(screaming)

Pain is my portion! Pain is my portion! Pain is my portion!

MAX

All right! All right.

(MAX climbs atop his desk.

CLAUSEWITZ tucks the bulletin board under one of MAX'S arms and the blotter under the other.)

DR. CLAUSEWITZ

Here are your wings! Ascend! Ascend!

(MAX begins flapping his arms, with little enthusiasm.)

Now, Death will begin his ritual march around the stricken soul he seeks to devour. But first--music!

(CLAUSEWITZ crosses to the bookcase, takes a CD from his pocket and pops it into the stereo. He pushes play and Wagner's Die Walküre booms from the speakers.)

DR. CLAUSEWITZ (CONT'D)

This ritual must be performed in conjunction with the right mood music in order to fully engage the pineal gland.

MAX

Of course it does. God forbid we omit the pineal gland. (To himself) How did I become mayor of Wackyland?!

(CLAUSEWITZ begins marching in goose-step fashion around the still-spinning WAYNE. He snaps his cape in time with his foot falls. Meanwhile, WILLIE continues to dig and thrust, even mouthing the words "dig" and "thrust" as he does so. MAX flaps his wings, on the verge of some kind of collapse. Just then, EDITH enters the outer office, with JAY TOYNBEE right behind her. TOYNBEE is in his

late 20s and is wearing a baseball cap, sunglasses, jeans, and sneakers. EDITH motions for TOYNBEE to wait as she opens the inner office door. She takes one look at this lunatic scene and lets out a SCREAM. WILLIE'S golf club goes flying, hitting the stereo and shutting off the music. CLAUSEWITZ trips over WAYNE and falls to the floor, causing WAYNE to let out his own SCREAM and SHOOT OFF THE GUN.

(CONT'D)

MAX'S wings go flying as he falls off the desk. WILLIE, MAX, EDITH, and CLAUSEWITZ freeze--then start examining their bodies for bullet holes. When they realize they are all still intact, they slowly turn to look at the door. They are motionless and silent as they wait to discover where the bullet landed. Suddenly, TOYNBEE falls face forward into the inner office. Everyone stares, horror-stricken, at the prone figure. A WRISTWATCH ALARM GOES OFF. CLAUSEWITZ presses a button on his watch, and the alarm stops.)

DR. CLAUSEWITZ

Sorry. Hour's up.

(BLACKOUT)

THE END