

A GRAPHIC
MYSTERY

NEITHER HERE NOIR THERE

The ending was just the beginning
of his trouble

BAMBI EVERSON

NEITHER HERE NOIR THERE

One act, approximately 55 minutes.

CHARACTERS:

MICHAEL ALEXANDER, 30's or 40's, a recently divorced writer.

ALICE MARTIN, 30's or 40's, Michael's platonic best friend for over 20 years.

MAXIE MALONE, 20's, Michael's creation, a film noir movie siren.

DELIVERY GUY, Chinese, offstage voice

PUPPY, a dog, or a person with a dog puppet

TIME: The Present

PLACE: Alice's New York City apartment, a walkup in Queens.

SYNOPSIS:

Michael, newly divorced, broke and depressed, has taken up residence at the apartment of his best friend, Alice. Prompted by Alice, Michael begins to rework a discarded film noir novel. He soon runs into trouble when his femme fatale, Maxie Malone, comes to life with an agenda of her own – one that does not include Alice. *Blithe Spirit* meets *The Maltese Falcon*.

PRODUCTION NOTES:

Chinese delivery person is just a voice, could be male or female. Same for the person using the dog puppet at the end. Quick costume changes are needed for Maxie at the beginning of Scene 2. A wig and layered clothing may be helpful.

FROM THE AUTHOR:

It helps to have some knowledge of film noir style. The dialogue is stylized in places and should be delivered in classic "hard boiled" style.

The other important note is the relationship between Michael and Alice is clearly affectionate, yet platonic. Michael's journey is about self-acceptance without a romantic relationship to validate it.

SCENE 2

MICHAEL is sitting at his laptop, trying to write.

MICHAEL

She had legs like a stork, a neck like a swan and dressed like a peacock. My interest in ornithology was growing like the pulsating lump in my pants. Her flowing blond locks cascaded down her back. I wanted to run my fingers through her hair like a cool stream. I wanted to drink her.

MAXIE enters. She has long blond hair and a colorful outfit. She smiles at MICHAEL.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Our love was hot, like those baked potatoes they sell on the street, that smell great but burn the crap out of your mouth.

(to himself)

What a stupid idea... Dumb analogy...

(erases)

She was hot. Hot like a Morunga Scorpion pepper. Her heat came from the inside and you had to touch her with gloves and a mask.

During this speech, MAXIE is walking behind him, reading his work, breathing on his neck.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

She kissed me.

MAXIE lightly kisses his cheek.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

It didn't feel so bad at first but the sting intensified, moment by moment, until it became unbearably painful.

MICHAEL swats at some invisible bug on his cheek.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Then she laughed.

MAXIE laughs.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Crap. Crap! It's all crap!

Erases last bit MAXIE walks off. He starts again.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

She was bad. She was beautiful. She had more curves than Lombard Street in San Francisco. She walked in wearing an emerald green dress,

MAXIE walks in again.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

The color of money and envy. No, scratch that.

MAXIE stomps out. MICHAEL takes a moment, then starts again.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

She wore a slinky red dress that clung to her like a child on her first day of daycare... No. The slinky red dress was wearing her and they were both fighting for domination.

MAXIE walks in again in the red dress. She squirms. She is looking pissed.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Her thick dark curls fell to her shoulders and she tossed them with disdain.

MAXIE sighs, frustrated. She whips off the blond wig and tosses it to the floor. Dark curly hair is underneath. She tosses her curls and stares at MICHAEL expectantly.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

She looked at me and I was salivating like a six-year-old kid when he hears the ice cream truck. But she had double-crossed me for the last time. "Harry," she cooed.

MAXIE

(cooing)

Harry... It'll never be over for me.

MICHAEL

(From his seat)

Sorry, sweet cakes. When a fire burns itself out, all that's left are ashes.

MAXIE

Give me another chance Harry. I love you. I have always loved you. Dylan meant nothing to me. He was a means to an end.

MICHAEL

Dylan was my friend. And now he's dead. Your face was the last thing he ever saw. It's a beautiful face, even when it's laughing.

MAXIE

Harry! You don't understand!

MICHAEL

No, baby, *you* don't understand! Dames like you don't come along very often, but Dylan was one of a kind. I should have had his back. Instead, I turned my back on him... because of you.

MAXIE

We can go back to the way it was. Before Dylan. Before the world chewed us up and spit us out and we can be happy again, like in Santa Fe, with the lilacs.

She kisses him.

MICHAEL

Baby, I can't trust you further than I could throw a football into a crowded elevator at Macy's.

MAXIE

(Shaking her head)

Jesus Christ!

MICHAEL thinks he has mistakenly written that.

MICHAEL

Damn auto correct!

(presses backspace)

MAXIE

No! No! That's one of the worst analogies I've ever heard! And will someone please help me get out of this stupid dress! I can't breathe!

MICHAEL

(pressing keys frantically)

What the hell is going on here?

MAXIE

Goddamn it, Michael! Look at me!

MICHAEL

(Looks up)

Holy Shit!

MICHAEL jumps behind couch, comes up with some ridiculous tchotchke to use as a weapon, such as a snowglobe.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Who are you? How did you get in here?

MAXIE

I'm not surprised you don't recognize me, asshole. You've been changing me up every 12 seconds.

MICHAEL

O.K.

(Grabs cell phone)

I'm calling the police!

MAXIE

Go ahead. Call the police, the Marines, the FBI. Why don't you call Julie Epstein from third grade while you're at it? I'm sure she'd be thrilled to hear from you after all these years!

MICHAEL

Am I hallucinating? Great! One more thing on my list of anxiety provoking incidents.

MAXIE

(slaps him)

I'm not a fucking hallucination!

MICHAEL

For a ghost, you pack a mighty wallop!

MAXIE

I'm not here to haunt you for Christ's sake. I'm here to help you, and I have to get out of this frigging corset. Ok with you?

MICHAEL

Fine. Knock yourself out. Wear whatever you want.
(MAXIE stays put)

MAXIE

So... WRITE IT!

MICHAEL

What?

MAXIE

Write it down!... Maxie exits and returns in a... you know...

MICHAEL

(puzzled... starts to type and say...)

Maxie exits.

She leaves.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

OK. That was just weird!

MICHAEL takes a moment, looks nervously around the apartment. No one is there. He crosses to the door. It is locked from the inside. MICHAEL comes back and sits on the couch and does some deep breathing. Looks at his laptop and begins to type tentatively and speaking out loud.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Maxie enters, wearing a comfortable yet stylish ensemble.

MAXIE returns in a rather odd pantsuit.

MAXIE

Took you long enough. And really? *This* is what you consider comfortable yet stylish? I look like I am wearing my mother's curtains!

MICHAEL

Should I...

MAXIE

Forget it. I'll deal.

MICHAEL

So, what do you want?

MAXIE

What do I want? Honey, It's what *you* want. You want to finish this, so lets get down to business. First of all, I'm not Genevieve and I'm not Liz, so get that out of your head.

MICHAEL

I can't help it. My characters keep morphing into the women in my life. Liz... was so beautiful.

MAXIE

A woman's beauty is 90% illusion buddy. The sooner you figure that out the better. Dames are like busses....

MICHAEL

I know, always another one around the corner. But maybe Liz was the right bus and I missed it. I was waiting on the wrong corner and that bus just sped past. And the next bus was Genevieve so I just hopped on. And rode that bus. Straight to hell.

MAXIE

(Snapping her fingers)

Snap out of it! God! I can't even talk to you if you are going to be so damn maudlin. Are you with me?

(MICHAEL nods)

'Cause this isn't about you. So - I'm back at the apartment with Harry. Dylan is dead. Harry knows I did it, but he's still mad for me.

ALICE comes in quietly, does not want to intrude so busies herself in the kitchen area and listens unobtrusively.

MICHAEL

But he can't forgive her. "I won't play the sap for you!"

MAXIE

No, but you'll cover for me, because the thought of these arms never holding you again kills you. I'd never make it behind bars. You know what happens to women who look like me in jail, don't cha, Harry? I'd become a hunk of meat. Fat bulls will put their hairy, sweaty, fingers inside me. The feisty broad who loved you, reduced to a monkey on a chain, smelling like sweat and begging for death!

MICHAEL
OK. OK. I give up!

ALICE rushes in.

ALICE
No... No... You can't give up! It's sounding great!

*ALICE in unable to see or hear MAXIE.
MICHAEL is taken aback, looks at MAXIE
and at ALICE.*

MICHAEL
How long have you been here?

ALICE
Just walked in.
(hugs him)
So glad you're up and at 'em.

MAXIE
Hey! Get your grubby mitts off my man!

MICHAEL
(to MAXIE)
Chill, will you?

ALICE
(pulling away)
Sorry. It's just nice to see you excited.

MAXIE
Oh, he's excited all right. Check out his bulge.

MICHAEL
(to MAXIE, stepping back)
Not *that* kind of excited!

ALICE
I know. Forget it. Did you eat?

MAXIE
This bitch is always trying to shove food down your gullet! You're busy.

MICHAEL
(to ALICE)

I'm busy.

ALICE
(Hurt)

OK, the artist at work. I get it.

She starts to leave.

MICHAEL

No. Wait. I'm sorry.

(Pause)

I think I'm finally losing my mind. I'm hearing voices.

ALICE
(concerned)

Whose? God's? Satan? Groucho Marx?

MAXIE

Don't tell her! This is between us!

MICHAEL

I think... I think it must be mine... my character.

ALICE

Phew! A therapist once told me hearing your own voice is perfectly normal, unless it's telling you to kill your family or jump off a bridge. We all have voices in our heads. Mine is telling me to order Chinese food. Your usual?

MICHAEL

Um... Sure... Thanks.

MICHAEL stares at MAXIE who is glaring at him. ALICE takes out her cell phone, gives him a thumbs-up and heads into the bedroom offstage.

MAXIE

Martyring Goody-Two-Shoes! Honestly, she is revolting! What do you see in her?

MICHAEL

She's been my best friend since college! Alice has been around way longer than you, so you should cut her a little slack. If it weren't for her, you probably wouldn't even be here.

MAXIE

Oh, I'd have showed up, boy-o-mine. I've been swirling around the periphery for years. Just waiting for the right time.

MICHAEL

Rock bottom? That's the right time? You couldn't have swept in before Liz walked out? Helped me man up then? Or talked me out of marrying Genevieve? That would have been extremely helpful.

MAXIE

I'm here now. Let's get back to work!

MICHAEL

I've sort of reached an impasse. Harry still loves Maxie... but obviously can't take the rap for her... He has a rock solid alibi. It would never hold up.

(As Harry)

It's the end of the road for you sweetheart.

MAXIE

You are NOT sending me up the river. I got your ending. Maxie Malone gets away scot-free. With my looks, your smarts and Dylan's money, we'd have it made. The world is our oyster!

MICHAEL

I don't know... I'm allergic to shellfish.

He goes back to his computer and types.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Harry looked at Maxie. Her dark eyes burned a hole in his face and he recoiled as if splashed by acid. That's when he reached for his gun.

(Looking at MAXIE and pointing his finger at her like a gun)

There's only one way out of this, baby. It either ends in jail or the morgue.

MAXIE

You're a coward, Harry. A lily-livered, spineless jellyfish. You couldn't shoot me any more than you could put a dying dog out of his misery. We're two of a kind Harry, and we belong together. You had my heart once, Harry, you can have it again.

MICHAEL

Your heart is cold and dark. Empty, like your soul. You're right. I can't plaster your brains all over the walls. I just had them re-painted last month. But I sure would love to smash your pretty face until it looks like a cheeseburger, medium rare.