

MAX GUNNER

Written by

Davin Intsiful

30A Manor Court, New Brunswick, NJ 08901
609-240-1969

ACT ONE

INT. MAX'S APARTMENT - BAYONNE, NJ - NIGHT

A warm, intimate celebration is underway in a cozy Jersey apartment.

FOUR CANDLES burn atop a birthday cake with "Happy Birthday," written on it in purple frosting.

MAX GUNNER, 22, a rough, but desirable family man, holds his daughter, RACHEL, on his lap, as he and his wife, MARY ANN, 22, sing the final bars of 'Happy Birthday,' to the giggling little girl.

MARY ANN

Make a wish!

Rachel eagerly blows out the candles. Mary Ann looks on, with a smile that continues to light up the room long after the flames have gone out.

MAX

What did you wish for?

RACHEL

I can't tell you or it won't come true!

MAX

That's good, I was just testing you.

Rachel laughs. Together, Max and Mary Ann line up several wrapped gifts on the table for Rachel to open. Rachel claps in excitement amidst swelled cheeks from her delightful grin, and she tears them open.

Max sits up and carries Rachel around the room winding in a slow dance. He brings her over to the bookshelf where multiple memorable photos stacked. He grabs a framed photo of the three of them.

MAX (CONT'D)

See, booger. This was me and your mom holding you when you were just 6 months. We were young and dumb, but we loved each other and you.

Rachel points to another photo, a military photo with another male figure.

RACHEL
Daddy, who is that with you?

Max grabs the framed photo and brings it in closer to view.

MAX
He was a friend. He's gone though.

RACHEL
You mean he left?

MAX
I guess you could say he left, but
he saved my life before leaving.
When you get older I'll tell you
the whole story.

He exhales and stares at the photo a moment longer.

RACHEL
Where did he go?

Max grabs Rachel's hand and places it on his chest, she feels
his heart beat.

MAX
Right here.

RACHEL
Your friend is in your heart?

MAX
That's where I put all the people I
love.

RACHEL
Even me?

MAX
Even you, booger.

Max tickles her to change the subject.

MAX (CONT'D)
C'mon, it's past your bedtime.

RACHEL
Nooo, daddy! It's my birthday.

She looks to Mary Ann, pouting.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
Mommy, can I stay up. I'm not
tired!

MARY ANN

I'm sorry, Rachel. You have to get to bed so you can wake up in the morning.

MAX

Come on, I'll sing you to sleep.

Max winks at Mary Ann, shuts the music off, and sings Lionel Richie's "Hello" to Rachel as they tread back to her room.

MAX (CONT'D)

This is the song that had me thinking about your mother when we first started dating. Then it had me thinking about you before you were born.

Mary Ann stays behind, harkening on Max and Rachel's bond as Max's words drift off into the other room. She glances at the photo shelf from afar.

INT. MAX'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

The gradient moonlight pierces through the room. Max changes into his boxers, then goes to the window and peers out, thinking. Mary Ann enters, and sees Max gazing outside.

She sits at the edge of the bed with her back to him. Face down, she rubs her knees, silent in her own thoughts. After a moment --

MARY ANN

Did you tell her you might not be around for her birthday next year?

Max whirls around, annoyed.

MAX

Now is not the time, Mary-Ann.

MARY ANN

When is the time, then? You can't keep doing this to her. To us!

She begins to tear up.

MAX

Do you really think I want to be doing this? That I want to go on tour for another two fucking years? I have no choice!

MARY ANN

You do have a choice! You were suppose to resign after the last tour. It's like you're just coming in and out of our lives --

She cries harder.

MARY ANN (CONT'D)

I just want my husband back. My family back!

MAX

It's not that simple. I'm working to ensure we have enough money for a secure future! Everything we have was earned through battle. Can't you see I'm battling for us?

Max goes to Mary Ann on the edge of the bed and caresses her neck. She remains still.

MAX (CONT'D)

Please don't do this right now. I need you.

He kisses her forehead.

MAX (CONT'D)

I leave in a few days -- just work with me. Can you do that?

Mary Ann's relaxes a bit, easing slowly back into his chest.

Max lays Mary Ann down in the bed, tucks her in, and wipes her tears. He strides his hands through her hair and gives her one last smile, before retreating across the room to the closet.

Mary Ann sits up, sniffing.

MARY ANN

What are you doing?

Max shuffles through an assortment of hanging wardrobe.

MAX

I need a drink.

MARY ANN

This late?

Max puts on a white t-shirt and black leather biker jacket. He pulls up his Levi's and adjusts himself at the end of the bed. Hard-nosed.

MAX

I'm just going over to Pat's bar.

He straps on his boots.

MAX (CONT'D)

Go to sleep. I'll be back in a few.

He exits before she can contest any further.

INT. PAT'S BAR - NIGHT

The smell of stale beer and smug faces set the tone in the local drinking hole. Capacity is low. It's last call.

The wise-ass bar manager, MICKEY, 52, greets Max at the corner of the bar with a nod of the head. Then, he sets Max up with the usual and pours two shots of Jameson.

MICKEY

You look a little tense. Not sure what's up, but here --

They both grab a shot and throw it back.

MAX

Thanks brother.

He raises his empty toast.

MAX (CONT'D)

Just a lot of the same old bullshit.

MICKEY

Well, I'll be your therapist for the next forty-five minutes before I tell you to get the fuck out so I can go home.

Max smirks.

MAX

I'm being deployed again.

MICKEY

Jesus Christ, Max. Bush is really making you bend over for this Iraq shit. I take it your wife isn't too happy about it?

MAX

What can I do? The money pays our bills and I'm good at what I do. I never want to leave my family, but I have no choice.

MICKEY

I don't know what to tell you. Other than your therapy session is on the house, cause you're just fucked!

MAX

Figured.

He smirks and knocks two times on the counter, signaling for another round of shots.

MAX (CONT'D)

I'm done after this tour though. I can't lose my wife and kid over this.

MICKEY

I hear that.

Mickey turns away to prepare the shots.

Max turns his attention to the TV overhead, showing a news broadcast of an update on the war in Iraq: Multiple casualties reported on both ends. Bush speaks of the United States safety and fight against terrorism.

Max stares at it, lost in thought.

CLICK. Mickey turns the television off.

MICKEY (CONT'D)

You don't need that right now. Let's toast up -- fuck it.

MAX

Yeah. Fuck it.

They clap shot glasses and swig back.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. FORT DIX - DAY

The Joint Training and Training Development Center. JT2DC.

An indoor frigid range with multiple simulation rooms depicting actual combat scenarios and human-like targets.

Max's 42nd infantry unit methodically engages in offensive formations, clearing rooms, and defensive tactics. Training appears to be a smooth operation. This is not their first rodeo, but familiarization is key.

INT. FORT DIX - RANGE COURSE ROOM - CONTINUOUS

They move training into the range course room, complete with a wide wall-to-wall screen with virtual targets ranging in distance from fifty to three hundred yards away.

GLOCK 19's and M16 A4's with M208's are wired from the screen with a laser sensor to imitate each shot forced on a target. There are barricades to assist with cover. It's like being in a real-life video game.

The course is timed. SERGEANT FRANK MORRIS, strict, hellish, sets the timer and resets the computer stats.

Max is up.

MORRIS

You ready?

Max nods. Sergeant Morris presses the key --

MORRIS (CONT'D)

GO...!!

The timer clocks Max as he takes down several targets on screen with precision, plucking them off like "Duck Hunt."

MORRIS (CONT'D)

Switch to pistol!!

Max switches to pistol with ease, no different from the rifle. Level headed. Sharp. He finishes off the remainder of targets in less than two minutes.

Onlooking soldiers look on impressed. They clap.

MORRIS (CONT'D)

Not bad. Now get the hell off the course.

Max stands up and confidently strides to the back. There's a sense of accomplishment and readiness. He knows he's ready.

INT. INFANTRY BARRACKS - FORT DIX - NIGHT

Max sits in his barrack at his desk. He pops open his laptop, and turns on SKYPE.

Mary Ann soon connects on the other end, appearing on the screen with Rachel on her lap. The monitor is a little blurry and the voices delayed, but it works nonetheless.

MAX

Hi, booger!

RACHEL

Daddy!

Max smiles. It's bittersweet.

MAX

It's so good to see you. I miss you both so much!

MARY ANN

We miss you, too.

RACHEL

Are you coming home soon?

MAX

Not as soon as I'd like, but when I do, I'll be coming home for good. I promise.

Max starts to tear up, but tries to hold back.

MARY ANN

Max, you shouldn't make those kinds of promises --

MAX

I mean it.

Mary Ann tears up, too. She shrugs.

MARY ANN

I guess all we can do is hope that's true this time.

MAX

Stop. I'll be back for both of you,
like always.

Mary Ann says nothing, just wipes her tears.

MARY ANN

We should probably go. It's
Rachel's bedtime.

Mary Ann takes Rachel's little hand and lifts it up to the
monitor.

MARY ANN (CONT'D)

Say goodbye to Daddy!

Rachel looks numbly at the screen, emotionally drifted.

RACHEL

Bye, Daddy.

Max waves back at her and Mary Ann closes the connection.

Max shuts his laptop and sits in silence. He takes an old
folded photo from his cargo pocket. It's a picture of him
holding Rachel when she was first born. She's wrapped in a
hospital blanket and knit hat with his smile gazing down on
her.

A tear hits it. The drop shifts across the photo, as if
looking for an exit off the film.

EXT. AL ASAD AIRBASE - IRAQ - DAY

YOUNG INFANTRY MEN line up outside of a C-17. Ears muffled by
the sound of plane carriers. Eyes squinted from dirt wind.
Men lost in translation with the sun beating down on them as
their names are called off and accounted for in formation.

Max listens for his name.

Sergeant Morris pauses, pulls a cigar from his lips.

MORRIS

Gunner, Lopez, Spring, Teter, and
Villa. You guys fall out, stand to
the rear of formation.

They turn to each other, confused, then follow the order.
Gear in hand, they head to the back and line up. The rest of
the unit clears out onto the carrier.

Sergeant Morris walks toward the remaining men. He stands firm, eyeing them.

MORRIS (CONT'D)

Listen up! Marine units are tied up right now and are asking for additional help from army infantry. I picked my top guys to assist on a separate, escort mission.

He paces along the formation.

MORRIS (CONT'D)

You will be protecting an escaped Al Qaeda prisoner with intel on a major terrorist leader. You will be heading around the city of Fallujah, to a discrete camp near the other side of the city. It will be dangerous, but your services are needed.

INFANTRY UNIT

Sir, yes sir!

MORRIS

Is anyone opposed to the idea of going?

INFANTRY UNIT

Sir, no sir!

MORRIS

Good, cause you didn't have a choice anyway. Just choose to stay alive.

He salutes the unit, and they salute back.

Max stares up through the sun, as he watches the C-17 uber his unit to that chance where most won't return home.

EXT. STREET - FALLUJAH, IRAQ - DAY

Several HUMVEES track across the desert sand on the outskirts of the city, joined with Iraqi security contractors and Marine grunts.

In the center humvee, Max and CORPORAL DAMIAN SPRING accompany their ESCORT along with two other IRAQI MILITANTS.

Children run across rooftops and gesture waves. Adults, disturbed by the intrusion, look out of their windows, frozen in suspense.

INT. HUMVEE - CONTINUOUS

Max adjusts the rearview mirror to keep his target in focus from the back seat.

The unidentified Iraqi sits between TWO IRAQI SOLDIERS. He's wearing a typical yasmagh head cover, baggy attire, a vest, and sand scarf around his mouth. He's quiet, yet mysterious looking. His hunched shoulders and leering eyes reflect tension.

Max peers forward scanning the road ahead...

MAX

So, what makes you so special?

Iraqi Soldier #1 translates the question. The Escort responds angrily in Arabic.

IRAQI SOLDIER #1

His name is Yazan Halabi and he is not special. Al-Qiada kidnapped him and his family and do terrible things. He is not a fan of America, but is on your side for retribution. He is thankful to Allah for escaping.

MAX

Why didn't they chase you?

Iraqi Soldier #1 translates the question.

IRAQI SOLDIER #1

Says there is no need to chase. Al-Qaida is everywhere you think they are not. This is why he needs protection.

Max pulls out the previous photo of him holding Rachel. Turns to Yazan in the back, holding up his picture.

MAX

You see this? This is my daughter.

Iraqi Soldier #1 translating in the background.

MAX (CONT'D)

She needs protection, too. I'll be coming --

BOOM. A loud explosion interrupts him --

EXT. HUMVEE - CONTINUOUS

The first humvee in line swoops in the air like a wild hog whose feet have been taken out from under it. It lands, flaming, uncontrollable, and steers off, crashing into a city wall.

Two burning soldiers roll on the ground as if mad children, trying to smother the flames off of them. Another soldier lies lifeless on the ground.

AL-QAIDA TROOPS in the distance block off the road ahead. They reloads another RPG rocket, and scope Max's humvee in direct sight --

Yazen screams relentless in the back seat, panicking. The Iraqi Soldiers try to hold him down. Max charges his rifle, as Damien takes two AK-47 shells to the chest.

Blood spewing off his lips, Damien fights to maintain control, but loses it. He rotates the in a 180, and it CRASHES into the humvee behind them.

Max blanks out for a second, but regains consciousness.

Yazen is still screaming in arabic. Iraqi Soldier #2 lays knocked unconcious against the shattered window. Max jumps out of the humvee, staggering to help Iraqi Soldier #1 and Yazen out of the vehicle.

MAX

Let's go...!! Move!

Just then, an RPG rocket sweeps across the battle ground and strikes, exploding directly onto the humvee. The impact knocks Max off his feet.

BLACK SCREEN.

Ringling sound. Gunfire. Screaming. Max slowly opens his eyes, trying to make sense of his surroundings.

He can still hear Yazen. Then there is silence, and Max's eyes fall closed.

Max lays inanimate along the dirt, debris-filled road. The photo flows freely though the air, blazed landing on his chest.

His side of the picture is burnt off.

END OF ACT ONE