

Reenactment

By Michael R. Colangelo

“. . . and where the fuck is my Jesus?”

Simmons is rampaging again.

He stands center stage amongst piles of scattering script pages and volunteer stage hands. He curses his poor luck with starring role actors and curses everything else too.

He doesn't realize that Juan and I are standing there at the foot of the stage.

He doesn't realize that his Jesus is locked in the trunk of our rental car outside.

Simmons is giving private acting lessons to Paolo's ex-wife.

Paolo is our boss. He's a swell enough guy unless you were moving enough drugs and prostitutes inside the city to catch his attention.

Or if you are boning his ex-wife, Pam.

They'd been divorced for ten years, but Jesus if the guy wasn't devoted to her.

Sometimes we had to snuff her new relationships. Mostly though, a power tool through the hand or a dear pet roasted alive in their oven would send them packing. It was an easy paycheck, mostly.

Afterwards, Paolo would send her flowers.

Later, he would get drunk or stoned, or drunk *and* stoned, and weep like a little boy who'd just watched his new puppy get run over on the freeway. We'd all stand around, uncomfortable, unsure of whether to get him girls or more drugs or what.

Eventually, he'd recover on his own, until she turned up with a new boyfriend weeks or months later.

I always thought that Pam liked the mechanics of the whole deal. She'd flaunt her new boyfriend around all of Paolo's clubs until he sent us to deal with it. Then she'd disappear, then resurface again with some new sucker.

Hey, I'm divorced too, and I don't give two shits who my ex decides to fuck.

But I'm digressing. Anyway – hurting Simmons won't upset me much. The guy's a prick. He's dressed down in some paisley silk shirt and goatee and long hair. He's some sort of throwback to an era he never quite escaped.

I know these types. They hang around the university and teach a bit and push marijuana and write these shitty religious plays with the intentions of laying girls young enough to get him thrown in jail.

You know – one of those artists who were more into tail than art.

He's a predator. He makes me sick. And I get the vibe that Juan doesn't like him much either. Although, I don't think Juan likes anybody very much, except maybe airport strippers.

Juan cups his giant hands over his mouth and bellows something in Spanish towards the stage. Simmons stops ranting, mid-sentence, and looks up at us like he just tumbled off the platform in front of a subway car.

I motion for him to come over. He hops off the stage and ambles down the aisle towards us. The kids are watching, wary of our presence in the theater. We don't look like stage critics. That's for sure.

I don't really want to put the hurt on Simmons in front of them, but I don't always get my way.

I jab my finger into Simmons's chest, and when he moves to slap my hand away, I grab him by the collar and shake the sense back into him. The flimsy material rips and he flails back and forth like some sort of doll.

"Don't ever touch me." I say. "And throw Pam's number away. You're not to touch her again, either."

He complains.

"There are laws against this. You can't just come in here--"

Juan punches him in the mouth. Simmons falls in the aisle and howls about broken teeth.

We leave him there. This is our 'easy' warning. If Paolo tells us to come back, we come back and give him the 'hard' warning.

We drive the kid in our trunk out onto the freeway and let him out on the I-53 turnpike. It's a good twenty miles from the theatre and, dressed in his thin Jesus costume – a brown robe, sandals, and a paste-on beard – it's going to be a long and cold walk home.

I note that he has pissed his robe at some point on his journey.

Afterwards, we drive to Burger King and eat it in the car.

"You see that kid?" Juan says through a mouthful of hamburger. "He pissed in his own pants."

"I think Simmons pissed his pants too."

We laugh.

Paolo doesn't like us hanging around the hotel. He says we scare his legit workers and the tourists who stay there.

Of course, he lives at the hotel, up top, and so the only way to collect my paycheck is to go and sit around in the lobby until he or an assistant comes down and hands it to me.

I always try my best to dress respectable. Still, even wearing a suit, the old scars and Aryan Circle tattoos give me away every time.

I sit in a plush chair in the lobby. It feels way too small beneath my girth.

I lean forward with my hands clasped in my lap. Well-off tourists and businessmen and hotel staff all throw me dirty looks as they pass by.

I feel like an asshole.

I want to leave.

"Well, it's not like he fucking owns me."

Pam's voice is unmistakable. She's sweeping through the lobby, complaining into a cell phone. No doubt that she has caught wind of our visit to Simmons the night before. She has come to give Paolo a piece of her mind.

It's a tough break for Simmons.

She spots me and pauses in front of my chair. She's wearing this tight white miniskirt and it's awfully hard not to stare at the tops of her thighs where the skirt starts to ride up a bit.

"I have to go," she says into the phone. "I'll call you later."

Her voice turns to ice.

She hangs up and points the phone at me.

"You, Edward. I'm very disappointed in you."

I shrug at her in response.

"Hey, I just work for him."

"Yes, well... I should think one of you big and tough types wouldn't be so sickeningly subservient towards Paolo."

I shrug at her again.

"Did you know he suffers from micropenis? Did you know that about him, Edward?"

She shows me with her thumb and forefinger.

This conversation isn't going well.

I stutter. I mangle my next sentence into mumbling and incoherent gibberish. I half-apologize for Paolo's possibly made-up affliction, and half-defend his character.

I need a drink. She can have me fired at best, or killed at worst.

"Mmmmm." She murmurs in response.

She digs into her purse and produces a scrap of paper. She hands it to me.

I take it and look. There's a phone number and street address scrawled across it in mauve-colored ink.

When I look up to hand it back, she's already halfway across the lobby again.

I burn a joint and kill a twelve-pack with Juan behind the 7-11 later on.

He shows me the new knife he bought with his pay for the Simmons job.

"I got a feeling we'll need to visit Simmons again," I mention.

"Good. I can show him this weapon too."

He slams the knife into the rental car's dashboard and giggles like a schoolgirl.

"You heard from Pam?" I ask.

"Nah." He shakes his head. "She's loco, you know – like crazy. One day we gonna see her about town wearing Paolo's cock and balls on the end of a necklace."

I almost tell him about the scrap of paper she handed me.

I keep my mouth busy with another beer instead.

We go back to Simmons's two days later. Paolo calls Juan, frothing angry about something. Juan calls me.

This time we go to his apartment and we bring supplies.

We knock on his door, and when some pretty blonde college girl in a French-patterned silk bathrobe answers, we kick it inward and storm his apartment.

It's just her and Simmons inside.

And let me take a minute to explain myself, because this part needs explaining.

Juan and I have both done time in the joint. I've done San Quentin, and Juan has done the grand tour of any number of forsaken South American jungle hellholes.

In prison, especially if you're connected with any sort of organized gang, rape is far more common than you might believe. When they make prison movies, Hollywood gets the prison rape right, if nothing else.

It has nothing to do with sex, and has everything to do with dominance, property rights, and a healthy dose of humiliation.

So, yeah, male-on-male rape isn't uncomfortable. It's part of business.

And while I'm not into it like some guys get into it, Juan is an expert in this area of prison life. In fact, if they gave degrees in this sort of thing, he'd probably have at least three PhD's in the subject.

He's even more giddy with a pretty young girl involved.

I'm glad when it's finally over in the early morning.

"You want to grab a beer? I don't think it's last call yet," Juan says as he stuffs a pair of bloodied latex gloves into a garbage bag.

I shake my head.

No.

On Friday night, against my better judgment, I finally call Pam.

"Max went missing, Edward." Her voice is thick and slow-sounding. "I think something happened to him. Do you know what happened to him?"

"Is this your address?" I ask.

"Yeah, I'm here."

"We should talk."

Pam lives in a very expensive condominium down by the waterfront. I don't fit in and feel uncomfortable early on. I'm standing in the lobby trying to find her on the directory listing. I finally hit a name that seems familiar and she lets me in.

When I get up there, her apartment is a mess.

There's old cat shit on the rug and dirty dishes piled up in the sink and across the living room table. She's wearing a fluffy pink robe. She drinks directly from an open bottle of champagne. Before she even greets me, she pops a pill from an open prescription bottle next to the liquor.

In other words, she's a mess.

"You did it? Didn't you?"

I shuffle my feet. The cat rubs against my shins, purring.

"Please. I need to know. You killed him, didn't you?"

I nod.

"Was it bad? I mean, did Max suffer?"

I nod again.

I catch myself confessing, and it suddenly hits me that this is all wrong. When you collect paychecks for killing guys that deserve it, or cops, or when you're on a job and some guy gets in your face, that's one thing. But collecting paychecks because your boss is a lunatic who just wants to destroy his ex-wife's life? Well, that's something else entirely.

I'm about to take the next step in my rehabilitation and apologize when she steps towards me.

At first, I think she's coming in for a hug and so I open my arms to meet her approach.

Instead, she drops her robe, naked beneath.

Her eyes change too. They turn to steel the moment the robe hits the carpet.

She giggles.

"Always liked you, Edward. You kill men. Paolo can't kill anyone. Paolo's worthless."

I back away, bewildered.

"Hey," I try and reason with her. "The pills and booze are talking. You need to lay down or something."

"Lay down with me, Tiger. I want you to tell me how you tortured Max to death while you fuck me."

She squeals with excitement over the prospect.

"You're fucking crazy."

She rolls her eyes and advances.

"Now you sound like Paolo. Tell me, Edward, what do you think they'll do to you when they find out you've been here with me?"

I feel my hands balling into fists on their own accord. The inside of my head crawls with something hot and angry and familiar.

"You better not."

"Of course I will. That's the part that turns me on, you dumb fuck," she hisses.

I've been duped.

Anger. White hot anger floods my mind and I lose all concept of time and place. When I'm calm again, I've got my hands around her broken neck. There's blood and hair spread in a halo, ringing the back of her head. It's splattered across her kitchen floor.

The cat is still rubbing at my legs.

It meows.

So I kill it too.

Juan catches up with me eventually.

He does me as bad as we've ever done anybody.

I'm ready for it.