

Beast of Burden

by

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INT. 80'S ERA CHURCH KITCHEN - EARLY MORNING

An oven timer counts down to zero. The oven door is opened and a tray of wafers with crosses imprinted on them is pulled out.

A radio can be heard in the background.

RADIO NEWS

Another mass shooting took place yesterday. Thirty dead and another twelve injured.

A young priest, SHAW, crosses to a workspace behind him and dumps the wafers into a large jar. He pulls more dough out of a metal bowl and begins rolling it out.

His workspace is immaculately clean and each item on the counter very clearly has its spot.

SHAW is late 30s with a strong jaw and militaristic posture. His hair is cut close and his clerical suit and collar is pressed. He prepares the wafers like he's done it a thousand times.

RADIO NEWS

Police have a suspect in custody who claims he was commanded by God to perform this terrible act.

SHAW uses a stamp tool to prepare the next batch of wafers. He crosses to the oven and places the tray inside.

RADIO NEWS

That means yet another in the long string of mass shootings stretching back 41 months to the Colorado school massacre. Let's pray yet again for another group of victims, perhaps today will grant us a reprieve.

He walks back to his workspace and pours flour from a mortar into his bowl, but very little comes out.

RADIO NEWS

In other news, local aquatic wildlife has been found dead up and down the west coast.

With a slight sigh he sets the mortar and we walks into an adjacent room.

INT. SIDE ROOM - EARLY MORNING

In the corner an older PRIEST is hanging upside down, his neck slit and blood dripping into a bucket. A shelf of cleaned bones rests against the wall. SHAW examines a few bones before settling on a large femur.

RADIO NEWS (muffled)
 Scientists are baffled and we'll
 have more details tonight at 6.
 Now for the regularly scheduled
 half hour of smooth jazz.

Jazz music starts playing over the radio.

He glances at the bucket on the floor, and seeing that it's half full, he replaces it with an empty one and walks back into the kitchen with bone and bucket in hand.

INT. CHURCH KITCHEN - EARLY MORNING

SHAW sets the bucket on the floor and snaps the head of the femur off like a twig. With one hand he casually crushes it to powder into the mortar.

He pulls three full bottles of wine from under the counter and pours them into the bucket of blood.

After a quick stir, he puts a funnel in the first bottle and fills it with the mixture. He pours a small amount into a glass and tastes it.

SHAW (delighted)
 1943, my favorite vintage.

He finishes the drink and resumes pouring the mixture into the last two empty bottles. The camera dolly's back out of the room and around the corner, fading to black as the jazz music stops mid song and the RADIO NEWS starts again.

RADIO NEWS
 I have some tragic news folks.
 Another shooting just occurred in
 South Dakota. I don't know what's
 happening to this country, but
 it's not good.

INT. BEDROOM - SUNDAY MORNING

Short montage of a very messy room. Muffled porn can lightly be heard in the background.

MICHAEL, early 20s with mussed hair, is seen lying on his bed obviously masturbating, his laptop covering his crotch. He has headphones on and is quietly speaking to his laptop.

MICHAEL(quietly)
 Oh...oh...you're dirty aren't you?
 (pause)
 Oh ya, like that. Keep going.

After a few moments he reaches climax.

The brief moment of ecstasy is followed by a visible wave of disgust and shame as he looks for the nearest rag.

Camera looks up at him from the floor over the shoulder of a tube sock a few feet away.

MICHAEL glances at the sock, at his soiled hand and crotch, and back at the sock. He extends his clean hand towards the sock and attempts to use the Force to summon it. He holds his breath, squints his eyes and flexes his hand toward the sock.

After a few grueling seconds he releases his breath and gasps for air.

MICHAEL (shrugging to himself)
 It was worth a shot.

With one hand on his crotch, he tosses his laptop to the foot of his bed. As he takes a step towards the sock he trips on a pair of jeans and face plants.

MICHAEL (quietly)
 MOTHERF-!

FEMALE VOICE (louder and overlapping MICHAEL)
 MICHAEL! Are you ok? Are you ready for church yet?

MICHAEL rolls over, glances at a clock and silently curses to himself. He quickly grabs the sock and wipes up, throws it in the corner and grabs a pair of dress slacks, a button up shirt and a tie. MICHAEL runs out the room.

INT. BATHROOM - SUNDAY MORNING

MICHAEL brushes his teeth with one hand and combs his hair with the other. We see a drop of toothpaste fall from his brush onto his zipper. He rinses and bolts out of the bathroom down the stairs.

INT. FRONT DOOR HALLWAY - SUNDAY MORNING

MICHAEL runs down the stairs to a waiting family. MOM and DAD are waiting at the door with his younger sister, LAURA; mid-teens, short styled hair and punk clothes.

DAD

What the hell took you so long? We had breakfast 2 hours ago.

MICHAEL walks by without stopping and grabs his coat as he goes outside.

MICHAEL

Sorry, I fell back asleep.

EXT. FRONT YARD - SUNDAY MORNING

The family is walking to the car now.

MOM

What was that noise I heard? Did you fall?

MICHAEL

Um, ya. I woke up and saw what time it was. Sort of startled myself out of bed.

LAURA

I bet he was masturbating again.

MOM & DAD

Laura!

MICHAEL shoots LAURA a steely gaze and LAURA just smirks back before getting in the car. MICHAEL gets in after her while MOM and DAD get in the front.

INT. SEDAN - SUNDAY MORNING

MOM (awkwardly)

Well, even if he was...masturbating, that's a perfectly normal thing to do...before church.

MICHAEL & LAURA (visibly disgusted)

Mom...

MOM

But no more using your socks for
cleanup until you do your own
laundry.

MICHAEL

MOM!

LAURA laughs out loud while DAD suppresses a laugh under his
breath. MICHAEL looks visibly discouraged.

INT. CHURCH - SUNDAY MORNING

Churchgoers file into the pews and take their seats. After a
few moments SHAW walks down the center aisle followed by altar
boys DIEGO & TUCKER.

A few of the older members look confused but don't seem too
concerned. SHAW reaches the front and takes his place behind
the altar, DIEGO & TUCKER split off behind him and take seats
in the back of the pulpit.

SHAW

I can see some of you are
confused. Well let me introduce
myself. My name is Fr. SHAW PARDUS
and I'm covering for Fr. WRIGHT
for the next few weeks. There was
a death and...he won't be back for
awhile.

A few elderly seem a little alarmed about the news of the
death but take it in stride.

SHAW (upbeat)

Now even though I'm only here for
a short time, I have some big
plans and I intend to make a
religious connection with each and
every one of you.

SHAW makes eye contact with MICHAEL on the last word and
lingers for just a few seconds.

SHAW

Shall we begin?

SHAW walks over to the podium, pulls out a bible, and turns to
a bookmarked page.

SHAW

I'm sure all of you heard about
today's shootings and, like me,
have very strong feelings on them.

SHAW begins walking around as he talks.

SHAW

There are many people who's world came to an end today, both the victims and the families of the victims.

(slight hesitation)

Today I'd like to share a reading from Revelations with you all.

The congregation murmurs amongst themselves.

SHAW (suddenly serious)

Now I know Fr. WRIGHT usually focused on the happy and light of heart messages, but we also need to study the bad to remember how precious life is.

SHAW returns to the podium.

SHAW (increasingly serious)

Revelations 13:1 - 10. The dragon stood on the shore of the sea. And I saw the beast coming out of the sea. It had ten horns and seven heads, with ten crowns on its horns, and on each head a blasphemous name.

And elderly lady performs the sign of the cross and clutches her hands tight around a rosary.

SHAW (CONT'D)

The beast I saw resembled a leopard, but had feet like those of a bear and a mouth like that of a lion. The dragon gave the beast his power and his throne and great authority. One of the heads of the beast seemed to have had a fatal wound, but the fatal wound had been healed.

An older gentleman sits with his arms crossed and looks fairly non-plussed to be here.

SHAW (CONT'D)

The whole world was filled with wonder and followed the beast.

(MORE)

SHAW (CONT'D)

People worshiped the dragon because he had given authority to the beast, and they also worshipped the beast and asked, "Who is like the beast? Who can wage war against it?"

DIEGO & TUCKER are playing rock, paper, scissors in the back of the pulpit and betting \$1 bills.

SHAW (CONT'D)

The beast was given a mouth to utter proud words and blasphemies and to exercise its authority for forty-two months. It opened its mouth to blaspheme God, and to slander his name and his dwelling place and those who live in heaven. It was given power to wage war against God's holy people and to conquer them. And it was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation.

MICHAEL looks around the room to see almost everyone hanging on his every word. He scoffs to himself at SHAW's charisma.

SHAW (CONT'D)

All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast - all whose names who have not been written in the Lamb's book of life, the Lamb who was slain from the creation of the world. Whoever has ears, let them hear, "If anyone is to go into captivity, into captivity they will go. If anyone is to be killed with the sword, with the sword they will be killed." This calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of God's people.

The congregation all hang on his every word and seem almost sad when he finishes reading. There is a long pause while they wait for his next comment.

SHAW

Let us pray.

Montage cuts of the congregation singing, SHAW reading some more, and DIEGO & TUCKER falling asleep.

SHAW

The peace of the Lord be with you
always.

CONGREGATION

And also with you.

SHAW

Let us offer each other a sign of
peace.

Congregation members begin to shake each others hands. As a little girl reaches for MICHAEL's, her father notices the toothpaste stain and stops her.

MICHAEL looks down and sees the stain on his zipper.

MICHAEL (to himself)

You've got to be kidding me.

(to father in front)

It's just toothpaste.

LAURA sees the stain

LAURA (loudly)

Gross, you couldn't even clean up
afterwards?

MICHAEL (to laura)

It's toothpaste...

(to the surrounding people)

Seriously, it's just toothpaste.

The little girls father glances at him and nods his head in a "Sure, whatever you say" manner.

MICHAEL licks his fingers and attempts to wipe the toothpaste away but only succeeds in making it look worse.

SHAW glances up at the disturbance as he continues his sermon.

SHAW

This is the Lamb of God who takes
away the sins of the world. Happy
are those who are called to his
supper.

CONGREGATION

Lord, I am not worthy to receive
you, but only say the word and I
shall be healed.

Music starts as people forms lines and walk forward for communion. SHAW hands out the wafers he made earlier while two old ladies serve wine on either side of him.

MICHAEL approaches SHAW.

SHAW
Body of Christ.

MICHAEL
Amen.

MICHAEL eats the wafer, takes a drink of the wine and walks around the outside of the pews and back to his seat. SHAW keeps his eyes on him the whole time.

MICHAEL kneels down and starts praying.

MICHAEL (under his breath)
Please God, make me a superhero.

SHAW finishes communion and cleans up the altar with the boys' help. He sits down and after the music stops he stands up and the congregation joins him. He raises his hands into the air.

SHAW (hands raised)
The Lord be with you.

CONGREGATION
And also with you.

EXT. CHURCH - SUNDAY MORNING

Everyone is exiting the church and various groups of people collect outside and shoot the shit. MICHAEL and his family walk by a group of twenty-somethings.

JAMIE, mid 20s female, athletic build with short hair and angular facial features, turns and bumps into MICHAEL.

MICHAEL
Oh, I'm sorry.

JAMIE
Didn't see you there.

MICHAEL glances at JAMIE's face and a moment of recognition washes over him.

MICHAEL
JAMIE, right?

JAMIE
Ya, have we met?

MICHAEL
No, I've just seen you around town
and --

MICHAEL is interrupted by a female who puts her arm around JAMIE leans on her.

RENAE
Hey JAMIE, who's your friend?
MICHAEL?

RENAE punches MICHAEL on the shoulder quite hard. The mere sight of RENAE causes MICHAEL to flinch before he's even punched.

RENAE is early 20s, has a pony tail with long bangs and minimal makeup. Her left eyebrow is pierced and she's wearing tight jeans with a hoodie.

RENAE
How have you been MICHAEL? Did I hear correctly? You got kicked out of college?

MICHAEL
...Yep you heard right.

RENAE (laughing)
Well I guess nothing's changed since high school.

MICHAEL (under his breath)
Tell me about it.

JAMIE
RENAE! Don't be a dick.
(to MICHAEL)
That sucks MICHAEL, I'm sure you can go back to school if you wanted to.

RENAE (loudly)
Oh, that's the best part, he made national news when he blew up his science lab.

The group of twenty-somethings laughs behind them.

JAMIE
Really? That was you?!

MICHAEL nods his head to JAMIE.

JAMIE
So what have you been up to with your whole life wide open again?