

Damned

By

Mark Cowling

EXT. ST. JEROME CHURCH, MINNESOTA - MIDNIGHT

Barely visible through the heavy falling snow, St. Jerome Church sits some way off the road. A chained and padlocked gate blocks the path up to the small building.

A rust speckled station-wagon veers violently off the road and smashes through the gate. But this exertion proves too much for the battered old car, which shudders to a halt.

John COOPER exits the station-wagon. Sporting a Grizzly Adams beard which can only be the result of neglect, he is in his mid thirties; Out-of-shape doesn't really cut it.

Without a thought for his stricken vehicle, Cooper runs clumsily through the snow towards the church.

A large amount of dried blood stains the cracked driver's side window.

EXT. COTTAGE BEHIND CHURCH, ST. JEROME CHURCH - CONTINUOUS

Out of breath, Cooper hammers his fists on the front door. Finally a light is switched on and the door lurches open.

FATHER SWEENEY peers out of the cottage, flustered and confused. The avuncular man, wearing a robe over pajamas, struggles to put on his glasses.

FATHER SWEENEY

Oh my goodness. What's happened?
What is it?

Cooper takes a couple of seconds to catch his breath...

COOPER

I want to be baptized.

FATHER SWEENEY

I'm sorry?

COOPER

Baptized. I want to be baptized.
Right now.

Beat. Father Sweeney tries to slam the door shut but Cooper catches it. For a short while the two men struggle until Father Sweeney relents.

FATHER SWEENEY

Are you out of your fucking mind,
son? It's the middle of the fucking
night, you crazy fuck.

COOPER
Please. I need to be baptized
tonight. Now.

Cooper pulls a handful of cash out of his pocket.

INT. ST. JEROME CHURCH - MINUTES LATER

Cooper and Father Sweeney stand at the alter. Still wearing his pjs and a robe, Father Sweeney yawns and opens a leather-bound book.

FATHER SWEENEY
Ok, where are we?
(sighs and flicks through some
pages)
Do you believe in God the Father
almighty, creator of heaven and
earth?

COOPER
Yeah, I do. Sure. Absolutely.

A clashing sound, perhaps trash cans falling over, can be heard from outside. This distracts Father Sweeney.

COOPER
It's the wind. Carry on. Quickly.

FATHER SWEENEY
Uh... Do you believe in Jesus
Christ, His only Son our Lord, who
was born and suffered--

The heavy oak doors are flung open as if made of plywood. A small, middle-aged woman staggers into the church, head bowed. She could be a history teacher or library assistant.

FATHER SWEENEY
Mrs Wilkins?

She takes a couple of unsteady steps forward.

FATHER SWEENEY
Are you alright, Mrs Wilkins?

MRS WILKINS throws her head back violently, her eyes blood-shot, skin flaking. She produces an ungodly scream that makes the window panes rattle.

COOPER
Maybe you could speed things up a
little.

EXT. PARKING LOT, YAPPY SNAPS - NOON

CAPTION: "THREE MONTHS LATER"

The Yappy Snaps pet photography studio is just off a busy street, prime real estate, but its parking lot is empty.

The store front looks great -- someone has spent a lot of money on this business.

INT. MAIN STUDIO, YAPPY SNAPS - CONTINUOUS

KEVIN Harris gently polishes the lens of a very expensive looking piece of hardware. He is in his early thirties and was probably quite athletic back in high school, but that was some time and a lot of pizza ago.

He checks his watch and sighs with frustration.

There is nothing more to be done. He is surrounded by a very elaborate arrangement of tripods and cameras, all spotlessly clean. If you take away about a dozen pieces of equipment, this could be a Rolling Stone shoot.

Around the room are prints of Kevin's greatest hits -- a miserable looking mastiff in a ballerina tutu, a disinterested cat dressed as Spock, hamster doctor, etc.

INT. RECEPTION, YAPPY SNAPS - CONTINUOUS

Slumped behind the desk in reception is NATALIE, an overweight goth who has made the very smallest possible concession to what is considered acceptable corporate attire.

Her thumbs are a blur as she hammers out a text message.

Kevin exits the studio and clears his throat loudly to get her attention. Natalie ignores him.

Awkwardly, Kevin pretends to be taking great interest in the fire drill evacuation procedure pinned to the wall, until Natalie is done.