

Pablito
Jason Shannon

Andy was at a huge family reunion. All of Ivy's cousins and aunts and uncles, her grandparents were there. Her brother, who'd once been drafted in the CFL, was there. Andy was trepidatious. This was the first time he was meeting her extended family. He'd only met her parents, upper-class yuppies driving Mercedes' around Ottawa and rubbing shoulders with senators, once before. They weren't snooty, per se, but they came from that world. Ivy's father had Chrystia Freeland's office extension in his rolodex. He also still used a rolodex.

Meanwhile, Andy was a few years away from sleeping under a bridge, subletting a rundown house owned by a couple of drug dealers under active surveillance by the OPP, and he'd just kicked his sex worker roommate out for shooting her half of the rent up her nose. He'd been hospitalized with something similar to SARS for months on end, and didn't get his grade twelve diploma, and was working as a nightshift manager at a Wine Rack. He had to make a good impression.

Andy and Ivy had only been dating for a few months. Things were going well. He liked her. He wanted this to go well.

About halfway through the dinner, as Andy was conversing with Ivy's grandmother, her uncle, at the far other end of this huge table, tapped his champagne glass with his fork. The din of conversation quieted down as all eyes turned to him. He stood up, his eyes sweeping down the left side of the table, then the right.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he began, "I'm sorry to be the one to tell you this, but I have some bad news. I'm afraid to report that Andy has been two-timing Ivy."

Andy gaped at the accusation. Mutters ran up and down the table. Ivy's grandmother looked scandalized. Andy felt himself sweating.

The uncle continued, "Yes, I know, it's unpleasant. Ivy has seemed so happy, but I cannot conceal the truth." Then the uncle looked down the table, his piercing gaze bearing down right on Andy. He said, "Does the name Pablito mean anything to you?"

Andy was dumbfounded. He was baffled. What was this man going on about? Blithering, Andy spat out, "Uh... no."

The uncle threw up his arms. He looked exasperated. As though Andy's transgression might be forgiven, it could be overlooked, it could be dealt with, if only he threw himself on his sword and prostrated himself before all gathered here now. But he wasn't doing it. He was still lying. He was still leading his double life.

Ivy, by now, was eyeing her boyfriend curiously. Just what, exactly, was he keeping from her?

At the other end of the table, the uncle said, "Ladies and gentlemen, I must present to you the evidence, the proof of Andy's betrayal. Behold..."

And he reached into the breast pocket of his bespoke suit, and pulled out an old VHS cassette. It was in the black plastic protective case like Blockbuster used to use. It was a brick in his hand. Andy didn't know how he'd fit it in his pocket. There was a label on it, worn down and faded, and concealed beneath a heavy translucent covering.

The uncle passed down the left side of the table. Each person who came into contact with it was shocked and dismayed, scandalized by the vulgarity on display – the religious aunt, the radfem cousin with the feminist power fist on her tank top, the ten-year-old boys and girls who were cousins once removed.

At last, it made it's way to Andy and Ivy. Ivy looked at it only briefly before it landed in Andy's hands.

It was an Italian pornographic gay bondage film.

Andy himself appeared to be the cover model, smiling sultrily, dressed in a jet black oily latex catsuit. The bottoms were assless chaps, his schlong hanging out almost to his knees. The chest was also open, his hairy man-titties pushed out of the circular gaps in the suit, nipples pierced and a chain strung between them. He had a spiked bondage dog collar around his neck, and held a paddle

in one hand, and a two-foot-long novelty dildo in the other. Between his spread legs, like he was about to lower himself onto it, was a Sybian machine. Off to the side were three young men on their hands and knees, their backsides facing the camera, ready and willing. One of them was hooked up to a milking machine. Across the room were scattered many dildos, buttplugs, sets of anal beads, fuzzy pink handcuffs, riding crops, a fucking machine, a reciprocating saw with a dildo mounted on it, and a forty-five-gallon drum of lubricant.

It was titled *La Dildo Vita*.

The cover model was named Pablito. Evidently this was Andy's gay Italian porn star doppelganger.

When Andy looked up from the cover, two dozen sets of eyes bore down upon him. The uncle, staring him straight in the eye, said, "Well, Signor Pablito, do you have anything to say for yourself?"

Andy shot awake, sitting straight up in bed. He was damp with sweat.

His urgency had awoken Ivy, who languidly rolled over. "Mhm, is everything okay?" she groaned, eyelids heavy with sleep.

Andy stared straight ahead at the dark room, his breathing strong.

"Sweetheart?" she asked.

He blinked, took a deep breath. It had been a dream. A vivid, horrifying dream. None of it had been real.

Swinging his legs off the side of the bed, he rubbed his eyes. At length, he told her the story of the dream. Ivy, half-awake, listened to her distraught lover.

At last he finished. Ivy, still groggy, processed it for a moment. She said, "Wait... why exactly was he in possession of this obscure, gay, Italian porno?"

Andy stared blankly for a second. "Huh..."

"You didn't think to ask this?" she said

"Well..."

"Go back to bed, dear," she said, patting him on the shoulder.

But Andy's nerves were still shot. He said, "You go back to sleep, I'm gonna go outside and have a smoke, calm my nerves."

Ivy grunted, and rolled over. Soon, she was gently snoring once more.

Andy went downstairs, shushed the dogs, went out the back door and around the side of the garage.

He looked up. Over the roof of the garage, the bedroom window was still dark.

Twenty minutes later, smoke wafted from a forty-five-gallon drum. Wood crackled inside. Old newspaper curled and was consumed by the flames. The shovel, digging deep into the earth, struck something rigid and plastic. Uncovering what he'd dug up, Andy pulled a huge box set of VHS cassettes out of the hole.

He stepped out of the small pit he'd dug, ambled over to the crackling flames. With one more look to the darkened bedroom window, he dropped the ten-cassette box set into the drum. The cardboard box went up in flames, and the cheap plastic of the cassettes began to warp and melt. His own face, printed on the top cassette, smiling devilishly as he lubricated his gloved fist, stared upwards to the night sky.

"She can never know," Andy muttered to his beagle as he watched the block of cassettes melt into a blackened sludge. "She can never know."

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