

## The Dead Know Nothing Excerpt

1

Patty returned home from work and dusted the snow off of the shoulders of her jacket. She then took a quick peek in her mailbox not expecting to find anything other than bills or Dominos flyers. To her surprise, there was a handwritten letter from Jimmy Franklin. Her cheeks flushed red. She quickly ran up to her second-floor apartment and rushed into her bedroom. She lived alone, so she didn't know exactly who she was hiding from, but she felt ashamed for some reason. The letter sat unopened in front of her on her bed for ten minutes until finally she ripped it open like a raccoon tearing at a banana in a trash can. This was the first time she had heard from since... well, she didn't actually know. Maybe he sent a letter when her mom or dad passed? It was hard to remember.

Now he was writing to her out of the blue. His parish was only about a fifteen-minute drive from her triple decker house. He could have delivered the message in person if he wanted to. But no- he sealed, stamped, and mailed it like a weirdo. Par for the course. That was the kid she remembered. What was different was the way he was speaking in the letter. This is what it said:

*Dear Patricia,*

*Hello, old friend. I am sitting here watching snow fall against the window, and all I can think of is summer days with you.*

*You'd be pleased to know that yesterday I accidentally lit my hair on fire trying to light a cigarette. Remember when I almost burnt down the school by throwing one onto dry leaves? Clearly, I'm still just as clumsy. There aren't people around to laugh at me anymore. They just become very concerned, which I suppose is funny in its own right. Everyone takes priests so seriously. You ever notice that? Why wasn't there ever a gospel where Jesus slipped and fell on a banana peel? I think that would keep people interested.*

*I hope this letter finds you well. Miss You.*

*-Jimmy*

*P.S.*

*I don't think I'd fit into those swim trunks anymore.*

She read the letter over and over again, not being able to shake the romantic connotations. He was flirting plain and simple. Why after all this time? After a birth, deaths, after...life? Maybe because he never had anyone else. She would have had to have been his only kiss now that she thought about it. *Jimmy, you're a god damned priest! Why are you writing me like this?!* Her hands were shaking and she was going to pour herself a glass of wine when there was a knock at her door. Most likely her son Freddie, who lived below her.

"Hey, Ma. You been paying attention to the news? Guy got stabbed down in Port Norfolk yesterday and they're saying a priest might have done it," said Freddie as soon as she opened the door.

"What are you talking about, Freddie? You're always coming up here blabbing about murder straight away. I just got home from work..."

"Yeah," said Freddie, "but didn't you say you grew up with one of the priests down there? You dated him or something right?"

Freddie was in his late thirties and resembled a giant egg. A lot of people look like eggs, but not many of their own mothers thought so. Patricia gave him another look over and decided he really was a fucking egg. The cashier at the Avenue Liquors had once called him a "Humpty Dumpty motherfucker." *Spot on.* She and his father were both good looking so she often wondered how her son inherited nothing except her red hair- and even that had all fallen out of his head by the time he was twenty-two. Wait... what was he saying about a priest? It couldn't be Jimmy the odds were just...

"Ma, you listening? Didn't you date a priest that works down at St. Brendan's?"

"I didn't date him. We've been over this. We were just friends. But Jimmy wouldn't stab anyone. Where are you hearing this? Don't say the fucking Twitter, Freddie, I swear to god..."

"Nothing wrong with Twitter," he said as he was becoming increasingly exasperated, "Twitter tells you things the news doesn't!"

"Come out of the doorway and sit down if you're going to be doing this. You're making me nervous. Do you want a beer or something? I'm going to have a glass of wine." She didn't want him drinking alcohol, but she needed some herself to hold off a stroke. Freddie had been out of work on disability for the past nine months and he was getting lazier by the day. Yes, he really did get injured, but she figured he was close to healed about six months ago. A mother knows her son.

He explained to her the details of the case, and it seemed like what had got the internet in an uproar was a neighbor claiming to see Jimmy leaving the scene of the crime. People had it out for him though. It was probably just another stunt in an attempt to get him defrocked. They turned on the TV (what Patty called "the real news") and the story was running there as well. *Fuck. How does the letter fit in? Why would both of these things happen at once?* Like Father Franklin before her, she was suddenly somewhere else in her mind. Back to a place she rarely left- 1978.

## 2

Patricia hadn't spoken to Jimmy since *that* day back in June. Her house was diagonally across from his, so she still saw him occasionally. Mostly before and after church when she would watch him walk with his parents to and from the car. It was annoying to have to get up so early to get to the window in time, but she couldn't stop herself from doing it. She was going back to school the next day and she knew there would be plenty of other boys. For better or worse, Jimmy didn't go to her school. There were guys after her the whole freshman year but she fended them off, especially one in her math class that was always about to bust out of his pants whenever he saw her. All of that was over with. She was a sophomore now and she was going to get a boyfriend. That would show James Franklin and his stupid Bible.

A few hours after watching Jimmy return from church, she set out her outfit for the next morning. As she stood there admiring it, there was a knock on her front door. She took a quick look out the window and saw it was Cheech Martin. *Ugh.* She went down and opened the door and told Cheech that she would go wake up Harry. But that's not why he was there. He stood there awkwardly on the front porch- nervous for the first time in his life. It took her a full minute to realize he was trying to ask her on a date. When he finally got the courage to say it out loud, she simply said "okay." Neither of them quite understood what happened next. He ran his hands through his long, cool hair and then asked her if they should go get ice cream "or something." And that's what they did and continued to do for the next few weeks. Not just ice cream. Movies and burgers. Pool and darts. Boyfriend and girlfriend stuff. He never really made it clear where he got the car they drove around in, but there were rumors some guy in Braintree was missing

one. Oh, well. She didn't know that guy. Patricia knew Cheech and she knew he was a maniac-but he wasn't when he was with her.

In the first month they were dating, Cheech only came inside her house when her parents were out. Her brother Harry never got defensive about their relationship. He felt it wasn't any of his business. One day, Cheech left her house to go back to his car and he found the tires slashed. He went ballistic. He guessed it must have been a local gang in the neighborhood. Patricia tried to calm him down without telling him what she really thought. Because what she really thought was that Jimmy had cut them. So, she let Cheech believe a gang did it. Cheech never suspected Jimmy because he considered him too much of a coward. He eventually found other things to be angry about and they got past it.

After that, Jimmy Franklin drifted slowly and surely from her mind. She didn't notice much when he went in or out of his house or if he ever went outside at all. As the years passed, she forgot he was even there, only about two hundred feet from her on any given night. She was off and on with Cheech all throughout high school. When they broke up it was usually only for a day or two. The last she heard of Jimmy before he left his parents' house was that he earned a full ride to the College of the Holy Cross. He always was a genius. She didn't know at the time that she'd never be moving out of her house, which her brother Harry and her would come to inherit when their mom and dad died.

Over forty years later she'd still be wondering if Jimmy, now Father Franklin, stabbed those tires and if he was capable of doing something much, much worse.