

Last week in June, 1978. 78 and sunny. Jimmy's father always said that once 4th of July hit, summer was already over. He hated how right he was. It seemed it went from Independence Day straight to Labor Day. He figured he'd better get out and enjoy the weather, but not many people came knocking to hang out anymore. Jimmy had become awkward. Weird. Not that there was ever a time where he wasn't those things, but now he was so much *more* awkward. So much *weirder*. There was his best friend Patricia Owens, but she was the very person it was hardest to be normal around.

DING-DONG. DING-DONG. DING-DONG.

Speak of the devil up pops an imp. What would he tell her? What would be his excuse why he couldn't go hang out? He was sick? But he didn't look sick or sound sick.

DING-DONG.

For Heaven's sake, Patricia, I'm coming. She stood at the door with her hands on her hips, wearing a blue and white one-piece bathing suit, tucked into her high jean shorts. It was becoming increasingly difficult to be around her when she was in her bathing suit.

"You're coming to the beach." Her red hair bounced when she talked, making her look more and more like Ann-Margret with each new curl.

"I'm not feeling very well. I think I'll stay home today."

"Come on! You're not sitting in there like a lump on a log all day. Don't you always say summer ends after the 4th?"

"Okay. Fine. Give me a moment."

He found his bathing suit tucked neatly in his dresser drawer. He hadn't worn it all year. Wondering if it still fit, he put it on and found out it did. His slight body hadn't grown at all. There was a plain white t-shirt folded neatly next to it, so he switched the sweaty one he was already wearing for the clean one. It was a forty-five-minute walk from where they lived in Savin Hill to L Street Beach in South Boston. They never once considered it a long journey, and had done it without concern or consideration since they were ten. Now at age fifteen, he wondered if they would look quite different walking along the side streets and highways to reach their destination. When they were halfway there, someone called from behind them.

"Patty, wait up!"

Jimmy could tell from the voice it was her older brother, Harry. He was wearing a tight Rolling Stones t-shirt tucked into his jeans. There was a shirtless guy with him that Jimmy didn't recognise at first. He was also wearing jeans. Jimmy felt like a complete idiot in his bathing suit and holding a towel. When they got closer, he realized the other guy was Cheech Martin. Not to be confused with the actor, Cheech Marin. This guy's real name was Timmy Martin, but he had a penchant for smoking marijuana and quickly inherited the Cheech namesake. Tim had just about the worst reputation a guy could have.

"Who the fuck is this kid?" he asked pointing at Jimmy. They had met a few times before, but clearly Jimmy had made no lasting impression.

"Aw, that's her friend Jimmy. He ain't so bad. Say, Jim, you got any cigarettes?" said Harry.

Jimmy always had cigarettes. His parents had banned alcohol from the house on account of his father's addiction, but they both smoked cigarettes all day long. When Jimmy started smoking at age twelve, neither of them said anything. They had both been smoking

since before that age. He handed the two older guys Camels, and then took two out for Patricia and himself.

"Not that bad is right!" said Cheech smiling as the four of them resumed the journey to the beach.

"He wants to be a priest, though. Don't ya?" said Harry.

"A priest! Brother, you must like tugging on it. You know you can't chase any pussy once you're a priest? You get good grades in school?" said Cheech.

"Ya, he does! He's a genius," said Patty.

"Why don't you become an accountant or some shit, man? Don't ruin your whole life," said Cheech. Jimmy tried to respond but couldn't. Cheech rubbed his combed-over hair and messed it up. It was twenty years out of style.

"We gotta get you a new hairdo, kid."

"Leave him alone, willya? Jesus Christ, Timmy, he just gave you a smoke, didn't he?" said Patricia.

Though Jimmy felt embarrassed in doing so, he laid his towel down next to Patricia's once they got to the beach. Harry and Cheech ripped off their jeans and ran into the water. He thought that he would be happy to see them go, but once Patricia started taking off her shorts, he wished they would come back. She took a bottle of baby oil from her small pocket book and asked him to rub it on her back. His hands trembled as he went to touch her shoulders. The smooth skin was overwhelming. *Why am I joining the priesthood?*

"You fall asleep back there, skinny? Your touch is so delicate."

He realized he had stopped moving his hands and then quickly started again. Now he was staring down at his own bare meatless stomach and hairless chest. His body was closer to hers than it was to the guys in the water. When he was finished, she laid down on her stomach to roast. She asked him to get her legs too and he thought he might faint on top of her. Her bottom was about as small as his was, but he couldn't help but glance every now and then as he moved up and down her legs. Her giggling didn't help any. He was completely and madly in love. But he was useless. This whole situation was useless.

"What's your favorite song?" said Patricia.

"Hmmm. Probably 'Stardust' by Nat King Cole," said Jimmy.

"What are you six thousand years old? That can't be your favorite song, you goof."

"What's yours then? Something by Donna Summer, I bet."

"Oh, yeah she's pissah. But, my new favorite song is 'Miss You' by The Rolling Stones. You gotta hear it. It's great! Harry just got their new album," said Patricia.

Harry could have been the All-American boy. He was big and strong and handsome despite his heavily freckled skin. You could picture him in a letterman's jacket holding his textbooks wrapped in brown string. Homecoming king and quarterback of the football team. But Harry hated all that stuff. The only things he cared about were hanging out with his friends and rock n' roll. The devil's music. Patty took after her older brother. They had an anti-authoritarian streak running in their blood. One of their favorite things was to throw eggs off of parked cop cars.

Patricia rolled over to tan her front, and Jimmy was relieved she could oil herself on that side. She must have sent off a wave of pheromones because suddenly three boys they didn't know walked up to them. They were about their age, maybe a little younger.

"Who is this, your boyfriend?" asked the ring leader.

"Not that it's any of your business, pal, but he's my friend," said Patricia.

"Why aren't you her boyfriend? You queer?" said the first kid.

"Yeah, he's queer as a four dollar bill," said the second one.

"Straight as a broken arrow," said the third.

"No he ain't queer! He's just quiet. I'll kick you in your fucking balls if you don't fuck off you little pricks," said Patricia.

"Ya, whatever. What's he going to do about it?"

Jimmy considered his options. He wasn't a fighter by nature, but he had been in a few scraps. They were unavoidable. The last time he threw a punch though, he figured he was about seven years old. He was bigger now, but not by much. Could he manage to stand up before they knocked him back down? Would they hit Patricia? They wouldn't do that, would they? Before he had to make a final decision, a solar eclipse dropped over the group of three boys. They turned to see what was casting the dark shadow and found Harry and Cheech, dripping wet and in their boxer shorts.

"That's my sister you're bothering there, kid."

"We didn't mean anything by it, we were just fucking around you know?"

"He told us they were going to beat us up," said Patricia.

"You think it's funny picking on women do you, you little piece of shit?" Before the kid could answer Cheech's question, Cheech punched him across the left cheek. Jimmy had never seen anyone get hit like this -even in the movies. It was more of a sledge hammer than a fist. Blood squirted across the sand, and the boy fell down, severely injured, the side of his face caved in. He convulsed on the ground in front of the towels. The two others tried to run, and one succeeded. Harry held onto the unluckier of the two with a headlock.

"What should we do with this one?" said Harry.

"Aw, let him go. The cops will be here soon you guys gotta go," said Patty.

Harry released him and the kid sprinted away with Olympian intensity. Harry and Cheech grabbed their jeans and sneakers and took off back towards Dorchester. A crowd started to gather around now that they were gone. Patricia started slowly folding her towel and packing her things, all while the one with the broken face was still twitching. An older woman bent down to try and help him. Jimmy ignored all of the people's questions and began to gather his things as well. They had been at the beach for less than fifteen minutes. The woman that was trying to tend to the boy suddenly walked over and grabbed Patricia's shoulder.

"Don't fucking touch me. We had nothing to do with this," she said, shaking the woman off. Jimmy followed Patricia off the beach with his head hanging down in shame, both for what happened and for desiring to look at her body as she walked. They put their shoes on up at a bench on the sidewalk, and thankfully, she pulled her shorts back on before she did. As they walked silently home, a patrol car pulled up beside them.

"You two have anything to do with that fight at the beach?" an old, heavy officer barked from his window.

"Who? Us? You must have the wrong people," Patricia said smiling.

"Red headed loudmouth. Skinny goof with her. I think you fit the description."

"We were there of course, but we didn't know those kids. Someone said that they were from Charlestown."

"That's weird. They ran towards Savin Hill."

"Those Townies have no sense of direction," said Patricia. At this the grumpy officer laughed. No one could help themselves. Everyone always ended up liking her. It was probably that wild red hair. Or her dimples. Or her everything.

"So, what are you two, boyfriend and girlfriend?"

"Ya, he's my boyfriend. So, what?"

"Didn't mean no offense. But, hey, listen. That kid back there is banged up pretty good. Maybe stay away for a while so you don't get yourselves hurt. Have a nice day, mam," he said tipping his hat at her. *Oh, no. He's in love with her too.* But what was it she just said?

The sun had just reached its peak when they started back up for home. They seamlessly dodged past cars on the busy over and underpasses, practiced explorers, poetry in motion. Best friends who had spent almost every moment together their entire lives. When they reached their street, he finally found the courage to ask about what had happened. Not the fight. Forget the fight.

"Hey, uh, Patricia. Are we? Boyfriend and girlfriend, I mean?"

"Oh, shut up, you fool. Kiss me," said Patricia. It sounded like something she must have heard in a movie but that was okay, because no other moment in his life would ever feel more cinematic than this. And he didn't screw it up like he thought he would. At least not right away. He managed to kiss her. It was the only time he would ever experience that sensation, and he knew it. Power ran through him. He was sure he could provide all the electricity for the neighborhood with his bare hands. Their lanky bodies held each other with all the strength their muscles could muster.

"Don't do it, Jimmy. Don't become a priest. Be with me."

There it was plain and simple. It was as he imagined it ten thousand times, her asking what he had been waiting for her to ask. Why the hell did he want to be a priest anyway? And now he couldn't answer.

"I... I have to..."

"Oh, you're impossible James Franklin. I suppose I should call you Father!"

She ran into her house crying. No one rang his doorbell the rest of the summer.