

LETTER FROM THE DEAD PART 1

By: Steve Bolin

Part 1

Dearest Emily,

If you're reading this letter then I'm already dead and buried. I apologize for any discomfort you must feel knowing that your great-grandmother is speaking to you from beyond the grave. I felt it was important that you receive, among other things, this letter detailing pertinent information you need concerning your new home.

The house I'm talking about is, of course, the one you've inherited from my will. Perhaps you're reading this in the front room this very moment. I've entrusted you with my humble home, its vast acreage and my precious pumpkin patch growing in the backyard. My spirit is wrapped up in this house – and in the pumpkin patch as well.

Today is my 100th birthday, Emily. The blessings of a long life are not without some consequences, however. According to recent lab tests, I have an inoperable tumor in my brain. The doctors give me another month to live at most, so I felt it was prudent to write this letter now.

I can't say that I'm surprised; no one lives forever. I feel blessed though, even after all the hardships in my lifetime – and the crazy things I've seen over the years. Believe me Emily, I've seen my share and more. Things perhaps, no human was ever meant to see.

The reason I'm typing this letter is to tell you of my pumpkin patch. There's something you should know about that garden, something I've never told anyone else. I wouldn't be telling *you* except that... well, you're inheriting my home and property. My pumpkin patch comes with it.

I suppose planting pumpkins won't be high on your priority list. Your job and family might take most your time. Or maybe the thought of following in the footsteps of "Pumpkin-Patch Patty," as I was sometimes known, doesn't interest you. If you want, you may continue your life as you wish and never plant a seed. What you do or don't do won't really matter. The small pumpkin garden will grow on its own – just as they have every season I've lived here.

The pumpkin patch is odd in more ways than one. You see, something happened in that garden 8 years ago that forever changed the way I look at the world. It was only the one time you see... and well...

Emily, I just don't know how to tell this story. It's too unbelievable. I was there and I *still* have trouble believing it wasn't all a dream. You might discount this letter simply as ramblings from a senile old lady. It doesn't matter I suppose; it may never happen again. Still, I think you should be warned.

Until the "incident" in the pumpkin patch, I used to discount unexplainable stories. I scoffed at reports of UFO's, alien abductions, and the like. I'd laugh myself silly over accounts of the Loch-Ness Monster and Bigfoot. They were just too far-fetched, jokes invented by bored writers or get-rich-quick con-artists.

Do you remember that story in Indianapolis sometime ago, concerning those serial murderers? (And I'm pretty sure it wasn't breakfast cereal they were killing either.) There were two of them at large. Do the names "Angel" and "SIN" ring a bell?

The newspapers said this "SIN" guy was found dead in an alley. An anonymous tip led police to the body's location. The halo-like strangulation marks covering the torso left no doubt that Angel did it. I find it ironic that a serial killer was murdered by another serial killer.

A friend of mine claimed to be the anonymous caller. She saw who, or perhaps I should say *what*, exterminated SIN. My friend said she was coming home late that evening from her bartending job when she witnessed the whole thing. She saw a young couple standing at the entrance of an alleyway.

The flap of Angel's coat flew open, revealing naked flesh. She saw the man reach for a knife tucked under his coat. Neither of them noticed my friend watching in terror.

Instead of fighting him, her skin rips open and these hideous, evil-looking tentacles grow out from her body. Before SIN can scream, this octopus-in-a-human-body thing – shoves an inky black tentacle down into his throat and silences him forever. Within moments, SIN's body is crushed like an empty aluminum can. The creature seemed to suck the life force out of the serial killer. My friend watched as this creature retracted its thick tentacles back into its body. Then it transformed into the beautiful young woman it started out as. The eyes of Angel and my friend briefly met, but thankfully, the thing walked in the opposite direction.

Why am I telling you all this? Has old granny gone off her rocker? Hardly. The reason I tell you this, Emily, is that I know what it's like to be on the receiving end of a strange tale. I know how uncomfortable it can be. Especially when said tale comes from someone you love. As incredible as it seemed, I believed my friend. Now I expect you to believe my tale. And I think you will.

O.K., Emily, enough of my dilly-dallying. The time has come to say my piece. Typing this letter was the reason I rolled my wheelchair up to this old computer. Don't worry about me tiring myself out. By the time you read this, I'll be getting all the rest I need.

* * *

Ever since I've lived here, Emily, I've grown pumpkins in the backyard garden. No, that's not right. They've grown whether I wanted them to or not.

Your great-grandfather was a terrific husband. We inherited this house from his grandparents after we were married in 1920. He told me about the pumpkins that grew every season in the backyard. He suggested I enter one of them in the state fair sometime.

I didn't act on his suggestion at first. He died at work, in a fire at the saw mill a few years later. He left a sizable insurance policy that helped raise the twins born to us almost nine months after our wedding night. Those two children were all I had – them and my pumpkins.

Eventually, I decided to enter that contest in remembrance of him. You see, he loved this place with all his heart. He was raised here by his grandparents after his folks were shot and killed during a bank robbery. In accordance with his will, he was buried right next to that little garden after he died.

This property has been in his family for years. Generations of his family have been buried on this land. Like those who had died before him, his will instructed that no gravestones or other kind of markers be displayed.

After years of detective work, I discovered the cemetery and the pumpkin patch were one and the same. This bit of news didn't surprise me. You see, by the time I found out, those large orange vegetables were growing over *his* burial site as well.

I figured since there was, quite literally, a bit of my late husband in those pumpkins, why not enter them in the fair? It was his idea anyway. Besides, tending and weeding the bulbous vegetables kept me busy while the babies slept. I gradually came to look forward to the pumpkins' arrival each year. They grew to be my friends and kept me company long after my children left home years later. I subconsciously ignored the movements of the garden's leaves on windless days.

The first contest I entered was the 1925, Indiana State Fair. I'd never entered a competition like this before. Oh sure, I'd been to small county fairs, but never to anything as grand and big as a state fair. I had no idea they were judged by weight alone. I thought the pumpkins would be judged like a cat or dog show, by shape and form. Needless to say, I didn't win. Now don't laugh at my once youthful naiveté. I'm no longer that innocent little girl.

The winner that year, a monster weighing 398 pounds, was almost 10 times heavier than mine. The pumpkin I entered was maybe 40 pounds or so.

The owners of that winning pumpkin went by the name of Farmer. I'll never forget them. That man and his two boys laughed at me until tears streamed down their faces. I'd never been so humiliated in my life. Had your great grandpa been alive, he'd have stopped their laughter with an old-fashioned knuckle sandwich.

My losing pumpkin and I went back home. It was close to Halloween, so I carved it into a jack-o-lantern and set it out on my front porch. I made pumpkin pie that evening then went outside to sulk beside my bulbous friends in the vineyard. Though they never offered words of encouragement, I always felt like they were listening. Maybe it was simply because my dead husband was buried there. I liked to think that each one carried a bit of my beloved within their big orange shell.

I quit entering contests for a while. I just couldn't face that kind of embarrassment a second time. How could I ever hope to compete with the big boys? Needless to say, I didn't give it much thought in those early years. I had hungry mouths to feed and growing bodies to clothe.

Over the following years, I began to notice subtle oddities. I subconsciously dismissed them because they were so enigmatic. Strangely, one pumpkin, out of the patch of 50 or 60, was significantly larger than the others. Others changed position on a daily basis – without intervention on my part.

As the years went by, however, the anomaly became harder to ignore. Each season, one pumpkin would grow substantially larger than the others. That the mammoth pumpkin never grew in the same spot two years in a row only added to the mystery.

By the time my children both left home, I had one monster that grew to my waist line. With my son's help, we weighed the beast. It was an amazing 509 pounds on the vine. I felt certain this would win any contest. I made arrangements to enter it in the 1945 state fair.

Many things had changed since I'd last competed. They now offered a \$1,000 prize to the winner. It's not much nowadays Emily, but back then *that* was some serious money.

They say that the more things change, the more they stay the same. One thing that remained the same at this contest was the winner. That's right; the same Farmer family that won in '25 won again with a 506-pound behemoth.

Now I can almost hear you yelling that I had the varmints beat by 3 pounds. But you're forgetting that I weighed mine while it was still on the vine. What I didn't realize is this: the moment you cut the thing, it starts losing weight due to fluid evaporation. The Farmers though, they realized it. When my pumpkin weighed in at 448 pounds, you can imagine my shock.

I'll never forget how that fat Farmer fella and his two sons laughed at me. It was the same sarcastic laugh I endured 20 years earlier. Once again I left humiliated, but I knew a chat with the ever-listening pumpkins would cheer me up.

My ritual that night was much the same as the first time I'd lost. I brought my pumpkin home, carved it into a jack-o-lantern and made pumpkin pies. Later I went out to my orange friends in the backyard garden and told them of my dilemma. I recounted how those boys and their father had laughed at me. By now, it no longer bothered me to see the pumpkins autonomously shift or turn while I poured my heart out

Once again, I decided to give up the silly contest. I couldn't beat experienced men. They probably worked and slaved to get their pumpkins as large as possible. What did *I* do? Nothing! ...Other than a little weeding from time to time and talking to them most every day. The things grew with a mysterious will of their own. Why should I win a prize for *their* efforts?

Nevertheless, the strange phenomenon continued. Season after season, one random pumpkin would grow to monstrous proportions, dwarfing all the others in size. I bought a special, long tape just to measure the circumference of the giants.

As the years flew by, you were born. I watched you grow into a beautiful woman. If you've ever seen any old black and white pictures of me as a young lady, then you know how much we look alike.

It was probably 50 years, Emily, before the idea of another contest entered my mind. Perhaps that's just how long it took to get my courage worked back up. During all that time, I never failed to visit my orange friends each season. I missed them during the cold winter months. They often moved while I chatted, as though searching for a more comfortable position. As always, during that time every year, a single, monster pumpkin would grow larger than any before it.

In 1992, I was 90 years old when I entered the state fair again. The prize money had grown to \$10,000 for the 1st place winner. Imagine my shock when I saw another generation of Mr. Farmer's grandsons there with two teenage sons of his own. The same Farmer features that had given me nightmares all those years ago carried down in those new, young faces.

The malicious Farmer personalities had gone from bad to worse. His two boys, probably around the ages of 18 or 19, came over and began insulting me. I'd never met them before and already they were name-calling. I won't repeat the awful things they said, Emily. I hope you never hear such foul language.

Their great-grandfather must've told some rather colorful stories about me. Small town rumors probably fueled their hatred as well. Some thought me strange because I talked to my pumpkins like they were people. I'd been caught doing it dozens of times over the years. With a

nickname like Pumpkin-patch Patty, rumors were bound to follow. Like the one about how I'd incinerated my hubby and used his ground bones as paint pigment. How do I fight vicious stories like that?

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