

# The Patch

A short horror story

Written by  
Christopher Epley

The wheels on the old muscle car had a shake to them, but that was the least of Dr. James “Jimmy” Lucas’ problems. He knew the old car needed some work, it had been built in 1968 after all, and it sat in the garage of his lavish suburban Chicago home for several years with just a few starts and trips around the block. Jimmy was in a rush, his breaths quick and deep, his knuckles white from the tight grip he had on the old steering wheel. It was late afternoon, not quite twilight as Jimmy crossed the border from Illinois into Wisconsin, the nervousness now fully taking him over. The familiar view of the concrete jungle of the city and its surrounding suburbs were far behind him, and ahead lies flat rural farmland and forests. In a way the so-called country brought him a sense of calm, the nervousness now fading as he continued the drive through rural Wisconsin veering off of the highway onto an old rural route. The radio started to broadcast static instead of the music that was playing on the start of his drive. The static irritated him and rather than look for a clear station he shut the radio off. He released some of the pressure from his grip and wiped some sweat from his brow with the sleeve of his black hooded sweatshirt. The sound of the wheels shaking was louder now that the radio was off, the constant shaking made him start to hyperventilate and he pulled the old car over on the side of the road. Jimmy shut the engine off and put his head on the steering wheel, tears begin to flow from his eyes, and he broke out into a complete crying fit. After what felt like an eternity Jimmy rose his head up and shook of the emotion, once again wiping his face and brow with the sleeve of his black hoodie. Jimmy got out of the car and took a deep breath, the air was cold and crisp, it was mid-October, the fields of corn were turning their golden hue right before harvest, and the leaves were giving off their orange color to everything in sight, Halloween was just right around the corner. He made his way to the front driver’s side wheel where he figured the worst of the shaking was at, he reached in behind the wheel and grabbed the tie-rod end, there was some looseness, this needed to be replaced and soon before it broke off. He didn’t have any time, he had to finish what he started, he only hoped he could do it before the inevitable break happened and left him stranded. Jimmy stood back up and grabbed his head and let out a huff of breath. He heard footsteps and looked behind the car as he saw an old man walking toward him on the side of this rural road out in the middle of nowhere.

The man was wearing a light brown duster, old torn up jeans, and a dirty flannel shirt. He had a dirty gray beard and long dirty gray hair coming out of a brown cowboy hat with a brown backpack on his back. If this had been a western movie the man would not have been out of place. The man tipped his hat at Jimmy and said, “Mighty nice of you stop, I’ve been walking out here forever.” Jimmy didn’t remember seeing anyone on the side of the road at all, but perhaps he was in his thoughts so much that he just didn’t pay attention. It was strange as the only thing on either side of the road was the orange blanketed forest, and this man should have stood out enough to notice. Jimmy tried to clear his mind and took a deep breath as he said, “I’ll be honest with you sir, I really didn’t stop for you, I didn’t even see you. I stopped to check my car, tie-rods are going bad, I just hope I have enough luck to get where I’m going.” The man smiled, “Well hot damn, my car broke down a ways back and I was headed back home to grab my tow truck. I was just hoping someone might stop and give me a ride. I own a repair shop, I can fix your tie-rods for you, and I’ll do it no charge if you give me a ride back to town.” Jimmy thought to himself scratching his head, then asked, “Can you do it quick? Like an hour or two? I

have somewhere I have to be, really important I get there tonight.” The man looked upwards and began to motion his fingers as if he were drawing a diagram. He looked back at Jimmy and said, “Yep, sure can. I’ll have you patched up in no time. But I would recommend you not venturing out after dark, we only have a little bit of daylight left. You’re welcome to stay at my shop if you like, I have an apartment above it.” Jimmy smiled, “Thank you sir, but I have a place just a little north of here, I’ll be fine travelling at night.” The man’s happy smile shifted to a concerned gaze, “Suit yourself.” He said as he began to walk toward the trunk. Jimmy frantically ran toward the trunk nearly tripping over himself and stretched his arm across the back of the car, “No! Not the trunk, its...uh...broke, won’t open. You can put your bag in the backseat.” Jimmy said with a slight smile. The man looked at him questioningly and said, “I can fix that for you too, but you’d definitely have to stay overnight.” Jimmy smiled back trying to not make this anymore awkward, “That’s ok sir, I just need the tie-rods fixed and I will be on my way.” The Man curled his lip and shrugged his shoulders, “You are a jittery fella. Suit yourself.” The Man said as he got in the passenger side of the car. Jimmy shook his head wondering what he got himself into, he looked at the trunk and thought he heard a strange sound coming from inside. He was sure he heard a thumping, but no, that’s not possible. Jimmy shook his head, took a deep breath and got in the car.

Jimmy started the car and drove away back onto the old rural route, the orange hue to everything from all the leaves gave an unsettling look, Jimmy ignored it. He looked to the man and asked, “I’m sorry you didn’t say where you were heading. How do I get to your town?” The man looked over at Jimmy, “I live in Grayfield.” The Man said as if Jimmy should know where that was. “I’m sorry never heard of it. Where is it?” The Man looked at Jimmy and raised his eyebrows, “You live up this way and never heard of Grayfield?” He asked. “I don’t live around here; I just have a vacation home with my...my wife.” Jimmy explained. The Man stroked his beard, “Ah, a vacation home. That explains why you have this beauty, you got money. What are you some kind of doctor or something?” Jimmy steadied his gaze on the road and responded without looking at the man, “Actually, I am a doctor.” The Man shook his head, “I didn’t mean nothing bad by it, I just know my cars is all and you don’t see these beauties without someone having money. I didn’t mean to insult you son. By the way, I never got your name.” The man reached out his hand to shake, “It’s Jimmy. And you are?” Jimmy shook the man’s hand as he said, “Names Bradford, but everyone calls me Brad.” Again, Jimmy thought he could hear a thumping sound coming from the trunk, but he brushed it off as the wheels shaking again. “Then I’ll call you Brad, nice to meet you. Now how do we get to Grayfield?” Brad smiled as he explained, “Just head up about another 8 miles then your going to want to take a left, follow that road down until you come up on Route 6, turn right and follow that about another 5 miles, once the woods start on the right side you will have another mile before you turn left then there you are. That’s Grayfield, the most off the wall small town in Wisconsin.” Jimmy nodded, “Strange I’ve had the vacation home for years and all the times we come up here we’ve never heard of Grayfield.” Brad looked upward as if in thought and responded, “Don’t know why, we’ve had some big-time murders happen throughout the years, all started in 58, then again in 62, 64, 69, 75, 81, 86, 89, and the last one in 94.” Jimmy looked shocked, “That’s horrible, I’ve never heard anything about those murders. Did they ever catch the people responsible?” Brad shook his head, “No, though the children years ago started the legend of The Watcher. It’s just a boogeyman tale the kids use to frighten each other. No suspects ever came up, police never could get any leads and the state boys never wanted to investigate. Grayfield is a small town, we just

watch our own.” Jimmy again, thought he heard thumping coming from the trunk, and again he brushed it off, “Wow, I’m sorry to hear that. So, know murders since 94 huh?” Brad nodded, “Yep, everything has calmed since then, people responsible must’ve quit, or judging by their age are either too old, or died themselves. Only highlight of Grayfield now is the pumpkin patch, huge orange pumpkins people from all over come to get. Perfect for Halloween.” Jimmy smiled, “Well that’s nice, I wouldn’t mind seeing some pumpkins.” Brad slapped his knee, “Well you’re just in luck, my shop is right across the road on the outskirts of town.” Jimmy smiled as he thought about the pumpkins, “That’s great, I love pumpkins.” Brad smiled, “You can bring one to your wife.” Jimmy’s eyes widened and asked frantically, “What?” Brad looked downward, “I meant no disrespect son, you just said your wife and you had the vacation home. I thought it would be nice if you brought one to her is all.” Jimmy eased up and relaxed, “Of course, I’m sorry. I just forgot I mentioned my wife.” Brad smiled, “No need to apologize son, just let’s get to my shop and I’ll have you fixed up in no time.” Jimmy nodded as he continued to follow Brad’s directions to the town he never heard of.

Jimmy still felt uneasy, he never heard of this town Grayfield, and the old man Brad, while he was nice, Jimmy kind of felt like he was pushed into giving him a ride. The thought kept creeping into his mind that even with the bad tie-rods he could make it to his vacation home before they broke, he had the extra parts. But now here he was going out of his way putting more wear and tear on the old car, with a greater chance of breaking down. Brad did offer to help fix them at no charge so there was that, Jimmy quickly put those thoughts out of his head, this man was willing to help him, then he could take care of his problem at the vacation house. The rest of the drive was quiet, and really quite scenic as the orange hue was everywhere, it was calming and very beautiful. Twilight was just starting to hit and there was just a bit of purple in the sky to go with the orange all around. Jimmy turned on route 6 and kept following as Brad had instructed, and just as he had said the woods to the right appeared. Coming up he could see the left turn he was supposed to make and sure enough, there was a town in the distance, streetlights were coming on and looked like an orange haze in the distance. Jimmy saw the pumpkin patch to the left of the road into town, it was enormous and stretched from route 6 all the way into the edge of town. Jimmy could see the pumpkins even in the twilight, they were huge and bright, very beautiful he thought. Coming up on the town at the outskirts he saw Brad’s shop, pointed at it as Brad nodded. He turned in and parked. Brad got out, opened the bay door and motioned Jimmy to drive in.

Jimmy exited the car and looked out of the bay door to see the big pumpkin patch, it put a sense of calm on him he hadn’t felt all day. Brad walked out of a back room of the shop and was dressed in his mechanic’s suit, “If you want to go look around the patch and pick you a pumpkin, go on ahead while there’s still light out. You got enough time; I’ll get these tie-rods changed out in no time.” Brad smiled. “Sure, that would be nice.” Jimmy said as he began to walk toward the pumpkin patch. Brad put the lift plates on the frame of the car and lifted it, then began to take the front tires off. Once he had the car lifted Jimmy felt better. He walked into the patch just across the road taking in the cool October air, glancing on the ground at the massive pumpkins. It gave off a strange sensation, he felt liked he was being watched, but after looking around he saw no one and the feeling left. He looked back down at the pumpkins, and one caught his eye, not for its color or its size, but for what looked like was dripping from the top. Jimmy swore he saw blood dripping from the pumpkin, he reached down and touched it, he was sure of it, it was

blood. He quickly looked back at the shop where he saw Brad working and just when he was about to yell for him he noticed the blood was gone from his hand and the pumpkin. He shook his head; he just imagined it. Jimmy saw the nicest pumpkin he could, and he picked it, holding it in his arms he looked back at the shop and saw something that horrified him. Something was dripping from the trunk on to the shop floor.

Jimmy ran with the pumpkin in his hands to the shop, he set the pumpkin down and nervously came toward Brad asking him, "How much longer?" Brad was putting the tire of one side back on as he said, "Got the other side to do then I'm done." Jimmy was starting to get anxious, "Ok I'll just sit over here." Brad nodded and then looked toward the dripping coming from the trunk. He walked over and inspected the drip, reaching up and putting the liquid between two of his fingers rubbing them together. "Now that ain't right." He said as he started to lower the lift. Jimmy raced toward him yelling, "NO! The trunk is broke...leave it be, I...uh...don't need it fixed." Brad looked at him with a raised brow, "Nonsense I can fix it and we can figure out what that red shit is that's dripping out. Could be some automatic transmission fluid leaking out if you have a bottle in there." Jimmy's eyes widened, "That's it...trans fluid tipped over, that's all. No need to get in there." But as Jimmy said that, Brad got the trunk opened looking in it concerned, then looking right at Jimmy's eyes. Jimmy hung his head down as Brad said, "It's bad, really bad." Jimmy with a soft defeated voice asked, "You going to call the cops on me?" Brad furrowed his brow and pursed his lips, "Why? Spilt trans fluid isn't a crime." Jimmy raised his head and ran frantically to the trunk, he looked in it and saw nothing but a bottle of automatic transmission with a broken cap, fluid leaking out of it. Jimmy fell to his knees in shock, Brad grabbing his shoulder, "You alright son?" Jimmy looked up and said, "No, I need to lie down." Brad helped him up and started guiding him, "It's alright son, come with me, I'll bring you up to the apartment here. I stayed there a few times to get away from the wife, bed is comfortable. You take all the time you need, rest up and I'll have your car ready by the time you wake." Brad walked Jimmy up the stairs and into the apartment, he brought him to the bed and had him lie down. He disappeared for a brief minute but came back with the pumpkin Jimmy had picked in his arms and set it on the nightstand next to the bed. "Here is your pumpkin, they have a calming effect and are good luck, well at least in Grayfield they are. Go to sleep son." Brad left and Jimmy lie there in the bed watching out the window as the purple twilight turned to pitch black, the moon now the only light visible. Jimmy stared at the pumpkin on the nightstand as he drifted off to sleep.

Screaming, Jimmy heard screaming, it was his wife. He was in bed, something was wrong, he looked next to him and there was his wife sound asleep. Wait no, that wasn't his wife, that was his nurse Jayna, the young twenty-something he was enamored with. Oh no, his wife Mary, she was home, she must've found out. He frantically shook Jayna trying to wake her, she awoke but it was too late, Mary burst through the bedroom door with a gun in hand screaming. Mary fired off a shot at Jayna, but she rolled out of the way onto the floor, Jimmy rushing over to his wife and tackling her down taking the gun from her. She kept screaming, yelling at him, "How could you! I'll kill you both!" Jimmy grabbed the gun and put it to Mary's head, "Shut the fuck up right now!" He said. Jayna cowered naked in the corner shaking and yelling out, "Oh my god Jimmy don't hurt her." Mary looked up at Jimmy snarling at him, "You ain't got the balls to do it, look at that little dick, you're weak." Jimmy filled with rage, turned the gun to its handle and began hitting Mary with it, "Shut up, you fucking bitch! Shut up!" Jimmy repeated as he

continued to hit Mary with the handle of the gun. Jayna, naked and afraid screamed, “Stop! She’s dead!” Jimmy stopped and looked down to see his wife’s face unrecognizable, a bloodied mess of meat, bone and blood. He stood up naked and covered in Mary’s blood from beating her to death, he looked at Jayna and said, “Help me get her to the tub.” Jayna horrified yelled at him, “Are you crazy! I’m calling the cops, what the fuck have you done!?” Jimmy walked calmly up to her dripping blood, pointed the gun at her head and pulled the trigger. Her brain matter splashing all over the wall of the bedroom. Jimmy brought both bodies in to the bath tub of his bedroom’s bathroom, found a circular saw and began cutting both bodies into pieces. After putting all the body parts into bags, he took them to his old muscle car and placed them in the trunk. Before he left for the old vacation home to dispose of the remains, he spent the next few hours cleaning the house and himself before he grabbed his black hoodie and headed out on the road. While getting in the car to leave he looks over and is startled by a person in the passenger seat suddenly appearing with green wooden limbs and a pumpkin for a head. The thing looked at him in the eyes, it had the scariest Jack O’Lantern face he had ever seen. The thing lunged forward, and Jimmy let out a scream.

Jimmy sat up quickly as he let out his scream, cold sweat poured from his head, he was breathing heavily. He was at Brad’s shop in Grayfield Wisconsin, in the apartment above the shop. It was a nightmare, and the pumpkin head creature is his nightmare, it had to be the pumpkin sitting right there on the nightstand. But the remains, where were the remains, last he remembered was Brad opening the trunk and they were gone. Jimmy got up and headed back downstairs to the shop. The old muscle car was back on the ground with a note on the windshield, it said, “Be back soon. Car isn’t ready yet.” Jimmy threw the note down and ran to the trunk and opened it, there were the bags with the remains of Mary and Jayna. “What the hell is going on?” Jimmy asked himself as he began to breathe heavier and heavier. Brad had to be going to the cops, but what the hell happened before when the bodies weren’t there? Jimmy slammed the trunk and got in the driver’s seat; keys were in the ignition. Jimmy tried to start the car, but nothing happened, no sound, not even the radio. He reached for the headlights and again, nothing. He got out of the car and lifted the hood, battery was gone. Jimmy looked around, no batteries in sight. Jimmy ran outside and looked around, to his horror the town that was just a short time ago lit up with orange streetlights was dark and desolate, no signs of life at all.

Jimmy ran down the street further into town, buildings all looked abandoned, homes not lived in for decades just rotting away. It was something out of a horror movie. Jimmy panicked and ran back to the shop the light still shining in the dark, the only light other than the full moon’s light. As he got back Jimmy noticed the pumpkin patch was still full but no signs of life anywhere. He ran fast and not noticing as he ran into the shop, he collided right into Brad. “Calm down son. What’s got you in a tussle?” Jimmy breathing heavy near hyperventilating said, “The town it’s gone, no one’s there, the trunk...” Brad interrupted, “Slow down there, town ain’t went nowhere and your trunk is a little gooey from the trans fluid, but everything is ok, see.” Brad walked Jimmy to the bay door and pointed to the town, orange streetlights all aglow, buildings all kept and nice looking, it was the perfect small little town. Jimmy’s eyes widened in shock, he turned around and ran to the trunk and opened it, the bags of remains were gone again. Jimmy now angry turned to Brad and demanded, “Where are the fucking bags?” Brad frowned and said, “Now I have no clue what you are talking about Dr. Lucas, but I had to get you a new battery, the old one lost its power. It’s installed and I got your pumpkin in the passenger seat there. I kept my promise you don’t owe me a thing; we’re all square for the ride and the pumpkin.

You're all good to leave and I suggest you go now Dr. Lucas." Jimmy hung his head and got in the car; he started it up but before he put the car in gear he thought about something. He stuck his head out of the window and asked Brad who was standing there, "How did you know my last name? I never told it to you." Brad smiled with a sinister grin and said, "You better get rid of the evidence Dr. Lucas, or the cops will know you killed Mary and Jayna." Jimmy's eyes widened and a sense of dread filled him as he put the car in gear and sped out away from Grayfield. Jimmy could see in his rear-view mirror that the orange streetlights again were not lit, and the town was dark again. Not even the lights of Brad's shop were lit. Once about a mile and a half outside of Grayfield he stopped the car and got out. Frantically running for the trunk, he opened it and sure enough the remains of Mary and Jayna were still there. He slammed the trunk closed and got back in the car driving away to his vacation home. He had to make there to dispose of the bodies. The road seemed to stretch on forever with the moon being the only light shining on the road and the pumpkin patch. He glanced in the mirror and Grayfield seemed to be the same distance as it always was, something wasn't right. He looked over at the passenger seat and there sat a creature with a green wooden body and limbs, with a pumpkin for a head. The most sinister Jack O'Lantern face looked Jimmy in his eyes, the creature's face glowed a bright orange from its eyes, nose, and mouth holes, smoke bellowing out. The creature let out a blood curdling scream and lunged at Jimmy.

Brad pulled his tow truck in with the old muscle car attached to it, the police escort following behind. He got out as the Officer walked toward him, "Ok Brad, evidence is all out of there but if you could hold it here for us until the big guys get here we'd appreciate it." Brad smiled, "No problem boys, she'll be here when the state boys come in. Any leads?" The Officer responded, "Plates say it belongs to a doctor out of the Chicago suburbs, so likely he'll be the first they look for. Bodies were cut up pretty bad and no signs of a driver. Car was just dead on the side of the road, door wide open when we found it. Just up there on the side of route 6. Kids will probably start up that old Watcher legend now when this gets out." Brad let out a giggle, "Yeah, kids and that legend. Well, have a great day Ed. I got work to do." Ed waved goodbye and the officers drove off back into Grayfield. Brad took a walk into the pumpkin patch, he walked until he reached near route 6. Brad reached down to a specific pumpkin and rubbed it saying, "Don't worry Dr. Lucas, they will never find you." A rustling in the woods could be heard across the road. Brad looked sternly at the rustling and said, "Not today, it's not your time. The children will speak of you again, you're legend will grow, but for now, they belong to me. Don't worry, I will take care of Grayfield." Brad laughed menacingly as he walked away. Meanwhile behind him in the rustling of the woods, a figure in a black flowing hooded robe floating above the ground, with a pale white as bone emotionless face watched as Brad walked away toward Grayfield. In fact, that's all the figure does is watch.

