

You read over the message again to confirm before reading it out loud. Everyone sits in silence, digesting the revelation. Anna breaks the silence.

"The priest and the nun did this? They... killed those five people?"

No one responds. It feels unreal... too monstrous to accept.

Cedric pulls out his phone, shaking — "I'm definitely calling the authorities to figure out what is going—"

A sharp bang echoes through the church. The doors slam shut.

Sister Alma steps forward from the shadows of the apse, Father Roy at her side like a looming statue of judgment. And just behind them, trembling — Jim.

"No need for authorities," Alma says, smiling thinly.

"We have already delivered God's justice." Roy's voice is a soft, gravelly whisper. "The meek suffer enough in this life. We freed them. Carried them home. We were doing Saint Joseph's work and would have continued before the evil intervened. Those five poor souls were just the first. There are more."

Jim stares at the floor. He clutches something behind his back — a red plastic can. That is when the smell hits you: gasoline.

Alma steps closer, eyes bright with fanatic zeal.

"Five souls, trapped in earthly agony. The Lord calls shepherds to protect the flock..."

And to end the suffering of the wounded sheep."

Her expression twists — pity and cruelty fused as one.

"You should be grateful.

We would have shown you the same mercy."

Cedric backs away, whispering, "We need to get out, now..."

Father Roy begins to mumble a prayer as he takes the gas can from Jim and begins to pour the remainder around the floor. With the doors locked and the air thick with fumes —

if a spark catches...

Father Roy pulls a lighter from his pocket, still praying. Alma places her hand on Jim's back and says, "You have served us well, Jim. This will be over soon."

A sudden chill grips your spine — a whisper so close it might be inside your skull.

"Tell him..."

"...tell him I forgive him..."

Your lips move before you realize you're speaking.

"Jim... Edith didn't want to die."

Your voice trembles.

"But she forgives you. She loves you."

Jim looks up sharply.

You step forward — guided by a presence not your own.

"She knows you tried to help her.

She said you were the only person who cared."

A tear rolls down his cheek — the first crack in the control they held over him. Father Roy stops praying, his face twisted with anger. "You dare defile this sanctuary with your communication with the dead? I condemn you to hellfire—"

He is cut off as he is knocked onto the floor. Behind him Jim stands, the wooden crucifix from the altar splintered in his hand from where it connected with the priest. Jim shakes with rage. He cuts his eyes to Alma, who tries to dart for the lighter lying on the floor next to Roy, who is unconscious. She is too late — Jim lets out a guttural scream as he swings the cross at the old woman.

You jump as Mikey pulls on your shoulder. "Let's get out of here!" he says, pulling you toward the door that Cedric has since unlocked. Outside, you all scramble to dial 911 when the dark night is suddenly illuminated by a blinding flash. The church bursts into flames. The interior is engulfed, preventing any rescue attempt. As you watch, frantic for a way to help, you see something in the middle of the fire.

Jim stands there, seemingly untouched by the flames.

Next to him — a woman holding his hand. For a brief moment they look up at you before the flames swallow them.

It isn't long before police, firefighters, and EMTs arrive on scene. It is no surprise Father Roy or Sister Alma did not survive the fire, but when you ask about Jim, the firefighters inform you that they found no one else in the church. The only thing that surprisingly survived the fire was the splintered wooden crucifix that you arranged to be donated to the Museum Nocturnus — the museum of haunted artifacts your team owns.

In the coming days, the work resumes. As admitted by Roy, more unmarked graves are found before a mass grave of human remains is uncovered, along with evidence proving that Roy and Alma had been luring homeless people to the church for years to kill them. The news is shocking, but they can no longer hurt anyone.

The church is gone, the truth is known... but trauma echoes long after the fire.

In the end, all we have left is what remains. Case closed.