

Detective Boyle had his elbows on the table. Ben had declined coffee, asking for juice instead. Boyle had informed him that juice was not an option. Detective Boyle was in his mid thirties, beer gut, thick neck. Ben imagined him going through boot camp. Private Boyle. Ben liked the sound of that. Boyle was speaking. "Mr. Quinn and Miss Brothers already told us what what you were doing at the pool. If you tell us what you know, you might not have to go to jail."

Boyle took a sip of his coffee. "How did you know Sherman Brocious?"

"Through school."

"Was he your friend?"

"He wasn't very friendly."

"Some of his friends told us the two of you were close. Did you like him...sexually?"

"Hate to ruin your plans for Friday night, but I'm straight."

"Were you close to Sherman Brocious?"

"Not really. Why?"

"When was the last time you saw him?"

"The first day of school."

"You haven't seen him since then?"

Ben rolled his eyes.

"What do you know about Sherman's cult?"

"Sherman Brocious had a cult?"

"We've got five missing kids and you won't even help us try to find them. We don't want to put you three away, got it? Even if you knew about it, if you help us now, we can cut you some slack, got it? If you know something about those kids or what we found at the pool tonight, now is the time. Got it? Before things get worse for you." That tactic wasn't working. Boyle said, "Did you know we found drugs on Miss Brothers?"

"Actually, it's Mrs."

"We found marijuana on your friend."

Ben fell out of his chair. Boyle jumped up and walked around to that side of the table. Ben was lying on the floor, laughing.

"What are you laughing about?"

When Ben spoke through his laughter, Boyle could barely understand the words. "You found...pot...on Lacy?"

"Get up."

The laughter was uncontrollable. Ben spoke again: "I...need...a doctor."

"Kid, you need a lawyer."

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"If you help us, everyone will go as easy as possible on you. If you don't help us, you could be charged with obstruction of justice, maybe in a murder trial. We have the pictures of the pool that Lacy had in her bag. I just looked at 'em with some of my partners. You know what's on those pictures, don't you? I'm going to level with you. It's not looking good for any of you, here, but for you, in particular, this situation doesn't have to get any worse. If you come clean now, with whatever you know, I'll tell you, judges look favorably on that, especially in juvenile cases." Detective Wasserman leaned forward in his chair. "If you don't," he paused, "well, what can I say, you take your chances."

Merlin was staring directly into Reuben Wasserman's eyes. Something about this situation reminded Merlin of a meeting he once had with a man named Solomon Zucker.

The detective said, "It's your choice."

Merlin said nothing.

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When Reuben Wasserman opened the door to Chamber C, Lacy Brothers was humming softly. Her eyes were closed. Her hands were folded on the table. Wasserman sat down across from her.

"Hello Lacy. I'm Detective Reuben Wasserman. You can call me Reuben."

"Hello."

"I want to ask you a few questions. If I ask about things you don't know about, you can tell me that. Please tell me as much as you do know about whatever we talk about. They should have offered you coffee...or water?"

"No, thank you."

"Let me know if you change your mind. What were you three doing in the cemetery tonight?"

"Walking."

"Have you been there before?"

"Yes."

"What do you do there?"

"Mostly sit."

"How many times have you been?"

"I go there all the time."

"How often do you go?"

"Every week."

"When was the first time you went there?"

"When I was a kid. I live close by. Do you go there, too?"

"Not normally," the detective said.

"It is a lovely place to walk. I like it especially in the fall. I like to take pictures there."

"Oh," the detective nodded. "I took a walk there tonight," he said.

"Was it a nice walk, Reuben?"

"No."

"You did not enjoy your walk?"

"No."

"I enjoyed the coolness tonight. Why was your walk unenjoyable?"

"I got a call from someone who said a night watchman told them there were kids trespassing in Woodland Cemetery. I went to take a look, and I found two hands at the bottom of a reflection pool, which I had to put into plastic bags and take back to my office. Now I'm sitting in a room for the second time with a young lady who I know is an A student, a junior who takes senior honors English, and I'm wondering why I feel compelled to ask her what she knows about the hands that were in that pool tonight. I'm wondering if she knows anything about the missing boys from her school that she didn't tell me the last time she was sitting in this room. In one way, I'm hoping she doesn't. In another way, I'm kind of hoping that she does."

For a long time neither of them said anything. Then Lacy looked directly at the detective. She said, "I see why that was not such a nice walk for you." That was all she said.

"Can you shed any light on any of this for me?"

"No, I cannot."

"Have you ever been to the reflection pool in Woodland Cemetery?"

"It is my favorite place to go."

"Did you go there tonight?"

"Yes."

"Did you see two hands in the pool?"

"No. I could not see much of anything tonight."

"Did you know, before I told you, that there were two hands in that pool tonight?"

"I had a feeling they were there. I didn't know for sure."

Reuben squinted his eyes. "What gave you that feeling?"

"Did you find hands there before, Reuben?"

"Someone else found the first pair. I saw them, though."

"I read about that."

"Did you go to the cemetery tonight because of those hands?"

"The ones from before?"

"Any of them."

"No."

"Did you see anyone else at the cemetery tonight, other than Merlin and Ben?"

"It was hard to see tonight."

"Was anyone else there?"

Lacy pretended to think hard about this question, pretended to have decided upon an answer.

She nodded when she said it. "There was a doggy, Reuben. He sounded mean."

"He was mean."

"Did you teach him to eat little children?"

Reuben chuckled. "Someone did. Someone did." He stood up and paced to the door. "Are you going to tell me anything else tonight, Lacy?"

"I have a question for you."

"What's that?"

"If you were my father, would you love me very, very much?"

Reuben let himself out of the room. After a minute he stuck his head back in. "By the way, we got a warrant to search your bag, and we kept a few things, so, when they give it back to you, if you find you're missing three rolls of film and one marble composition notebook, don't be surprised. Goodnight, Lacy."

Reuben flipped off the overhead light and closed the door.

Lacy shut her eyes.

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Detective Reuben Wasserman stayed at his desk until 5:19 the next morning. He took one trip to the a/v room to replay portions of the early student interviews. He listened to the recording of Boyle's interview of Ben. Occasionally, he pulled a file from the mound of paper on his desk and flipped through it. He packaged three rolls of film in a processing envelope to give to

Evidence in the morning. He left two voicemail messages requesting from various people that twenty-four-hour undercover surveillance be reinstated in the cemetery. He read the last page of a marble composition book over and over again. Mostly he sat with his feet on his desk and his eyes open, chair leaned back as far as it could go, staring at the ceiling. He had sent the three children home with their parents. He told their parents about the hands. He told them to keep quiet about it until it came out in the papers. He told them to keep an eye on their children. When Boyle came in at two after nine the next morning, Detective Reuben Wasserman went to Boyle's desk and talked in a low voice for approximately one minute, then returned to his own desk. No one heard exactly what he said, but by most accounts it was something about Boyle being a fucking idiot.

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Boyle was standing in front of the light wall by his desk. He had clipped up twenty-nine of the fifty-four pictures that came back from the three rolls in Lacy's bag. He had been standing there for over an hour. One of the lab techs walked past him and said, "Perv."

Reuben Wasserman said, "I'm taking everything into account."

The tech laughed. The Chief was right behind him.

"Seen the TV?"

Wasserman turned to face the Chief, who read from the front page of the Dayton Daily News, "'Second Hands Found in Disappearances. Three Students Questioned.' Read their names on the news. Had pictures of their faces from when we picked 'em up. Says what school they go to."

Wasserman looked back to the light wall. "Not my fault."

"Not saying it is. Just wanted you to know about it. What the hell is all this?"

"Pictures from the girl's bag."

The Chief put his arm around the detective. He cocked his head. "Cute." He took his arm from Wasserman's shoulders and scratched his ear. "What does this have to do with five missing boys and two pairs of hands?"

"I don't know," Reuben said. The detective stepped back from the wall. "Maybe nothing." He eyed the messy desk. "Maybe nothing."

The Chief saw twenty-nine black-and-white photographs, printed on eleven-by-fourteen inch paper. They were taken in someone's living room. They were pictures of Lacy in her underwear, sitting on a chair, sitting on a couch, bending over the chair. There were close-ups of her naked legs, of her hands, of her feet, of her hair, of her face. You could see her holding the remote shutter control in some of the shots. They varied in pose, in costume, in composition. The one thing that was the same about all of them, though, was that somewhere in each frame was an albino boa constrictor. Lacy was holding it in a few of the shots. It smelled her ankle in one. In others, it was crawling over her breasts or wrapped around her waist like a belt.

The Chief turned to Wasserman. "So...?"

"So, I called the school. She takes photography eighth period. Mrs. Dugan."

The Chief looked back to the wall. "This all of 'em?"

Wasserman was thumbing through a folder. "The good ones, yeah."

~

Merlin was sitting on the floor. Ben was sitting in an ergochair at the desk. He had Nirvana on repeat. Lacy was lying on the bottom bunk, looking at Benjamin through the viewfinder.

"Mine was nice," she said.

Ben said, "I had a monkey."

Lacy snapped a picture and pulled the camera away from her face. "What was yours like, Merlin?"

Merlin shrugged. "I can't say I know. Listen, I think you two'll agree with me that we're faced with somewhat of a problem here."

"What are you going to do?" Lacy asked hopelessly.

"I'm through with this."

"We have to."

"You're insane!" Merlin hissed.

"Merlin," Lacy said, "you cannot tell. You cannot tell anyone."

"I'm not going to tell. That's not the issue." Merlin queried Ben. "What's your stance?"

It was a long time before Ben answered. "My stance," he finally said, "is that I also believe."

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The next day after school the three of them rode a city bus toward multimedia but they got off three stops early. They walked through McKinley Park, went over the Main Street bridge, walked through downtown. They split up in Courthouse Square, met back at the Main Street bridge, crossed the river. They walked along the bike path on the south bank of the river for about half a mile, then climbed down an embankment leading to a lower path. They continued upstream, along the west bank of the Miami river, past where it is joined by the Mad river. They stopped at the overpass where highway 4 crosses the rivers. They set their bags at the base of the incline leading up to the roadway. Merlin took off his shoes and gathered stones from the edge of the river. Ben and Lacy built a fire from driftwood and litter. Lacy sang softly to herself, "...blueberry pie, walks on by, and I don't know what to do, with that blueberry pie, but I'm gonna try..." When the fire was built, and the stones gathered and placed, the three of them sat in a triangle around the fire. Cold wind whipped the flames. They held hands to comfort each other, but no one said a word. Then Lacy rolled up her pant leg. Merlin cringed. Strips of photographic negatives were taped to her calf. She handed the strips out evenly, and they started burning them.