

"I have lots of film, so if any of you want to take some pictures over the holiday, it's right here. I rolled these last night while I was watching Jeopardy. My husband thinks I'm crazy. I hope at least some of you are planning to take pictures over the holidays. We have been blessed with this wonderful snow, and I, for one, am going to take advantage of it. I was out last night before the sun went down, taking shots of the back yard. I think snow looks so wonderful in black and white, don't you? Jessica, how's your book going, do you have anything to show me? Bring it up. Please. I want to see how it's going. Lacy, don't you need some film for the holidays? Is she sleeping? Lacy, can you hear me?"

Lacy mumbled something.

"Aren't you feeling well? What was that? I can't hear you, honey."

Lacy spoke louder. "I said, 'Not particularly.'"

"Why don't you take some film with you over break? I know you're not feeling well, but take some pictures, okay? Did you do more pictures with the snake?"

Lacy mumbled again.

"What did she say? Speak up, honey. Did you re-shoot with the snake?"

Someone translated Lacy's response for the teacher. "She said she shot three rolls with him."

"Why haven't you shown them to us?"

"The cops stole them." Lacy wiped her nose with her sleeve. "If you need me, I will be in the bathroom."

"Jessica, go with her."

"I can go by myself." Lacy stood up and pointed at Jessica. "Stay."

Mrs. Dugan said, "I don't want you to be alone in the hallway."

Lacy gestured toward the classroom door. "I will not be alone."

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When Lacy got back, the classroom was empty. The "IN USE" sign over the door to the lab was on. She sat in her desk and lay her head down. When Mrs. Dugan came out, she heard Lacy singing "...I don't know what to do, with that blueberry pie..." Mrs. Dugan stroked the girl's shoulder.

"Are you doing okay, honey? I'm worried about you." Lacy sang quieter while her teacher talked. "You don't have to work today if you don't feel like it. I know you must be worried about Ben." Her Benjamin. When Mrs. Dugan's voice faltered, Lacy stop singing completely. "I just think about his mother... I love you kids like you were my own and if anything happens to any one of you, especially you and Ben, you know I'd-- Just let them do what they can to protect you." She patted Lacy on the back, and went back to the lab. Lacy's eyes were closed, her face as serene as if she was dreaming. She started humming softly to herself.

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Reuben Wasserman watched the right front tire of Mrs. Brothers's 1972 Chevrolet pickup truck roll onto the sidewalk. He saw Mrs. Brothers slot the gear shift up three notches. The teacher's parking lot door swung open. Lacy, her olive drab bookbag huge for her body, strode stiffly through the exit. Her arms were folded across her chest. Her head was angled just high enough to see six inches in front of her feet. She hefted her bag into the back of the truck. It landed on a

thin layer of slush coating the metal bed. Lacy got in and slammed the cab door. Her mother drove to Wabash and turned left. Lacy didn't put on her seatbelt.

When they were on the highway, Lacy turned around and looked out the back window of the cab. She flailed her arms wildly like a nine-year-old. The detective took one hand off the steering wheel and held it up, fingers spread. Lacy's mother flicked her daughter with the back of her hand. The girl faced forward, staring through the front windshield at the drizzling rain. She stayed that way or the rest of the ride.

The detective followed them around the mall at a distance, but he made no effort to hide. When Lacy and her mother stood in line to get Chinese food, he stood in line at Sbarro's. When they ate in the court between the two stores, the detective ate his dinner four tables away. He tried not to make eye contact. When Lacy looked at him, he pretended to be staring at the Christmas shoppers who rushed from store to store with bags so full they looked like they had been inflated. Mrs. Brothers kept an eye on her daughter. Lacy kept her eyes mostly on the floor, although occasionally she lifted her head to smile at Reuben Wasserman. After dinner, while Lacy and her mother were in Borders, Lacy's mother caught her snapping a picture of the detective. She verbally reprimanded the girl. That didn't stop Lacy from doing it, though. It didn't even make her do it less overtly. It just necessitated that Mrs. Brothers find ways, for the rest of the evening, not to catch her daughter in the act.

Lacy and her mother shopped for longer than Reuben Wasserman preferred to spend in a mall, even when he wasn't there to buy. Lacy broke away from her mother for short periods throughout the evening, wandering back to the bookstore on three separate occasions. She took the escalator down, took the elevator up, looked at watches in Lazarus. She stopped to eat a cookie. When the night was over Wasserman felt like he had been to every store in Dayton Mall. Mrs. Brothers bought clothing, shoes, Nintendo games. Reuben hoped that Lacy was as tired as he was of Christmas shopping, so that this could be his last trip with them to the mall. He would be there again soon, after all, with his wife.

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On the last day of school before winter break, Mrs. Dugan stayed late so Lacy could use the lab. Officer Brown sat outside the door of the classroom. Mrs. Dugan sat at her desk grading essays. Past the first door with the "IN-USE" sign above it was a hallway lit by a single red bulb. There was a door on the right side of that hallway. It was closed. The room beyond it was flooded with fluorescent light. It contained two closets. Inside those closets, students would disassemble thirty-five millimeter film canisters and wind exposed film onto spools. They would place those spools into lightfast cylinders that allowed liquid to pass in and out of the compartment containing the film. During a normal class period, six or seven students would stand around in this room, go in and out of closets, wind exposed film onto spools, mix powders and liquids together according to precise ratios, measure the temperature of water, steadily invert and right the developing cylinders to ensure that the film inside was evenly washed or agitated, and always, always, students would watch the timers, one-foot-high analog clocks, spinning down the minute and thirty seconds needed for the second rinse or the twenty-five seconds needed for clearing. When there were more than three people in that room, the voices echoed into an unintelligible mess that Mrs. Dugan couldn't stand. She was always telling them to quiet down.

Past the door that opened into that room, at the end of the red hall, was the door to the print lab. That door gave way to a dim, orange-brown light that, once inside with the door closed, made it impossible to distinguish color. In that room, everything was shades of orange-brown; it was impossible to tell what color someone's shirt was. Once Lacy's eyes adjusted to it, though, she could see everything she needed to see in order to print black-and-white photographs. She could even read and write in that room (but not in pink on white paper). There was a sink in the middle of the room, eight feet long and four feet wide. It held trays of developer, stop bath, and fixer chemicals. At the end was a wash tray. A snaky plastic tube continuously swirled clean water into the wash. Around the outside of the room were counters divided into individual stations, each with an enlarger and space underneath the counter where students kept paper, filters, and other supplies. In general, one student used one station during a class period, and other students used the same work station during other class periods. The only exception was the station farthest from the door. That was Lacy's station, and Lacy's station alone. She had labeled it with masking tape and permanent marker. The labels were signed "ME--" They said, "MY ENLARGER. DO NOT USE." And no one did.

Lacy was in the print lab listening to oldies on an old boombox that Mrs. Dugan had brought in. There was a general agreement in the eighth period class that they listened either to the oldies station or to a Cranberries tape. Jessica had donated the Cranberries tape; she found the music of the fifties and sixties emotionally inane. After school, Lacy listened exclusively to oldies. The Cranberries provoked her melancholy. Ben used to work late with Lacy. When one of them stayed late, the other stayed late. Whenever they wanted to stay, Mrs. Dugan accommodated. Ben and Lacy were the best students in her class. In their sophomore year, both had been awarded gold medals in the national Scholastic art contest. Their attendance records were identically spotty, and when they were in class, they never actually worked. Ben specialized in portraiture, though his last assignment consisted entirely of abstract pieces. Lacy's work was all either bizarre or dark. Mrs. Dugan didn't particularly enjoy bizarre or dark, but, technically, Lacy's was the best being done in any of the classes. On the whole, Mrs. Dugan delighted with the pair and their output. The teacher could hear the oldies from her desk. Lacy sang along with the ones she knew. The music lent its beat to the girl's step as she danced from her station to the trays. She tapped her fingers together and plucked several eight-by-ten sheets from the developer, shook off the excess chemical, and submerged them in the stop bath. You were supposed to use tongs when moving prints from tray to tray, to avoid months and years of harmful chemicals seeping into your bloodstream, but even rubber-tipped tongs sometimes scratched the surface of a print. Lacy and Ben never used them. Neither did Mrs. Dugan. Anyway, Lacy liked the way her hands smelled after she had been working, inky and bitter, and salty. When she left the lab, she postponed washing her hands as long as possible. The same was true after she masturbated. She loved the surprise of bringing her hand close to her mouth and nose after it had been soaked in developer (or whatever). She loved remembering, just then, what her hand had been doing before to make it smell the way it did. Sometimes she and Benjamin took off their underwear together in the boys bathroom so they could enjoy the feeling of jeans on their naked skin throughout the otherwise drab school day. The first time they did that, Benjamin later told Lacy that when he unzipped his jeans to piss, he had surprised himself, expecting to feel his underwear first when reaching for his dick. Lacy liked surprises. She laughed when Benjamin told her about that. She took the picture out of the developer and gently shook off the drips. She submerged the print in stop bath. After fifteen seconds she let it drip

again and moved it to the fixer. The stop bath neutralized the developer; if you didn't stop a print, the developer that had soaked into the paper would continue to darken the image. The label on the stop tray suggested a minimum of thirty seconds in the stop. Lacy kept prints there for fifteen seconds. She never had any trouble. The fixer eliminated the light-sensitivity of the paper; if you didn't fix long enough, your print would turn green or purple when exposed to normal light spectrums for hours or days. Eventually it would turn brown. Lacy's habit was to leave her prints in the fixer until she was done for the day, then move them en masse from fix to rinse. Lacy went back to her enlarger, drying her hands on a rag tucked inside the waist of her jeans. She opened a black box that was labeled with permanent marker on a piece of duct tape. It said, "Lacy Brothers." Benjamin had annotated the moniker, "dork." The two of them had written a series of notes on the inside of the box top, debating whether or not Lacy was a dork (Benjamin maintained that she was, Lacy maintained that she wasn't). Lacy slid a full sheet of paper out of the black bag set inside the box and laid it on her enlarger. She mindlessly punched the button that starts the exposure. After three seconds, the light went off. Lacy danced the paper over to the developer. She took it for a quick dip in the stop. When she placed it in the fixer, Lacy remembered a time Benjamin had bitten her leg when she was standing in that exact spot. He was sitting on the floor writing. She had thought it might be fun to stand with the front of her skirt right in his face. She hadn't expected him to lift her skirt, run cold fingers up the insides of her thighs, and bite her on the leg (right below her panties). She had enjoyed it, though, and she rewarded him by fingering his nipples for the rest of the class. None of the other kids cared; everyone was always making out in the red hallway when the doors were shut. Mrs. Dugan sat outside the lab at her desk at least two days of every week. When she was in the lab, she usually stayed in the light room helping students develop their film.

On the afternoon of the last day of school before winter break, Lacy recalled her exploits with Benjamin. She sang along with the radio ("...don't wanna leave her now, you know I believe in how..."). She danced throughout the room. She printed copy after copy after copy, until the fix tray was absolutely full, of identical eight-by-ten prints from a single negative, a picture of Benjamin that she had taken in the lunchroom. It was a picture of him sitting at the table eating a cream cheese bagel. The shape of his mouth suggested that he had just finished laughing. He was looking to the left (at Merlin, Lacy remembered). After she took that picture, Ben stole the camera from Lacy and stuffed potato chips into her mouth until she had to spit them out on the table. Ben took a picture of that. He was so amused with it that he spent the rest of the period finding volunteers from other tables to do the same thing. Mrs. Dugan thought the pictures were just silly. Lacy hated looking at the one of herself, but she thought the others were hilarious.

People loved modeling for them. Benjamin had taken several rolls of the concept.

Lacy rooted around the cabinet under her station and found a permanent marker. She pressed a long piece of masking tape to the enlarger next to hers. She wrote, "PONY BOY. DO NOT USE."