

On December 31, 1994, Lacy left her house at eleven p.m. and walked, in thirty-eight-degree weather, from 131 Indiana Avenue to the Dayton Convention Center. She entered through the one of the revolving doors on Fifth Street against the general flow of couples and families leaving the building. People were crowded together on both sides of the sidewalk, talking loudly and huddling together to stay warm. Reuben Wasserman followed Lacy in through the revolving door and by the time he stood, glancing along the balconies of higher floors, checking paths to other exits, Lacy was already three-quarters of the way up the first escalator. She was looking at the detective, and only turned to face forward when she came to the second level. Wasserman got on the escalator. When he came to the top, Lacy was waiting for him. The duckling fuzz came into view first, then he saw her face, her flushed cheeks, her blue sweatshirt... Wasserman got off the elevator, stepping onto thin carpet.

"Look, Lacy, I'm not--"

She lifted her camera to her face and snapped a picture of him.

"Lacy--"

"Shhh..." Lacy held her index finger to her lips. She took the detective's hand in hers and tugged. He went with her through throngs headed toward the the down escalator. He went with her across the pedestrian walkway over Jefferson Street and up the stairs of the Convention Center parking lot. They went to the fourth level. Six cars were still there. Lacy led him toward the north end of the lot. At that end, the levels at the top of the garage were narrower than the levels at the bottom. From the street, it looked like stairs. Lacy's hand was warm. She curled her fingers around the detective's thumb. Suddenly, they both felt the shockwave of an explosion. People below were cheering. When Lacy led Reuben Wasserman beyond the cover of the top of the garage, to the end of the fourth level, he realized why Lacy had brought them to that spot. It was midnight on New Year's Eve, and they were setting off fireworks from the fifth level of the Convention Center garage. Reuben stared at the sky. Straight above him, closer than he had ever seen, orange and yellow and pink. Explosions zipping in every direction. White twizzlers spiraling across his field of view. A green megabomb blasting into a thousand puffy flares. Eight times bigger than normal. The boom of each rocket came with the flash and shook the platform where they stood. Streaks and sparkles showered the sky; specks of fiery luminescence glistened in their eyes. Lacy's mouth gaped as a child's does, her head thrown back, eyes open as wide as possible, trying not to blink.

"Whatever you do on New Year's Eve, you will do for the rest of the year," she said.

Reuben glanced at her. He wondered if she meant watching the fireworks, or if she meant him following her around town when he should have been home with his wife, or if she meant something else. Reuben listened to the pops and booms above and the cheering of the crowd below. The time from when Lacy spoke to the end of the show seemed to last forever. It was probably only fifteen minutes. Embers from the bombs fell at their feet to the already-melting snow. When it was over, they were silent.

Then Lacy started walking toward the stairwell, without taking his hand, without saying a word, without even a glance.

"Lacy." The detective moved to follow. "Let me drive you home."

They went to the stairwell together. They went down the stairs and across the overpass together. They went over the thin carpet together. They went down the escalator together. They went across the Convention Center lobby together. They were together on the other side of the revolving door. They started across Fifth Street together, but when Reuben Wasserman got through the crowds and stepped up onto the sidewalk on the other side of the street, they weren't together. He checked the street, going in a steadily widening circle, but Lacy wasn't there. He searched on foot for twenty minutes. During that time, most of the crowd cleared out, leaving the detective wandering around in front of the Convention Center, being stared at and propositioned by the same set of panhandlers and janitors as he came back again and again to the same spots.

He traced the route to Lacy's house, called the station, went to the cemetery. Finally, from the pool, he called her house. It sounded like Mrs. Brothers woke to answer the phone. Wasserman almost didn't have the heart to ask, "Is Lacy there?"

But Lacy wasn't there.

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When Detective Reuben Wasserman got to his desk at six-fifty-five that Monday, Lacy still hadn't shown up. Wasserman had been in almost constant contact with Lacy's mother. He told Mrs. Brothers he had seen Lacy watching the fireworks downtown but that he had been unable to follow her home. Mrs. Brothers suggested that perhaps her daughter was tired of being followed around by the detective.

Perhaps.

Wasserman delicately asked Mrs. Brothers if she was planning on filing a missing person report. Mrs. Brothers hung up the phone. Wasserman eyed the piles of folders and paper on his desk.

At seven a.m., he took the marble composition book to the a/v room. He listened to recordings of the student interviews, with his head in his lap, until someone opened the door and said,

"FedEx. You have to sign."

"Someone else can't do it?"

"Has to be you."

Reuben stopped the recording and went up front. The delivery man was holding a cardboard box the size of VCR. Wasserman checked the label for a sender's address. It was listed as Lacy's mom's house. The sender was "Lacy Brothers," and it looked like her writing. Reuben signed for the box and took it back to his desk. It felt to him like it weighed about six pounds. Boyle and Spence were standing in the aisle talking angrily about football.

Boyle saw the label. "Letter from your girlfriend?"

Wasserman set the box on top of his pile and slid open the desk's top left drawer. From under a knot of junk items he pulled the pair of scissors he used to slice through the duct tape that held closed the flaps of the box. He set the scissors down and ripped away more of the tape. Inside was a plastic container with an opaque green lid. The container fit snugly inside the cardboard box. From the top, all Reuben could see was the lid. He carefully lifted the plastic container and was going to set it next to the box, but he noticed that Boyle and Spence had stopped talking. They were staring at the container. Boyle looked like he was about to throw up.

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It was a Rubbermaid container with clear sides and a green lid. The lid had been sealed in place with plumber's caulk. Inside were ten human hands, laid with the fingertips of one touching the wrist of the next. They were at varying stages of decomposition. There was a thin layer of black liquid that sloshed to one side when Wasserman set it down on the pile. Stepping back from his desk, he saw what Boyle and Spence were already looking at through the sides of the container. After that he didn't touch it again.

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Reuben sent a unit to the Brothers house with orders to arrest Lacy. Wasserman took Spence with him to the cemetery. When they saw the pool, they started running. Wasserman called for backup. Spence called the other unit and told them Lacy wasn't at the house. Both men drew their guns and, as they ran, checked constantly behind them, checked their sides, checked the pool, certain someone or someones must be crouching behind the larger monuments, waiting for them. When they got to the pool and saw what was in it, Wasserman crouched at its edge. There were shards of ice floating on the water. Lacy Brothers lay face up at the surface. She was naked. Her eyes were open. Her skin was white and blue. Sherman Brocious sat cross-legged at one end of the pool, looking at the body. His hands were missing. The stumps of his forearms dangled awkwardly, near his lap. He was also naked. His skin glistened. His chin-length black hair was soaking wet. It hung, in clumps, in front of his face. His body spasmed, shivering. Wasserman wrestled Lacy out of the water to the granite ledge. He felt her neck for a pulse. He pried her mouth open, leaning toward the lips. Then it registered, how cold she was, and he stopped. Spence was yelling for medics. Wasserman stood up. He spoke to Sherman Brocious. "How long was she in there?"

"Three hours."

"Well she's dead!"

Spence was done yelling. All three of them were quiet for a moment. It looked like Sherman Brocious was chewing something.

Wasserman screamed at him. "What the hell happened?"

When the child spoke, his head bobbed fluidly, arbitrarily, like a marionette's. One second of his speech seemed to take an hour to hear. "She...drowned...herself." Spence tried to put his jacket around the naked boy, but the boy shuffled it off and stared intently at the water. Wasserman slowly backed away from Sherman Brocious with his bobbing head and his black hair and his handless stumps of forearms; back away from Lacy's breathless body; back away from the pool with its ice shards and black moss; back away from Lacy's clothes in a stack on the granite edge, socks inside of shoes, pant legs scrunched on top of socks, piglet-patterned panties still nestled inside her jeans, each item seamlessly piled upon the last as though she had undressed with one continuous motion.