

Why?

BREAKING NEWS: Wife and daughter that have been missing for a month FOUND! Dateline could not have come up with a better story! Lizzie Mcdermott, the Ridley's neighbor, sat in stunned silence as the story was laid before her. It CAN'T be true!

Jason Ridley woke up. The cotton mouth and pounding headache he had was normal. You can't down a fifth of vodka and twelve beers the night before and not expect that wasn't going to happen. It was like this when his wife and daughter were around. Every day, just to numb the general soreness of age and insecurities. They weren't around now.

Madelyn Ridley was an amazing little girl. She often asked questions that could not be answered. She was always curious about WHY! Why does the sun burn so hot daddy? Why is the earth heating up Daddy? Do Animals love? What is love? He would always regret the general annoyance he would have with questioning of this sort.

Jason's wife Rebecca was also special. She was disabled a long time ago; a fractured spine, years of stubbornness, toughness and denial led to today. She was amazing. She glued the family together, acting as a buffer between an annoying, constantly, questioning child and her drunk idiot father.

To say that what happened to them was not deserved is an understatement. Jason felt that every day since their disappearance.

The day Madelyn was born Rebecca went through hell. She fought and battled through numerous setbacks and finally when an astute nurse said let's fill a glove with ice and put it "There" the whole process changed. Madelyn was born with struggle and with strife.

Rebecca had a teenage son, he also battled with Jason on a daily basis. One day Jason realized the true nature of his stepson and unleashed his full fury. Years of tension and disrespect arose in him and he could not stop himself. The thirteen beers he had did not help. Cameron Johnson said "Get the Fuck out of here, no one wants you here"! Jason responded with "Go To HELL"! He would miss Madelyn's first birthday party over this stunt.

Cameron moved out about a year ago with his girlfriend. They stated they could not handle the daily bullshit of Jason's drinking. Jason looked at this as the first real positive result of being hammered.

April 20th Jason's wife and daughter went missing. Maybe it was a walk out fueled by alcohol; maybe it was a need to get a way moment? Maybe it was forced? Regardless, Rebecca and Madelyn were missing. Jason called and spoke to his boss.

John O'leary was not the best at communication, or empathy, or giving a shit no matter what. He reluctantly let Jason have three weeks off. The search that encompassed the town of Paisan did not sway him to be more compassionate. He of course had deadlines and people to answer to.

As word spread throughout the small town, people were emboldened to act. Searching every where. The local police were systematic in their searches. They checked all of the local hospitals, morgues, hotels. They did not understand the obvious. They reached out to various districts and precincts. No word. No response. No hope.

There was a knock on Jason's front door. Shit! He did not have the candles burning. His wife was obsessed with candles and he tried desperately to keep the memories alive. He walked past his daughter's room still riddled with toys and stuffed animals strewn all over. There was a sense of loss remembering her little laugh and the joy she would have when she got a new toy from grandma. "Daddy look"!

Jason raced through the house, cleaning as much as he could; lighting ALL of the candles. Was there a chance she would be there, was here a chance that Maddy's smiling face would greet him and scream "DADDY"! when he opened the door. He wanted it to be perfect none the less.

Sheriff Peter Wrigley was at the door. He wanted to take one more look around. He was at the end of his rope. The Ridley's house was old. The top floor was set up nicely thanks to Mrs. Ridley. The glass on the windows were clean. The ancient hardwood floor polished after years of stripping, then re-finishing. Madelyn's school artwork was strewn along the kitchen. A frog, a picture of Mommy and a recent picture of the Universe. Peter noticed a distinct smell but acquainted it to the age of the home. "I see why your wife loves candles" he said. "that is why I still keep them burning" Jason replied.

The basement was a maze. There were rooms mixed with rooms. Rooms off of rooms. It just kept going until you hit the foundation walls. Peter was not happy about going down there but he needed a clue; he needed something! Perhaps a toy, a map of a place they wanted to vacation to, a letter... SOMETHING! The acrid smell of dust and age got to him. His wrenching stomach persisted. He had seen many things over time but dust and musty basements always got him. He said through a few muffled gags "Jason, this basement needs a cleaning." Jason nodded. Peter Wrigley left the home no better than when he started. He failed to find the rat that had made residence in the "cave". Jason left the situation amused and with a strange sense of relief.

His next visitor was Rebecca's dad and sister. "I can't understand what happened, they were happy here, happy with you". Danny said. The memories of softball games filled them. "I miss them so much". Leah said. "I'm so happy you keep the candles burning, it would have made Rebecca happy!" The conversation persisted and as the beer flowed through them all, the memories persisted too.

Jason's last day of 'bereavement' ended like any other. Piss drunk, literally, and on the floor of his office, 6:55 AM. The etherical ring tone that he woke up to every day boomed in his skull. "FUCK!" He dragged himself off of the couch that was his bed for years. He and Rebecca had not shared a bed in decades; why start now? He started the coffee, burned through three cigarettes and took a shower. That acrid smell was strong today. He lit all of the candles!

His first/last day was filled with stupid questions. Thank god 3 beers and 2 shots of vodka were breakfast! It was normal. He did what he always did; move on and somehow he was the savior. That should have carried him; it didn't. O'leary chimed in on a Zoom call "What the fuck Ridley? I have been paying you for three weeks and this is the output I get when your back! Your job is in jeopardy!" Jason took this with a grain of salt, he did not have it in him to explain that today was his last day.

5:00 PM: Jason logged off. Took his laptop, monitors, mouse and manuals and launched them against the wall. The smack was oddly satisfying; the shatter was not.

He grilled the ribeye to perfection. Mrs. Mcdermott noted how good it smelled and how sad it was that it was just for one. Memories filled his head of Madelyn's strange obsession with steak. She hated everything he made. Beef stew, YUCK, Mac and cheese Ewwwe, Spaghetti Disgusting; but steak! Steak seasoned perfectly with a baked potato, sauteed mushrooms and asparagus; yep that was a win there. Jason nodded to Lizzie Mcdermott and took his meal inside.

He ate in silence, silence. Silence was all that was around him. Not fair but a reality he had grown used to. Not fair fucker? REALLY?!? You caused this. An inner monologue spoke up but Jason was ready. Beers flowed like the Mississippi, shots were also kind. Its like the universe knew... knew what was to come. He stumbled up to the bathroom, pissed all over the walls from the constant wobble and went to bed. Not on the couch, not on the floor; Bed! Jason embraced himself in the sweet fragrant smells that lingered from Rebecca's perfume. They intoxicated him, if that was even possible. The soft sheets welcomed him, the lack of warmth of a person beside him chilled him. The darkness was special. Inviting. "You are one of us" they mused. Jason passed out.

That ethereal sound again; what the fuck! Jason did not remember setting his alarm. It went off normal time. His head throbbed, eyes burned, stomach wretched. He stumbled across the kitchen floor... did it really matter? Coffee. Cigarettes. Alcohol normal routine. "Gotta function today" he said, "gotta be clear." Today was fucking special.

And then a scratching sound, a banging even. "What the Fuck?" Stupid house noises.

The long slow hiss of urine pouring from his crotch enveloped him, what didn't cover the bed the night before that is. "What a loser you are!" ringing in his head. The sound of the rat came again. Subtle, minor, insignificant. Yet it instilled a rage inside of Jason that was inescapable. There were numerous break ins in the neighborhood, maybe this was a squatter, a pathetic loser with no family who spent most of his money on beer or a shit eating, questioning and annoying rat! Whatever it was; it's time had come.

Jason walked down the dark stairs, the light had burnt out years ago. He came to the open expanse of the basement and flicked that light switch. It glowed a soft amber. It did not do much. He meandered back to the "Cave", a section of the basement that no one ever went to; a dark quiet place that was only made aware when cleaning because of the hidden door. Jason's .45 caliber pistol lie in his hands. "Fuck you Rat!" What happened next would haunt him for the rest of his life.

A shot fired! His finger so close to the hair trigger that he accidentally discharged. The rat scurried along the floor unfazed. The bullet creased the door to the cave. Splintered wood stared at him. "Don't go in there, leave it be" his inner voice spoke. "It is time!" Jason overruled the monologue. And he pushed open the broken door to "the cave". It was the last door Jason Ridley would ever open.

Jason Ridley was a family man. He loved his wife dearly. He loved his daughter despite her annoying traits; we all had them after all. He worked his ass off to provide and give Madelyn her best life possible. Jason Ridley was not prepared for this.

'Dear my loving husband, you have been there throughout; this was NOT your fault! Maddy and I have been dealing with depression for years. We tried to hide it from you because we loved you so much! We knew that you always had a dream for us and we knew we could never live up to that. Maybe we were wrong, maybe I'm exaggerating, maybe it's all bullshit! I'm truly sorry for this but I feel as if we had no choice. I talked with Maddie about this a lot and she agreed it was time to go. We will always love you! Thank you again for always loving us and please know this was not you; it was us!'

Jason looked at the huddled version of his family in the corner of the "cave". His mind rattling with the words of the note. Maddie lie curled in the loving embrace of her mother. They both had a look of content that Jason had strived for years to give to them. The search was over!

Jason sat and sobbed, the cold concrete offered little comfort. The candles, the meticulous decorations, the why's and the endless curiosity were all gone. Jason raised the .45 to his eyes and without hesitation, through his tears, pulled the trigger.