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**AUTOPSY REPORT**

**Name of decedent:** Bella Watts

**Case#:** AW18-156

**Investigation#:** WCCO 18-436

**Date and time of death:** August 16, 2018 at 1750 hrs  
**(Pronounced)**

**Age:** 4 YEARS

**Date and time of autopsy:** August 17, 2018 at 1330 hrs

**Sex:** Female

DIAGNOSES:

I. HISTORY OF BEING REPORTED MISSING AND SUBSEQUENTLY LOCATED IN AN OBVIOUS STATE OF DEATH WITHIN AN OIL TANK BATTERY:

A. ASPHYXIATION DUE TO SMOTHERING

B. BLUNT FORCE TRAUMA OF THE FRENULUM AND GINGIVAL MUCOSA OF THE MAXILLA

C. POSTMORTEM ARTIFACT (DECOMPOSITION)

D. OIL, WATER AND SLUDGE DEBRIS IN THE STOMACH

II. HYDROCARBON EXPOSURE

III. TOXICOLOGY:

A. POSTMORTEM - BASIC, LIVER TISSUE-----NONE DETECTED

B. HYDROCARBON AND OXYGENATED VOLATILES PANEL, CHEST CAVITY BLOOD:

1. BENZENE-----PRESENT

2. ETHYLBENZENE-----PRESENT

3. TOLUENE-----3.7 mcg/mL

4. XYLENES (O,M,P)-----PRESENT

5. N-HEXANE-----PRESENT

6. METHYLPENTANES (2-,3-ISOMERS)-----PRESENT

7. N-BUTANOL-----PRESENT

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8. ETHANOL-----13 mg/dL  
9. ACETALDEHYDE-----PRESENT

**TOXICOLOGY:**

Reference Lab: NMS Labs  
3701 Welsh Road  
Willow Grove, PA 19090

**OPINION:**

Based on the history provided and the autopsy findings, the cause of death is asphyxiation due to smothering. The toxicology results likely represent decomposition and an artifact of being submerged in an oil tank for several days. The manner of death is homicide.

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Signed: September 27, 2018

MB/NW AD: 08/17/2018 AT: 08/19/2018 MD: 09/01/2018 MT: 09/01/2018

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HISTORY: The decedent is a 4-year-old Caucasian female (DOB: 12/17/2013) who has an unknown medical history at the time of this autopsy. Reportedly, the decedent was reported missing with her sibling and mother on the afternoon of August 13, 2018. Unfortunately, the decedent was subsequently located in an obvious state of death within an oil tank battery container on rural property. The decedent was pronounced dead at the scene at 1750 hours on August 16, 2018.

WITNESSES: Personnel present for the postmortem examination include Michael Burson, MD PhD, Pathologist and Joey Weiner, Autopsy Assistant. For a complete list of individuals present at the autopsy, please see the investigative report file held at the Weld County Coroner's Office.

District Attorney Disclaimer: At 1010 hours on August 17, 2018 the representative from the District Attorney's Office read a portion of an email which he received from the Public Defender's Office. In this email the Public Defender has requested that we swab the necks of the children for residual trace DNA. According to him and his expert DNA witness, they anticipate trace DNA being preserved on the neck structures of the children despite being confined in a container of oil, water and associated sludge matter over the course of four days.

IDENTIFICATION:

- By the Weld County Coroner, State of Colorado.

CLOTHING: The decedent is received in an unsealed body bag, wrapped in a bed sheet (from retrieval process) and clad in the following clothing items:

- An oil-soaked pink pajama-type top with images of hearts and butterflies
- A pair of oil-soaked underwear

IDENTIFYING MARKS AND SCARS:

- None visualized

EVIDENCE OF MEDICAL/SURGICAL INTERVENTION: Evidence of medical/surgical intervention consists of the following:

- None

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**EVIDENCE OF INJURY**

**EXTERNAL EVIDENCE OF INJURY:**

- A 13 x 3 cm area of vertical excoriations on the left buttocks
- An at least 1.5 cm laceration of the frenulum and upper gumline with associated pink-purple contusions
- Superficial probable bite wounds of the mucosal surface of the tongue
- A 9 x up to 4 cm yellow-tan possible abrasion on the left torso
- A 3 x 1.5 cm faint yellow-tan discoloration on the superior aspect of the left shoulder

**INTERNAL EVIDENCE OF INJURY:**

- None

**GENERAL EXTERNAL EXAMINATION**

The autopsy is commenced at 1330 hours, on August 17, 2018 on the body of Bella Watts at the McKee Medical Center, Loveland, CO. This autopsy is performed at the request of the Weld County Coroner, State of Colorado. The body is that of a well-developed, well-nourished Caucasian female whose appearance is generally consistent with the reported age of 4 years. The body measures approximately 41-inches long and weighs 38 pounds.

At the time of autopsy, rigor mortis is released in the major muscle groups and the muscles of mastication. Livor mortis is not readily apparent due to postmortem artifact (decomposition).

There is postmortem artifact consisting of bloating, marbling of the abdominal surfaces and areas of skin slippage. Unfortunately, the body was found in an oil tanker containing oil and aqueous fluid. This resulted in abundant skin slippage upon washing.

HEAD: Head hair is blonde-brown, normally distributed and measures up to 15 cm long over the crown. EYES: The eyes are moderately opacified (postmortem artifact). The irides appear brown; the pupils are equal at

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0.3 cm. The sclerae are dull, however there are no discernible scleral or conjunctival petechiae. NOSE: The nose is midline and does not grate upon palpation. ORAL CAVITY: The oral cavity contains natural dentition in good repair. The frenulum is markedly disrupted and there are adjacent pink-purple bruises of the buccal mucosa present. There are also teeth impressions and superficial bite marks on the mucosal surface of the tongue.

NECK: The neck structures are midline and without palpable adenopathy.

CHEST: The breasts and nipples are normal female.

ABDOMEN: The abdomen is mildly protuberant and slightly tense (postmortem artifact).

GENITALIA: The external genitalia are normal female.

EXTREMITIES:

UPPER EXTREMITIES: The upper extremities are well-developed and symmetrical with all digits present. The fingernails are short, dirty and in fair repair without evidence of tearing. The fingernails are clipped and retained as evidence. LOWER EXTREMITIES: The lower extremities are well-developed and symmetrical with all digits present. The toenails are short, dirty and in fair repair.

BACK AND SACRUM: The back and sacrum are unremarkable.

**GENERAL INTERNAL EXAMINATION**

The body is opened with a routine thoracoabdominal incision. The subcutaneous fat measures 1.2 cm in thickness at the level of the umbilicus.

BODY CAVITIES: There are no abnormal fluid accumulations or adhesions in any of the body cavities.

CARDIOVASCULAR SYSTEM: The heart weighs 80 grams. The epicardial surface is unremarkable. The coronary ostia are patent. The coronary arteries follow a right dominant distribution. Sectioning reveals no

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significant narrowing by atherosclerosis. There is no acute thrombosis. The endocardial surface and papillary muscles are unremarkable. The myocardium is red-brown, firm and without fibrosis. The valve leaflets are thin and pliant. AORTA: The aorta has a normal smooth yellow intimal surface. There is minimal atherosclerotic streaking noted. The major branches, including the celiac, superior and inferior mesenteric, and renal arteries are widely patent. The inferior vena cava is unremarkable.

RESPIRATORY SYSTEM: The right and left lungs weigh 160 and 140 grams, respectively, and show normal septation. The lung parenchyma is mottled pink-tan to purple. There are no masses or gross areas of consolidation. The trachea and mainstem bronchi are unremarkable. There are no foreign bodies or masses. The pulmonary arteries are free of thromboemboli.

SPLEEN: The spleen is soft and weighs 60 grams. The capsule is intact, smooth and glistening. The parenchyma is firm, red-purple and smooth. There are no infarcts, nodules, scars or cysts present.

LIVER AND BILIARY SYSTEM:

LIVER: The liver weighs 350 grams. The capsule is intact. The parenchyma is firm and red-brown. No masses are detected. GALLBLADDER: A thin-walled gallbladder is empty.

GASTROINTESTINAL TRACT:

ESOPHAGUS: The esophagus has a uniform diameter and intact mucosa. STOMACH: The stomach contains approximately 75 ml of viscous, green-black fluid which is suggestive of oil and particulate matter from the oil tank which she was in. The mucosa is smooth, glistening and arranged in normal rugal folds. There are no gastric or duodenal ulcers. SMALL AND LARGE INTESTINES: The small and large intestines have a uniform dimension and appear unremarkable. The vermiform appendix is present.

PANCREAS: The pancreas is tan-orange with lobular architecture. There is no evidence of hemorrhage or saponification.

ADRENAL GLANDS: The adrenal glands have a golden cortex and gray-brown

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medulla.

GENITOURINARY SYSTEM:

KIDNEYS: The right and left kidneys weigh 50 grams each. The capsules strip with ease. The external cortical surface is red-purple and smooth. The cortices are well delineated from the medullary pyramids. The pelves and ureters are nondilated. URINARY BLADDER: The urinary bladder is empty. The mucosal surface is tan-pink, moist and smooth. FEMALE INTERNAL GENITALIA: The cervix, uterus, fallopian tubes and ovaries are unremarkable.

NECK: The anterior musculature is smooth and glistening. The epiglottis and hypopharynx are unremarkable. The hyoid bone and thyroid cartilage are intact. The laryngeal mucosa is pink-purple, moist and smooth. There are no masses or aspirated material. The thyroid gland has symmetrical lobes and appears unremarkable.

SPINE: The spine has normal configuration.

SKULL AND BRAIN: Reflection of the scalp reveals patchy areas of likely Tardieu spots. These areas are incised to reveal superficial blood collections within the fascial planes. There do not appear to be any contusions present. The skull is intact and without fracture. The dura is intact and without epidural or subdural hemorrhage. There is no subarachnoid hemorrhage. The brain is moderately edematous with flattening of the gyri and narrowing of the sulci and weighs 1300 grams. The cerebrovascular system has normal configuration. The cranial nerves are symmetrically intact. Serial coronal sections through the brain reveal no areas of hemorrhage, contusion or mass lesion within the cortex, white matter, brainstem or cerebellum. The atlanto-occipital joint is intact. The cervical spinal column has normal mobility.

**SPECIMENS OBTAINED**

SPECIMENS: Specimens retained at the time of autopsy include vitreous fluid and blood collected from the peripheral veins, heart and lungs.

TOXICOLOGY: Pooled blood as described above and liver are submitted to

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NMS Labs for analysis.

HISTOLOGY: Sections of heart, lung, liver, kidney and brain are submitted for histology.

EVIDENCE:

- Swabs of face prior to washing
- Swabs of anterior neck prior to washing
- Swabs of face after washing
- Swabs of anterior neck after washing
- Swabs of bilateral hands (palmar surface)
- Oral swabs
- Vaginal swabs
- Bilateral fingernail clippings
- Deoxyribonucleic acid blood spot card (DNA)

Radiographs (X-rays):

- Full body X-rays are taken and submitted to the Weld County Coroner's Office

**MICROSCOPIC EXAMINATION**

**HEART**: Sections of the heart are without histopathologic abnormality.

**LUNG**: Sections of the lung are without histopathologic abnormality.

**LIVER**: Sections of the liver are without histopathologic abnormality.

**KIDNEY**: Sections of the kidney are without histopathologic abnormality.

**BRAIN**: Sections of the brain are without histopathologic abnormality.