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You Know

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YOU KNOW
Gary Fincke

Her Piece

The woman whose one daughter was buried
By her killer tells me she wants to talk
To someone who will write everything down.
She means "to say her piece" in the paper
Where my column is printed once a week,
But we stick in two minutes of silence
After she begins, "It's awful to bear."

I nod like I know what it is to have
A child found after eight months in the ground.
The four rooms she rents face a wall that keeps
The Susquehanna from flooding her street
And the seven blocks before the city
Slopes up to hillsides where the rich can build.
"Over there," she finally says, "you know,"

Meaning beyond that wall where her daughter
Has surfaced, and she passes a small set
Of photographs I shuffle through and hold,
Embarrassed to lay them down. On top is
Her daughter at twenty, taken, she says,
"Just the month before." Outside, I can read
"Thank You Wall," those words repeated in paint

After April's flood crested three inches
From the brink. "Beforehand is when you know,"
She says. "It doesn't take Thomas to touch
The grave," trusting a Bible tale with me,
Adding, "You study her now. Find the words,"
Watching me clutch those photographs as if
I was already hearing those faces, too.

The First Dark Glasses

The street lights are aspirin.
My wife talks about the queen
Who bearded herself before
Ceremonies, convincing
Her soldiers to obey.
The air between us rattles;
The night is footsteps.
Along this road a father
Has thrown his child in front
Of a truck. Now, the headlights
Are cigarettes in the mouths
Of prisoners. We know
The knees of those cars will buckle,
And we cross and recross,
Diminishing ourselves like waves.
The first dark glasses, I say,
Were worn by judges to hide
How they felt about evidence.
She places her hands on my back.
“Get ready,” she says, lights coming
From both sides like testimony.

Girls

My wife begins with hiding in a ditch
As a child, pressing herself to the dirt
As if her seventh-grade homeroom teacher
Was evaluating her bomb drill form.
The men in the truck joked about fresh meat
That turned their truck around. One of them said,
“She’ll have a story to tell tomorrow”
While he pissed upon the shoulder, so close
She heard the hiss of contact just before
A quirk of traffic chased their lust away.

She says the man who bought our house confessed
 To raping "his girls" in the small room where
 Our daughter slept for six years. Where she screamed,
 One night, undressing, at a face against
 Her window, sending us outside to where
 We found the painted cinderblock that man
 Had left behind, inviting us to check
 The garages of our neighbors for proof.

After we moved, for one year, we walked back
 To that house, returning until we thought
 We'd never lived there. That father, she says,
 Raped each daughter earlier than the last.
 For privacy, that bedroom had two doors
 To lock. Surely, the mother would try one
 Or take to her tiptoes at the window.
 What kept those three girls from screaming? What keeps
 Us from setting fire to our former rooms?

A Scenario of Accomplices

The day, in early November, he takes
 His daughter to Niagara Falls, it snows,
 And from out of the crowd of cold tourists
 A woman bends to say, "What a darling,"
 And suddenly, "Want to see?" She swings her
 Up until she's squealing and squirming high
 With delight just before he steps forward,
 Fearing at first this woman is the one
 Who can throw a child over the railing,
 And then, with conviction, she's the woman
 Who will steal her, flee into the crowd where
 A scenario of accomplices
 Will pass his child like a relay baton
 While she squats down to disappear among
 Families, rising again in a coat

That covers the purple sweater he's marked.
When he rushes that woman, when he tears
His child from her arms as she walks, he learns
The tight grip of somebody sure of theft
Or safety, his daughter's cry of surprise
Or sudden pain, a stranger spinning to
Curse him with an expression of loathing
As if he is a soldier assigning
Her child to a boxcar, saying nothing
As the crowd swirls her behind him, yet he
Keeps moving, looking for men he is sure
Are nearby, seeing him or him or him
Retreating as he passes, his daughter
Saying, "what?" and "water" while he hurries
Away until there are so few people
They could be walking their own upstate street
On this Saturday morning, watched only
By a neighbor, someone like me, who cuts
His grass among flurries to get it trimmed
For winter, who thinks his daughter is sick
From the way he carries her to the car,
Who imagines he sees emergency,
Something to remark to his busy wife
Who will look across the street for the rest
Of the day, straining to see his story,
Reading the trouble by gesture, whether
It can pass or is inconsolable.

Stories

My daughter says that three men, this year, have jerked
Themselves off while she walked near them in New York.
She names teachers who suggested sex, the way
They managed ambiguity to protect
Themselves from guilt or shame, and I name a few
Of my own, including the one I worked with

Who married a girl he fucked, keeping his job.
The one who photographed fourth-graders and moved
To another school. The one who, for years, touched
Enough sixth-graders to finally be fired.

We're getting ready to talk about the man,
This afternoon, who showed her his back yard, who
Asked her what fish did in winter, guiding her
Toward his shadowed pond, asking, at last, how long
I'd be gone from the house we were visiting.
And because he's not a memory, because
He's standing on his screened-in porch fifty feet
From us, we lower our voices when we start
To talk about the needs we keep to ourselves
Until some of us eagerly surrender.

The Murder Interview

She was riding on his shoulders,
The father says—she waved at me.

He's describing, for reporters,
The last time he saw his daughter.

Alive, that is. With her killer,
We've been told, just minutes from death.

The father returned to yard work.
The girl, we know, climbed down and held

That boy's hand like a small sister
Beginning a walk in the woods.

After that, it's speculation—
The boy fifteen, the girl, seven

And her body, found this morning,
Undressed and beaten and strangled.

The father remembered that boy
Helping with the search, calling her

By a nickname. He remembers
The way his daughter bounced, laughing—

Like on a carousel, he says,
Like she was at the school picnic

Out to the park, the bumper cars
And the tilt-a-whirl coming next.

He lights a cigarette, asks us
If we want to follow him back

Through that forest to make believe
With ourselves. Take hold of my hand,

He says. Try my fingers for size,
Then just you wait till we get there.

The day's bruise widens like the wish
For leaving, the humidity

Of denial staining our shirts.
The moist light seeps into the earth.

All of us remember the weight
Of our children through our shoulders,

And we hold our breath, listening
To the childish cry of darkness.