

Jeremiah 5:1

“Go up and down the streets of Jerusalem, look around and consider, search through her squares. If you can find but one person who deals honestly and seeks the truth, I will forgive this city.”

THE GREY LADIES

EDDIE, a local police officer with seven years on the force, speaks.

EDDIE

There's so much grey.
In this job.
Look, I know we put it out there
like it's all right and wrong
good and bad
black and white.
And we—all of us—
collectively pretend
that it's always easy to spot.
That every time
it's simple to tell.
But you know that's just...
well it's a stretch of the truth is what it is.
Just to make e'rybody feel better.
You sleep easy at night believin' we got it in hand?
That's good; that's good.
Amen for you.
But the fact is
every day, every shift
day night graveyard
it don't matter.
The fact is
it's mostly grey.

People lie to me
all the time.
I reckon it's somethin' about the uniform.
You'd think a person'd see an officer of the law
and figure it's best to tell the truth.
But see there you'd be mistaken.
That's cuz most people got somethin' to hide
and they think we wanna know what it is
so they do their level best
to act like they doin' anythin' but lyin'.

You do this job long enough
and you get good at spottin' the liars.
The kicker is figurin' out

if what they is lyin' about
matters.
Is it black and white?
Or is it in the grey?

You got porn in your house?
I don't care.
You cheat on your wife?
I don't care.
You pinch the pot at your weekly poker game?
I don't care.
I'm sayin'
does it matter under the law?
Does it adversely affect the community at large?
My community.

My job is to recognize not only when someone is lyin'
but when someone is bein' true.
Everythin' rides on me spottin' the difference.
On me bein' certain.
Perfection, see, is to be sure.
But it ain't ever that simple.
Cuz we drown in probabilities.
We operate in the grey.
But in order "to protect and serve"
we gotta move forward.
We gotta
in one
—snap—
we gotta make it
black and white.

So I just get off my dinner break
—I'm on day five of workin' second shift—
when I get a 10-12 call from dispatch.
So I light 'em up no siren and head on over
and as I roll up on the address
I see there's this young woman on the front steps a' this house
and this woman is screamin'.
She sees me and
trippin' down the steps
all legs and arms
she comes runnin' full speed at my vehicle
before I barely got it slipped out of gear.

So I leap out quick
and put my hand on weapon
still in my holster.
But she don't care.
Or she don't see.
Fear can make you not see.
Cuz see she's not screamin' angry; she's screamin' scared.
She fears somethin' more than she fears me.
Snap.
My hand leaves my weapon.

I hold out my hand
palm up
damn near lookin' like a traffic cop
and she pulls up short not ten feet from me.
But this woman with an off-white sorta familiar lookin' face
she don't stop screamin'.
Her hollerin' is so high pitched,
she got every dog
in a three block radius
runnin' for cover
I'm sure of it.
I'm tryin' to get her to calm down
de-escalate
to tell me the deal
but all I can make out
from what she's sayin' is
"...get 'em out get 'em out get 'em out..."
And her arms
she's got these scratched up skinny bleedin' arms
and she's flailin' them in the direction of the house across the street.
When I turn and look
I see the bottom of the wooden front door
has got a jagged splintered hole
'bout two feet square
lookin' like it's been kicked through.
From the inside.

"We been gone a long time but we been right here right here we always been right here
get em before he comes back he's comin' back he always comes back get em out get em
out get em out—"
Who, I ask her?
"FAMILY."

Snap.

I call for back-up
and tell the kindly neighbor
"Watch the girl."

I take the front steps
two at a time
til I hit the porch
and peek around the peelin' window frame
tryin' to get eyes
on what's inside.
Heavy curtains.
No dice.
Across the street
the girl's still screamin'
and
snap
I know she knows somethin'
and there's no waitin' for back-up
so I kick in the front door
my weapon raised
and I go in.

It's warm.
It's dark
though it's still day.
It's quiet.
Freaky quiet:
no TV, no radio, no hummin' of the fridge.
There's all sorts of stuff
like people livin' here
but it don't quite seem like
people livin' here.
There's nothin'
well
right.
But it feels like
there's somethin' in all this nothin'.
Snap.

Arm out
weapon sniffin'
I walk with great care
down the tiny hallway
and through living room
into the dusty without dust kitchen.
More curtains, more shades; no light.

I'm lookin' at the open bag of Fritos on the counter
when I hear patter
like rats
over my head.
Scuffin'.
Scurryin'.
Then
Stop.

I find stairs
at the back of the kitchen.
and I head on up
tryin' not to make a squeak
with my utility belt
and department issue shoes.
I make my way to the upper landing
and stare down a hallway
lined with three open doors.

Weapon. Up.

"Cleveland Police!"

"Cleveland Police!"

(silence while he waits for movement, a sound, something)

Then
a face leans out
from the single doorway
on the left hand side.
A pale thin pointy face
made leaner by her hair pulled back tight in a ponytail
that's swingin' back and forth down her back
on account of her shakin'.
She stares right past my gun
and into me
like she's tryin' to make out whether I'm God or the devil.
I don't know her
of course I don't know her
but I wonder if I might know her face.
Snap

I go to lower my weapon
but before I can say what's what
she comes runnin' at me
just like the screamin' girl outside.
Only this one, she don't stop.
She jumps into my arms
and hangs herself there
and whispers somethin' over and over
that gets lost in the Kevlar of my vest.

Just then
another face comes floatin' out
this time from the doorway across the hall.
This face too
is grey
like the ashes of a campfire.
But this one's not alone
she got somethin' hitched on her hip:
a little grey girl in a diaper
and nothin' else
who I'd a guess is no more than three.
She's six.

This young mother
she got some real bravery
in her grey face.
She's seen lots
and her eyes dare me to convince her
of who I say I am.

Snap.

I think I know this young mother.
I think know her
and I think know the shakin' pony tail girl under my chin
and the dog-scarin' girl still screamin' outside.
I have seen 'em, over and over again
on posters peelin' off telephone poles
on yellowed signs taped to the inside of glass storefronts
and on flyers pinned to the Missing board at the station.
I seen all three of 'em
in black and white.

But I have to be certain.
Perfection, see, is to be sure.

So I ask this grey lady:
what is your name?

She tells me.
And the weight of the "bein' sure"
nearly buckles my knees.
She nearly smiles.

Pony-tail girl
face in my vest
turns her head a stitch
and I can make out
what she's keepin' on and on about:
 (in a whisper)
"Don't leave us."

And I assure her

I will not.

END