

BREAN BRADEN
FROM SOME PROBLEMS WITH AUTOBIOGRAPHY (2023)

Mrs. Baumeister

The police came to me and said, "We are investigating your husband in relation to homosexual homicide." . . . I remember saying to them, "Can you tell me what homosexual homicide is?"

—Julie Baumeister, *People*, December 12, 1993

Thank you for seeing me on such short notice.
I've never had to hire a lawyer before,
and I don't think I really need one now—
Herb couldn't be the one who killed those boys.
The day our son brought home a human skull
he'd found behind our property, Herb said
it was the medical-school skeleton
his father, Dr. Baumeister, had owned.
Herb didn't know how else to dispose of it.

He's always been a conscientious man.
The Friesian foals we kept—when they broke free
or died, naturally, Herb was distraught.
He made a point to bury them himself—
he even bought a backhoe off a neighbor.
"There's one right tool for every job," he'd say.

I blame the Sav-a-Lot we owned in Muncie—
some weeks we wouldn't see him for three days.
He'd come home with dark bruises up his arms
from stocking shelves, unloading trailer pallets.
He'd gripe about the college kids he'd hired:
"Don't you get sick," he'd spit, "of all these faggots?"
"What faggots?" I'd ask. He'd stare at me.

This was around the time *The Star* reported
the Strangler of I-70, the one
police thought picked up hitchhikers—young men
he'd had *relations* with before they died.
I told Herb not to leave the house at night.
I'd hear him in the kitchen with his keys
rattling in his fist. He'd set them down
and pick them up again, rattling.

One morning, still dark, I woke to the odor
of woodsmoke. I found Herb's daybed empty—
a campfire blinking through our terrace trees.
In the backfield, he stood there in his boots,
just poking at the embers of a blaze
with a charred snow shovel. He was so sweaty.
I wanted to ask what he thought he was doing
outside without his coat, but I felt scared,
like I was interrupting, so I left.

I'm not *stupid*. But I have kids to raise,
my teaching job at New Joy Lutheran—
what could I say to make them understand?

Is that your wife and daughter on the desk?
Beautiful family. What would you do
if one of them—if you suspected something?
You'd fight to keep your family from harm.

If the wicked are rewarded, like Herb says,
all good people can do is find a place
to hide away and keep the world locked out.

He couldn't be the one—I don't believe
the things they say he did so many times.
How can you know a man twenty-three years
and not know him at all? Don't answer that.
I've taken too much of your day already.