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Trespass · Catherine Gammon

A WOMAN picks up a younger man—in a bar. A passion. He lives with her—after three weeks she is dead. There is no third party. No witness. Only the man and the death. This is the story. Stop here. There is no solution.

Intervention—she wishes to intervene. In her personal history. In the life surrounding her. In the future. She would like to go back to that time when she was a child in Los Angeles riding with her father in the car at night and he pulled over to the curb and got out and in the darkness pissed against a tree. She would like to stop there and say little girl, don't be afraid, your father's drunk and it's not your fault. She would like to go back and warn the child, herself, you're not crazy, your father's lying, don't blame him, don't forget what you know, don't let your mother pretend—don't lose track of your life for their sakes. She would like to go back and stand up to those people, the mother, the father, and speak the truth, and force them to speak it. She would like to go back and find the truth. But she is a ghost in that past, as for us as I write, as you read (because I have told you), she is a ghost already.

This will have been a cold story. (Lexical citations are derived from *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, Houghton Mifflin, 1979.) It was a hot night but the woman was cold. Cold inside her skin. She could feel the shivering start and lost her power of concentration. She had been reading and put the book face down on the nightstand. In the bar she saw the man—dark-haired, lean and beautiful. He was looking at her. He was watching the door and didn't move his eyes from her as she walked in. He didn't smile. He was something out of a movie. A silent movie. When everything was in the seeing, in the look. She watched him and didn't smile. She ordered bourbon and forgot him, then saw him in the mirror. He stood next to her. They leaned together against the bar. She felt his breath against her shoulder—briefly, passing, he turned around, leaned back into his elbows and looked for her face. She gave it to him: this is my face.

On reading Derrida: She picked him up in a bookstore. She brought him home. Three weeks later she was dead. She also brought home Lao Tzu, Thomas Merton (the wisdom of the desert), Kierkegaard (either/or, volume one), and the Bhagavad Gita. But it was Derrida that killed her (dissemination) because it was Derrida she began to read and left abandoned on her night table when she got up and got dressed and went down to the corner for a drink.

She did not like his face in the mirror. He sensed this. In the mirror his face was false. She averted her eyes from his mirror face. He was careful from then on not to meet her face in mirrors.

Bourbon had been her father's drink. She rode beside him in the car, just the two of them. He reached his hand into his pocket, pulled out a pint, drank from the bottle, left hand still at the wheel. She would see this image clearly, in her memory, never knew if it was once or many times she saw it, knew it didn't matter, the thing itself was constant and repeated, whether seen by her or not. He drank far more than her mother knew, more than her mother either could or would imagine. With her drinker's heart she knew this, then and now.

Intervene: 1. To enter or occur extraneously. 2. To come, appear, or lie between two things. 3. To occur or come between two periods or points of time. 4. To come in or between so as to hinder or modify. 5. To interfere, usually through force or threat of force, in the affairs of another nation. 6. *Law*. To enter into a suit as a third party for the protection of an alleged interest. [Latin *intervenire*, to come between: *inter-*, between + *venire*, to come (see **gwa-** in Appendix *).]

They made love and slept and ate and drank and made love and slept and drank. They did as little as possible of what had to be done: they excluded everything. She called in sick and unplugged the phone. She brought the mail up and didn't open it. No one knew where to find him. He had nothing and no one to leave.

She would like to return to the past to which she can't return. She would like to find answers to questions to which she can find no answers. She

would like to say to her mother: I was a child. I didn't know the word *pissed*. *Pissed* is a word that protects me, now, from the darkness and the fear when Daddy stopped the car and left me and leaned against a tree. I followed him. (Did I?) He yelled at me. (Did he?) How long did I sit alone in the car before I got out? (Was he too sick to yell at me? Was he sick, or only pissing?) Why do I remember this? So much and so little? I remember the darkness and the night—the tree—fear. I remember, maybe, that Daddy was crying.

She woke up one morning and saw the man had become a loathsome bug. His face, which had been so beautiful, was suddenly cunning and sly. He wore his mirror face beside her, and she recoiled. She lit a cigarette. He spoke to her. She didn't understand the words. He asked her a question. She began to answer it. He asked another question. She drew back farther. Every question he asked her pulled her farther away from the original question, and pulled her farther away from herself and from him. He became ugly. She got up from the bed screaming. She grabbed the nearest thing to hand and threw it back across the room at him. It was the book she had been reading the night they met. He followed her into the bathroom. In the mirror he was beautiful. He pounded his hand against her image—his image. The mirror shattered. His hand bled, dripping down into the sink. She stood frozen, looking: the white sink cold and gleaming—tiny mirrors glittering and in the bigger shards her face—his bright dark blood. They both stood arrested—as if suddenly sober: time suspended, battle done—white, red, silver. She pulled a towel down and wrapped his hand.

In the bar they had talked about political violence: Star Wars, apartheid, Central America, intervention. In bed they shut the world out. They saw the sun and shadows move across the floor. When they got restless she connected the phone and called out for cigarettes, liquor, and food. There is no third party. They were alone.

In Los Angeles in some neighborhoods the trees are planted in a narrow strip of grass that runs along the curb, between the street and the sidewalk, one tree per lot. It was an old neighborhood, they were old lots. It was a big tree, relatively speaking. Not skinny like the little tree outside

their own house. Not thicker than human like the trees she knows now in the East. But relatively speaking, a big tree. As big around as her father's leg, maybe, his thigh, maybe a little bigger. Yes, she got out of the car. She sees him clearly, leaning in the night against the tree. More than this she has never remembered. Only the mood of shame and fear and the knowledge that she saw what she was not supposed to see. There is no one to speak for her. She wants to intervene on her own behalf. She wants to say wait, this is not an isolated incident, this is important — wants to shake the man, the sick drunk man against the tree, lean and beautiful, dark-haired and fair-skinned in the moonlight. But she is inventing the moonlight. She is looking at her lover's dark eyes, his tousled hair — brown, almost black, like her father's. She is living in the smell of old bourbon, Camel cigarettes, and sweat — her father's smells — and sex, the dirty sheets. Don't forget, she wants to cry — don't let this little girl forget — and wants to pull him away from the tree and slap him and push him down to the ground, to his knees, to force him to cry — to cry so that he'll remember, so she will remember, so she'll know what really happened, what she saw, what she felt, and before that, in the car, and when he stopped the car, and before he started it again, and later, when they got home, when they faced her mother, and when they hid — wants to pull her father around and pound his chest, make fists and beat his chest, naked, hairless like her lover's, and cry you lied to her, all her life you lied, don't you know what you did? — she'll think she's crazy because you're her father and you lied — it's not what you did — she doesn't know what you did — it's that you lied and she never believed it but she knows — look at her — she's seen you lying and you're her father and when you lie there is no truth — but it's her lover's chest she's pounding and while she weeps he holds her wrists, waiting for the screaming and weeping to pass, waiting to let loose his grip and pull her head to his shoulder to soothe her and stroke her head, her hair, when she will weep more quietly against his skin.

Gwa-. Also **gwem-**. To go, come. 1. Germanic **kuman* in: a. Old English *cuman*, to come: COME; b. Germanic **kuma-*, he who comes, a guest, in compound **wil-kuma-*, a desirable guest (**wil*, desirable; see **wel-**²), in Old English *wilcuma*, a welcome guest, and *wilcume*, the greeting of welcome: WELCOME; c. compound **bi-kuman*, to arrive, come to be

(**bi-*, intensive prefix: BE-), in Old English *becuman*, to become: BECOME.

The word *pissed* is an intervention. Language is an intervention. In her mouth all speech intervenes. In her mind words come between—hinder and modify, interfere, usually by force or threat of force, enter into suit, allege interest, attempt protection. They come, they appear, they lie between—they lie. Extraneous, they enter. Like this lover, this stranger in her body.

She woke up. She felt a body in the bed behind her, breathing against her neck. She shivered and pulled away, curling into herself. Her skin crawled. Lavender light came in from the street in slivers that outlined the desk, the lamp, the bookshelf, the door. Desk. Lamp. Bookshelf. Door. She couldn't identify them. She didn't know the room. It was too dark. The lavender edges of things gave back no information. She pulled the sticky sheet tighter around her shoulder and shivered in her skin. She felt her heartbeat, fast, fluttery, doing doubletime and depthless. Her skin was cold and clammy. The lavender outlines began to move in the room, sinuous and swirling, became cartoon shapes, illegible words written in air, welcome, whispering, grasses twitching, wild eyes watching from the other side of the night. Her mind was clear. She knew she was awake. She knew these visions were in her mind, projected into the room. She wanted to see what would come next. But they scared her. She closed her eyes and saw nothing. She opened her eyes and saw the wild lights. She closed her eyes and rolled away to the stranger's body. If she looked at him she would see a stranger's face and hallucinate love. She lay there, stiff, cold, curled up against him. She felt her heart beat in her chest, fast and shallow. She took deep, slow breaths. She kept her eyes closed. She waited. She expected to die. The night went on.

He had become a loathsome bug. His hand bled. They were out of booze. She tried to make coffee but she was trembling—the blood, the breaking glass, the screaming—the shock of seeing his face so ugly. And maybe too much bourbon, she thought. She didn't know what day it was, how long he'd been here, she wasn't sure she knew his name. But the sight of his blood had made her tender. She leaned over him in the bright reading light next to the bed and painstakingly with shaking hands and a tweezer pulled

out slivers of glass. They called the liquor store for vodka to wash his wound and to celebrate the fact that it wasn't Sunday.

According to Bachelard (the psychoanalysis of fire) alcohol is a creator of language. It enriches the vocabulary and frees the syntax. The alcoholic unconscious is a profound reality. Alcohol does not simply stimulate mental potentialities, it creates them. Alcohol incorporates itself with that which is striving to express itself. These are Bachelard's words, approximately as translated into English by Alan C. M. Ross. What Bachelard does not say—or if he says it, she failed to notice, or if she noticed, the caution eluded her—is that for some people this alcoholic incorporation is irreversible (incorporate: to unite with or blend indistinguishably into something already in existence; to give substance or material form to; embody), the exchange vampiric, Faustian; that for such people, to enact this bargain (given, not chosen) is to die or live in hell.

In her nightmare her father is in the bed with her, the breath on her neck is her father's breath, the leg against her leg her father's leg, the heat and wetness in her body for her father's pleasure, the searching fingers her father's fingers, the erection moving against her skin, against her bottom, the back of her thighs, her inner thighs in search of welcome, her father's. In her nightmare she wakes up screaming, but in reality her lover is coming into her and when she starts to scream he pushes her head into the pillow until their lovemaking is done. In her nightmare her father was in the bed wrapped in sheets and she stroked him, half-erect. In her nightmare he was an old man, the man he was just before he died. She was asking for information, stroking and waiting, cajoling, until a rush of potency scared her and she withdrew her hand. "Did you ever make me do this?" she asked, and he told her once, that night he got her loaded. "Did you get me loaded?" she asked, and already in her nightmare she saw a bottle of booze on a chair in the other bedroom where her mother sat in bed, the way she did every morning, reading prayers. In her nightmare a third person was in the bed with her and her father—a shadowy person, almost no one. In her nightmare her father pressed himself against her from behind and she felt his probing fingers. In reality at the age of four she was suddenly afraid of the dark. In reality whatever happened her father will remember nothing. This is the moment in which she would like to inter-

vene. But to intervene is to wake herself, and in reality she screamed. She remembered nothing of reality, only the nightmare, and pressed against the pillow by the violent hand of a stranger, unable to breathe and heaving under the effort and sweat of his young body, she tasted her own juices, and vodka, and blood against her cheek.

Wel-². To wish, will. 1. Germanic, **wel-* in Old English *wel*, well (<“according to one’s wish”): **WELL²**. 2. Germanic **welon-* in Old English *wela*, *weola*, well-being, riches: **WEAL¹** (WEALTH). 3. Germanic **wiljon-* in Old English *willa*, desire, will power: **WILL¹**. 4. Germanic **wil(l)jan* in Old English *wyllan*, to desire: **WILL²**, **NILL**. 5. Germanic compound **wilkuma-* (see **gwa-**). 6. 0-grade form *wol-* in Germanic **wal-* in Frankish **wala*, well: **GALA**, **GALLANT**, **GALLOP**, **WALLOP**. 7. Basic form **wel-* in Latin *velle*, to wish, will. 8. Suffixed form **wel-up* in Latin *voluptas*, pleasure.

Freud is no help. Freud said the little girls desired the unthinkable and repressed the desire. Recent scholars say the fathers did the unthinkable and Freud repressed the facts. The debate continues. She will find no answer: there is no solution in theory, her mother knows nothing, and her father is dead. Her triangle can be unraveled only by opening it up in time. But she is out of time. The delivery boy from the liquor store rang the bell for 5-E as he had done almost every day for three weeks. The first morning they were laughing and wrapped in sheets. The man said they were having a honeymoon, they expected to see a lot of him, and gave him a ten-dollar tip. At first they ordered bourbon, then they switched to vodka. Sometimes he brought them one bottle, sometimes two. At first they paid with cash, later with checks. The boss said he knew the woman a couple of years, her checks had always been good. At first the delivery boy liked going to them—they were happy and sexy to look at and generous with the money. They gave him an extra five dollars to stop at the corner and bring them a carton each of Marlboros and Camels. They always buzzed him up right away and let him inside when they opened the door. They were nice with him—in fact, they excited him. But rapidly he decided they were pigs. The air was stale in the apartment and stank of something skunklike and deadly. They became ashen and their eyes dark-hollowed. They were like junkies he told the boss. The tips dried up. The woman

reeked of ammonia, as if it came oozing out her skin. Once on the other side of their door he heard screaming that suddenly stopped. The man came to meet him alone, wearing jeans and a black shirt, unbuttoned. His skin was scratched and bleeding. The check he gave him was crumpled and almost torn. It was the woman's check. Her handwriting was illegible. The man gave him an extra dollar to carry down a bag of empties. "Don't come back," he said. "No matter what we tell you, promise you—don't come back." But he had come back. When they called and gave the boss an order he had no choice but to go. Every day then he dreaded them. Until the morning when he stood on the stoop ringing and got no answer. He was carrying two quarts of cheap vodka and a carton each of Camels and Marlboros. He rang and rang. He went back to the store and told the boss. "I spent twenty-four bucks on cigarettes for those people," he said. "That's your problem," the boss said. "They're killing each other," the boy said, and the boss said that wasn't his business, as long as the checks were good. The boy walked out. He came back to the building and rang for the super. They went up together. The super pounded. There was no answer. He yelled, he said, "We're coming in." They waited. Slowly, the super unlocked the door. The boy gagged on the threshold. The skunk smell was overpowering, and all the human fluid smells, and fear. The boy crossed himself in the presence of what he knew was death. Neither he nor the super went in.

Replete and fearful—feeling exists but she is willing to know it only in the mind. She thinks she wants illumination, reality, the absence of deceit, but she is too absent from herself, too well protected. She is too old she thinks to wait for miracles. But pleasure is terror: If I take a knife to him, she wonders, will he give me back the truth?

She would like to intervene. Here perhaps: She had been reading for several hours when she began to get an inkling of the method and laughed out loud. She realized she would be too stimulated to sleep. She put the book down on the nightstand. Or here: He wore an overcoat in houndstooth plaid, black and ivory. Invented like the moonlight. Or not. He gave her a drink from his bottle. She asked for more. He gave it to her: Don't tell your mother. Later he was crying.

In a mirror, across the room, the man: huddled, so small and naked as almost to be invisible—he, who had been so beautiful. In the mirror, a bloody sheet, and everywhere the traces of its passage. In the mirror, his hands bloody, his chest, his skin cut and torn. In the mirror, in his lap, in his bloody hands, a telephone—suddenly familiar. He remembers where he is. They were sitting in separate corners, each with a bottle. The blood surprises him.

Here and now: She wishes to speak. Too much is missing. Nothing is right yet. Her story is not complete. There is more to say: I am a little girl who lives in a jail. Outside a neighbor is yelling at a dog to shut up. Every day she yells at the dog to shut up. I hate it when she yells at the dog to shut up. I also hate the dog. Most of the time I ignore the yelling neighbor and the dog. I let my jailer hate the yelling neighbor and the dog. Most of the time I ignore everything. I live in a dark jail. I came into this jail when I was a little girl and I'm still a little girl. I am alone in the house. Most of the time I like being alone in the house. In the house alone I act out fairy tales—mostly Cinderella—my favorite part is when she cries on the bench. The coffee table is just the size of the bench in my picture book and I act it all out up to the part where she weeps because her wicked stepsisters have ripped up her dress and she can't go to the ball—up to the part where she weeps crying on the bench—right before the fairy godmother comes. I am the little girl crying, waiting for the fairy godmother to come and send her off to the ball and the handsome prince and the triumph over the wicked stepsisters and the happiness ever after. That's how old I really am, in my heart. And there's more to say. There will always be more to say.

For a while they watch television, soap operas, anything. She soaks in the bathtub, sleeping. He pulls her up by the hair. She holds onto his shoulders, her grip is slippery, she falls. Water splashes. They have bruises. In the tub they examine each other's bruises. Next they study the scars. His hand bleeds. Together they take time to dream. They can leave this city. They can go anywhere. They don't have to live like this. They are free. The sun is coming up. The little bit of sky out her window is almost blue. She lights a Marlboro and watches the smoke blown to nothing by the fan. The ash falls, she scatters it away.