

Trespass

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Extract

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❖ PART ONE ❖



Dark hair and lots of it, heavy brows, sharp features, dark eyes, dark circles under the eyes, dark looks about the room, at the maître d', the waitress, the trolley laden with rich, tempting desserts, and finally, as Toby guides her to the table, at Chloe, who holds out her hand and says pleasantly, though she is experiencing the first tentative pricks of the panic that will consume her nights and disrupt her days for some time to come, "Salome, how good to meet you."

The hand she grasps is lifeless and she releases it almost at once. Toby pulls a chair out, meeting his mother's eyes over the truncated handshake with a look she characterizes as defiant. "My mother, Chloe Dale," he says.

"Hello," the young woman says, sinking into the chair. Toby lays his fingers upon her shoulder, just for a moment, very much the proprietor, and Salome sends him a weak smile.

On the phone Toby said, “You’ll like her. She’s different. She’s very serious.”

Which meant this one was not an airhead like Belinda, who had ruined an entire summer the year before. On hearing Toby’s description, Brendan warned, “Brace up. Young men go for extremes.”

“That’s true,” Chloe agreed. “You certainly did.” She recollected Brendan’s mad poet and the bout with the anorexic alcoholic, but she herself had not been a model of probity—the misunderstood artist who read too much William Blake and spent a semester poring over accounts of the Manson murders in preparation for a series of lithographs depicting dismembered female bodies.

The waitress approaches, brandishing heavy, leather-backed menus. Toby reaches for one, so does Chloe. Salome keeps her hands in her lap, forcing the waitress to stretch across the table and slip it in place between the knife and fork. “Can I get you something to drink?” she inquires.

“Let’s have a bottle of mineral water for the table,” Chloe says, “and I’ll have a glass of the white Bordeaux.”

“That sounds good,” Toby agrees. “I’ll have the same.”

Salome’s eyes come up from the menu and rest on Toby’s mouth. “Coffee,” she says.

She doesn’t drink. Is that a good sign?

“She lives on coffee,” Toby chides indulgently, as if he’s letting his mother in on some charming secret. Chloe studies the young woman, who has lowered her eyes to the menu again, a faint smile playing about her lips.

She’s confident, Chloe thinks. “So, how did you meet?” she asks.

“We’re in the same poli-sci class,” Toby says. “It’s a big lecture. I spotted Salome, but we didn’t actually talk until we both showed up at a meeting to organize a campus antiwar group.”

“That’s good,” Chloe says. “You won’t have to go through boring arguments about politics.”

“What kind of arguments?” Salome asks offhandedly, still studying the menu.

“About politics,” Chloe replies. “You’re already in agreement.” The drinks arrive and the conversation is suspended while the waitress pours out the water, arranges wineglasses and Salome’s coffee, which comes in a silver pot with a smaller silver pitcher of cream. “Shall I give you a few minutes to decide on your orders?” she asks.

“I think so?” Chloe says to her son, who replies, “Yes. I’m not ready yet.” All three fall silent, concentrating on elaborate descriptions of food. “What are you having?” Chloe asks Toby.

“I’m not sure,” he says. “Maybe the salmon.”

Salome pushes the menu aside, nearly upsetting her water glass, but her reflexes are quick and she steadies it with a firm hand laid across the base. Her fingernails, Chloe notes, are short, filed straight across. For a moment all three are fascinated by this decisive movement—no, the glass is not going to tumble—then, for the first time, Salome directs upon Chloe the full force of her regard. It’s unsettling, like seeing a spider darting out crazily from some black recess in the basement. “Why would an argument about politics necessarily be boring?” Salome asks, her voice carefully modulated, free of accusation, as if she’s inquiring into some purely scientific matter—why does gravity hold everything down, why does light penetrate glass but not wood.

Toby is right. There is nothing ordinary about this young person. “Well, not necessarily,” she concedes. “But sometimes when people disagree strongly on principle, and there’s no reconciliation possible, it can get pretty dull, pretty . . .” she pauses, looking for the noninflammatory word . . . “unproductive.”

“Salome loves to argue about politics,” Toby observes, temporizing, as is his way.

Lives on coffee, loves to argue. Could there be a connection?

“I don’t actually love it,” Salome corrects him. “But when it’s necessary, I never find it boring.”

Fast work. Chloe now stands accused of calling Toby’s new love interest boring.

She takes a sip of her wine, casting her eyes about the room in search of the waitress. It’s an attractive, tastefully appointed room, richly paneled, with dark, solid furnishings, damask cloths, strategic flower arrangements, and the glint of glass and copper. The food is excellent, though, of course, absurdly expensive. She chose Mignon’s because she knows Toby likes it, and it’s close to the university. She took the train, an hour and a half to Grand Central, and then another twenty minutes on the subway, which put her four crosstown blocks from Mignon’s. It’s twelve forty-five, she has an appointment midtown with her editor at three thirty, plenty of time for a leisurely lunch with her son and his new girlfriend. It’s intended as a treat for them; they’re students who eat grim cafeteria food or the cheap and nourishing fare served in Ukrainian restaurants on the Lower East Side. Her eyes settle on Toby, who looks anxious, pretending interest in the menu. She turns to Salome, who is ladling sugar into her black coffee, two full teaspoons.

She feels a stab of pity for the young woman, so clearly out of her element and on the defensive. Meeting the boyfriend's mother is never fun; for one thing, one gets to see one's lover transformed into some older woman's son. But it could be so much worse, she wants to tell Salome. You should have seen my mother-in-law, a true harridan, and the worst part was that Brendan thought his mother was fascinating and acted like a giddy puppy in her presence, falling all over himself in his effort to please her. Whereas Chloe is charming, everyone says so, and her relations with her son are genial. These self-congratulatory musings relax her, and when Salome raises her cup to her lips, darting a quick, nervous glance at Chloe over the rim, she sends the girl a sympathetic smile. "You're right," she says. "Politics is serious. Especially in these dismal times."

"Can you believe the arrogance of this clown!" Toby exclaims. "Now we don't need the United Nations. The rest of the world is just irrelevant."

"He's a puppet," Salome says. "The dangerous ones are standing right behind him."

The waitress appears, ready to take their orders. Chloe feels a quiver of interest in Salome's choice; doubtless she is a vegetarian. Toby orders the salmon; Chloe her usual duck salad. The waitress, a bright-eyed redhead—why couldn't Toby fall for someone like her?—looks attentively at Salome, her pen poised above her pad.

"I'll have the Caesar salad, no anchovies," Salome says.

Very pure, Chloe will tell Brendan. No alcohol, no meat, no fish.

The waitress retreats. Toby takes a roll from the bread basket

and begins slathering it with butter. “There’s going to be an antiwar rally in the park on the fifteenth,” he says. “We’ve got about eighty people signed up already.”

“Excellent,” Chloe says. “I’ll tell your father. He’s so enraged, he needs an outlet.”

Toby nods, stuffing half the roll into his mouth. He is always hungry. He developed an appetite when he was fifteen, it’s never let up, and he still doesn’t have an ounce of fat on him. Chloe takes up the basket and offers it to Salome, who chooses a wheat roll and places it carefully on Chloe’s bread plate. If she takes no bread herself, Chloe reasons, the girl will never know her mistake. “Are you majoring in political science too?” she asks, setting the basket close to her son.

“No,” Salome replies. “International relations, with an emphasis on the Balkans.”

“How unusual.”

“She’s a Croat,” Toby announces.

Chloe takes this information in quietly, uncertain how to respond. Does it explain the passion for politics? Are Croats Muslims? “But you don’t have an accent,” she says.

“I grew up in Louisiana,” Salome says.

Croats in Louisiana? Chloe thinks.

“Her father is the Oyster King,” Toby says.

Chloe takes another sip of her wine, thinking of the Tenniel illustration of the Walrus and the Carpenter inviting an attentive clutch of unwary oysters *for a pleasant walk, a pleasant talk, along the briny beach*. “What made you decide to come to New York?” she asks.

“I got a scholarship.”

“She’s very smart,” Toby adds needlessly.

“It must be quite a change for you,” Chloe observes. “Do you like it here?”

For a moment Salome’s eyes meet Chloe’s, but distantly, disengaging at once in favor of a leisurely survey of the room, as if her answer depended upon the framed photographs of Parisian street scenes arranged along the far wall, the quality of the table linens, the low hum of chatter from the other diners, the neat white blouse of the waitress, who, Chloe notices with relief, is approaching their table, skillfully balancing three plates, on one of which she recognizes her duck salad. For God’s sake, she thinks, impatience constricting her throat around a jumble of words that must not be said, I wasn’t asking for your opinion of this restaurant. Toby sits back in his chair, his eyebrows lifted in anticipation, waiting, now they are both waiting, for the verdict of this odd, dark creature he has extracted, it now appears, from some refugee swamp and set down before his mother in a perfectly respectable corner of New York. Salome’s eyes pass over his attentive face and settle upon her coffee cup, which is empty. She lifts the silver pot and pours a ribbon of black liquid into the porcelain cup. “Not much,” she says.



“You see,” Toby chides Salome when they are on the sidewalk watching his mother disappear into the ceaseless flow of pedestrians. “That wasn’t so bad.”

“I don’t think she liked me,” Salome says.

“She likes who I like,” Toby assures her, though this is not, strictly speaking, true. He knows his mother won’t criticize any friend of his to his face, but that doesn’t mean she has no

feelings in the matter. He hadn't expected Salome to charm his mother, but he'd assumed they would find some obscure common ground of femaleness to ease the inevitable tension. That hadn't happened, and not, he admits, for lack of trying on his mother's part. Salome leans into him so that he feels the soft give of her breast against his arm. She is embarrassed that she acquitted herself poorly, he concludes, and anxious that he might be displeased.

"It doesn't matter," she says. As they turn south, toward the university, she slips her hand into his. At the light she reaches up to touch his cheek, and, when he looks down, rises up on her toes to brush his lips with her own. He accepts the kiss, bringing his hand to her chin to hold her lips to his a moment longer. They have two hours before his roommate will return from his job, and they will spend them sprawled on the futon that takes up most of the space allotted to Toby. It is a perfect fall day, cool and dry; the leaves on the stunted trees plugged into squares of colorless, vitrified dirt along the sidewalk have already turned an anemic yellow. Toby wants to sprint the few blocks to the apartment just to have a few more minutes of being in bed with Salome. He passes his arm around her back, urging her to a speedier pace. The fineness of the bones beneath her skin, the slenderness of her waist, send a shiver of excitement from his stomach to his groin. She is right; it doesn't matter what his mother thinks of her, or his father, or anyone else for that matter. That they will feel strongly, one way or the other, is inevitable, because Salome is so entirely different from any woman he has ever known. Compared to the officious graduates of expensive prep schools who are made anxious by her opinions, the city denizens with their tongue

studs and tattoos, the scholarship girls from the Midwest who greet one another with shouts and hugs after an hour apart, Salome is a jaguar among nervous chickens. “Pretty exotic, Toby,” his roommate observed upon meeting her. “Are you sure you’ve got the energy for that?”

He doesn’t deny that she’s difficult. She has few friends, only her roommates, two theater majors she dismisses with a wave of the hand. Her room, formerly a walk-in closet, is hung with embroidered pictures. There’s a shelf crammed with statues of her favorite saints and votive candles, which she lights to solicit favors. On Sundays she wraps her hair in a lace shawl and goes off to Mass at the Croatian church on 51st Street, after which she receives her weekly call from her father, the Oyster King. While she talks, Toby stretches out on her narrow mattress, baffled by her harsh, impenetrable language. Her voice rises to a shout, she sounds furious—he can’t imagine what it would feel like to address either of his parents with so much force—then abruptly she is calm and affectionate. The conversation invariably ends with what he takes to be cooing endearments.

When she waits for him in the coffee shop, she passes the time crocheting lace squares which she will give out to the professors who earn her admiration. Those who displease her must put up with such serious and close questioning that they blanch when they see her hand shoot up in the midst of her somnolent peers.

She brings the same energy and essential forthrightness to the minimalist bedroom where they will soon pounce on each other with feline exuberance, tussling for the fun of it. She will start throwing off her clothes as soon as they are inside the

door, pulling Toby toward the bed with an impatience that delights him. Her hair falling over his face smells of cloves, the perfume of her skin is complex, warm, spicy. When she wraps her arms and legs around his back, she holds him so tightly he can feel the taut vibration of her muscles, and her breath in his ear is quick and even to the end.

As they turn the last corner to the apartment, his mother is the farthest thing from his mind, so it surprises him when Salome says, "What I don't understand is why your mother volunteered your father for the rally. Why doesn't she come herself? Is she afraid she'll get arrested?"

"No, no," he assures her. "She'll come. That's a given."

"Why? So she can find it boring?"

They have arrived at the doorway, two concrete steps to a barricade of bars and steel plate. Toby digs in his pocket for the keys, releasing Salome, who perches on the step behind him, glowering at the poor scrap of blighted grass enclosed by a ragged bit of chain-link fence. "Jesus," Toby says, jamming the first of the keys into the lock. "Why did you jump all over her about that? She was just trying to make conversation."

"I didn't jump all over her," she replies. "I just asked her what the hell she meant."

The first bolt clicks; Toby yanks the gate open, dislodging Salome from her step. "It's obvious what she meant," he retorts. The scene replays in his memory at such a volume that the whole restaurant has stopped dead, bearing witness to the outrage against his mother. "She meant it was nice that you and I agree about politics, that we don't argue about politics. It was a perfectly innocent observation, Salome. She didn't say politics was boring, or that you were boring. She said arguing was

boring, and she's right about that." Locks two and three give way before the force of this reasoning, and Toby shoves the heavy door open with a grunt.

"It was a condescending thing to say," Salome insists to his back. He charges into the foyer, making straight for the steps without looking back, leaving her to close the gate, the door, and follow. "It was condescending," she repeats, trudging up the stairs behind him. "She wanted to make sure I understood she doesn't care about what I care about."

Toby takes the next flight two steps at a time, a final key gripped in his fist. At the door he slides it into the lock, looking down at Salome in the dim light of the stairwell. Her head is lowered; her white hand grips the rail as she climbs toward him. A sensation of pity mixed with consternation assails him, dampening the desire he felt on the sidewalk as thoroughly as a hand laid flat across a vibrating string. "Look, Salome," he says. "It was very thoughtful of my mother to invite us to lunch. Mignon's is a good restaurant and not cheap, and she did it because she wanted to show us a nice time. She's a nice woman. She likes to make people comfortable, she doesn't have ulterior motives."

"If she wanted to make us comfortable, why didn't she choose someplace where a normal person would be comfortable?" Salome arrives at the landing, where she pauses to push her hair back from her eyes. "What's comforting about paying twenty dollars for a salad?"

"You didn't have to pay for it," he snaps, blocking the doorway so that she is forced to look up at him. "She paid for it; she can afford it; it was a gift. She took us there because she knows I like it. I'm a normal person, and I like it."

“So you take her side,” Salome says calmly.

“There’s no side to take,” he exclaims. She pushes past him into the dimly lit space that comprises the sitting room and kitchen and goes straight to the sink, where she takes a glass from the dish rack and fills it with water.

Toby pauses in the open doorway, precisely representing the state of his emotions: he could go in or out, he could pursue this argument, their first, or close it down, he could take the glass of water from her hand, set it in the sink, and lead her to his room, or he could dash the water into her face. Each option has a certain appeal. She swallows half the glass, watching him indifferently as he stands there in an agony of indecision. Then, still frowning, she brings her free hand to her collar and begins unbuttoning her blouse. In the next moment Toby observes that she is wearing the black lace bra that fastens at the front. He steps into the room and closes the door behind him, facing it only long enough to shoot the bolt into the lock.



“How did it go?” Brendan inquires, examining the return addresses on the four envelopes Chloe lays, one by one, before him. “Nothing but bills,” he adds.

“Good,” she says. “He loves the novel and doesn’t know much about engraving. I think he’ll let me have my way. I keep thinking the whole thing should have the feel of thorns and rough bark.”

“That might be hard on the reader,” Brendan observes. He angles his cheek to receive the brief kiss she offers him. “But I meant the lunch, the new girlfriend.”

“Not promising,” she says. “Very weird actually. She’s a Croat; does that mean she’s a Muslim?”

“A Croat? No. Croats are mostly Catholics. Where is she from?”

“Louisiana,” Chloe says, making for the door. She doesn’t want to talk about Toby’s girlfriend one minute more than is absolutely necessary.

“Well, then she’s not a Croat, darling. She’s an American of Croatian descent.”

“Toby said she was a Croat and she didn’t object,” Chloe says. “Her father is the ‘Oyster King.’ ”

“This gets better and better.”

“Probably a vegetarian, rabid about politics, drank four cups of coffee with lunch, majoring in international relations, emphasis on the Balkans, definitely sleeping with Toby.”

“Emphasis on the Balkans?”

“I knew that part would get your attention.”

“Whereas the sleeping with Toby part got yours.” Brendan smiles at her maternal jitters.

“She’s very abrupt,” Chloe says.

“Was she rude to you?”

“Not exactly. She just made me feel . . .”

Brendan swivels his desk chair to face her. As he waits for the word that will describe how Toby’s new girlfriend made Chloe feel, he stretches his long legs out across the carpet.

“I don’t know,” Chloe concludes. “Creepy.”

“Creepy,” he repeats, without emphasis.

Chloe tries again. “Uncomfortable.”

“What’s her name again?” he asks. “Something heartless and biblical, isn’t it? Delilah? Lilith?”

“Salome,” Chloe says and Brendan nods. “Salome Drago.”

“That’s got to be shortened from something. It’s probably Dragonovich, something like that.”

“Which would mean what?”

“Ovich is son of,” he speculates.

“Son of a dragon?”

Brendan shrugs.

Chloe shifts her canvas bag from one shoulder to the other.

“Son of a dragon and daughter of the Oyster King,” Brendan says. “I can’t wait to meet her.”

“It won’t last,” Chloe predicts.

“No,” Brendan agrees. “Seems unlikely, doesn’t it?” His eyes wander away, back to the clutter of pads and books on his desk.

“How’s the crusade?” Chloe asks, hoping the answer will be brief.

Brendan takes up his glasses. “Frederick’s about to cut a deal with the Sultan al-Kamil for the city of Jerusalem.”

“That can’t last either,” she says.

“It’ll last eight years, which is better than we’ll see again anytime soon.”

Jerusalem, Chloe thinks. If only God would send down a new tablet telling which set of outraged refugees are the “real” chosen people.

“I’m going to work for a bit,” she says. Brendan raises his fingers over his page, something between a dismissal and a farewell wave, his attention already absorbed by his companion of choice, Frederick of Hohenstaufen, the thirteenth-century emperor whose puissance and cunning so confounded his con-

temporaries that they called him *Stupor Mundi*, the wonder of the world.



As Chloe comes into the clearing, she spooks a doe, which eyes her for scarcely a moment before crashing off into the underbrush. She crosses to the narrow deck, strewn with crimson and yellow leaves, and lets herself in at the glass door. Autumn is a contradictory season, she thinks, dropping her bag on the worktable, setting the kettle to boil on the hot plate. The explosion of colors, the ionized, energizing air; it feels like a promise of something, but autumn bodes ill for all living creatures. The days are already shortening; it is only five thirty and the room is gloomy. She will have to turn on the light. She takes her mug from the sideboard, glancing about the cluttered room as she opens the tea packet. Now is the time to clear everything out from the last project, the wretched children's cookbook she took on because the money was good and the art director an old friend. She had little pleasure in the job. The dummy came to her with the illustrations specified. She has an ersatz child in her repertoire, a serenely smiling, genderless creature who can be made to look mischievous or serious with an adjustment of the eyebrows. There were five of these children in the cookbook, one brown, of course, one vaguely Asiatic with straight black hair, all mixing things in bowls, running blenders, flipping pancakes, and, in the final spread, gorging themselves on brownies.

Good riddance, Chloe thinks, and now banish all color. She opens the canvas bag and reaches inside, feeling a curious,

almost cinematic thrill as her fingers discover, lodged between the drawing pad and the wallet, the paperback novel she picked up at the bookshop in the train station. A legend floats up on an imaginary screen—*With tremulous fingers the artist undertakes the definitive project*. She extracts the novel and examines the cover. The windblown tree stretching menacing branches over the figure of a woman struggling against the force of the blast is, she discovers, a detail from a painting by Corot, *The Gust of Wind*, which, by some process, doubtless involving theft and war, is currently in the possession of the Pushkin Museum in Moscow.

It's a cheap paperback, with minimal apparatus, and the virtue of being small. It will be in her pocket every day for the next six months, to be perused in every spare moment, marked with yellow and blue highlighters, indexed with sticky tabs, its spine broken, its pages stained with coffee and ink. Brendan calls her method "billeting the book," not a bad description, as she is not seeking to memorize or critique the text, but to inhabit it. It is to become, for the duration, the terrain of her imagination.

The kettle shrieks. Obediently she lifts it from the burner and pours the boiling water into the mug. Her eyes rest on the framed watercolor over the counter, a prequel to the pinecones that served as endpapers for the children's *Walden*, the poorly paid, entirely absorbing job she believes has led her to this one. "Thank you, Henry David," she whispers. Her *Walden* didn't win any prizes, but it was a finalist for three of them and sold well. It is an elegantly made book; Chloe controlled every detail of it, and Professor Warnick, the scholar who excerpted the original text, told her he thought it a pity it was relegated to the

children's section. She had immersed herself in the life of the great eccentric, read two weighty biographies, twice driven down to Princeton for long conversations with Professor Warrick, and then, armed with his letter of introduction, driven up to Harvard and Concord to examine the surviving papers.

The jacket and binding of the book are sap green, but inside all is sepia. She had done a hundred drawings and a dozen watercolor sketches in preparation for the twenty engravings; it took her the better part of a year. It is a small book, modest in scope, spare in design, suitable for the dictums of an ascetic who saw no point in having more than two chairs in his sitting room. She had achieved a Buddhistic detachment as she worked, an elemental restraint and serenity she hopes to call up again in the work ahead.

Taking her mug and the novel, she settles into the reading chair next to the cold woodstove. On the train she read the introduction, with its summary of the criticism over the years, including a bibliography worth investigating. Then there was the "biographical notice," a self-serving and cowardly piece of work, in Chloe's view, such as one might expect from an unimaginative parent, but not from the author's sister, who was a novelist herself and should have known better. At least the author, having lived only long enough to see the force of her imagination reviled in the pages of the London press, had been spared the humiliation of reading her sister's lame defense.

Even so, Emily Brontë had been more successful than poor Thoreau, who furnished his bookshelves with most of the first printing of *Walden*. Another glance at the biographical note informs Chloe of a surprising fact: Emily Brontë was born just a year after Thoreau, and likewise in a backwater, though the

wind-lashed parsonage at Haworth was more removed from the world of commerce than Concord. Could two more disparate sensibilities ever have occupied the planet at the same time? Thoreau, all patient observation, ironic, obstreperous, oddly genial; Brontë, rebellious, passionate, chilly, imperious, raised on fantastic tales in a house with a graveyard at the front door. Yet both could not bear being housed, both felt more at ease in a windstorm than by the fireside, both were unemployable, constitutionally solitary. Even with the time difference, there must have been many hours of many days when the youthful Henry and Emily were both out walking in bad weather, Henry occasionally accompanied by a friend, Emily by a dog.

A walk with Henry and Emily. Chloe closes the book and gazes out past the deck at the woodland path, overarched by maples, horse chestnut, and beech, all weeping particolored leaves. They would have hated each other. She would have thought him dry and lifeless, and he would have dismissed her as self-absorbed and irrational.

The sharp report of a rifle, very close, jolts Chloe from this critical speculation. A pause tempers the air, followed by three more shots in rapid succession. "Bastard," Chloe exclaims, leaping to her feet. In her haste to rush across the deck, she bangs her shin cruelly against the hob of the woodstove. "Damn," she says.



Mike stalks purposefully along the drive, shoulders low, head lifted at an angle to accommodate the struggles of the doomed