

"Among Thieves"

by

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A ragged yellow Oldsmobile sedan IDLES in a trash-strewn alley. The DRIVER, low in his seat, taps rapidly on the steering wheel.

Four GUNSHOTS sabotage the silence of this low-income neighborhood. Startled, the Driver squirms in his seat. He revs the engine and anxiously watches the back door of a grafitti covered building. He HONKS the horn. No one appears. The driver looks around, growing more uneasy. He leans on the HORN. There are two more GUNSHOTS.

He puts the car in drive and hits the gas, sideswiping a couple of garbage cans, as he speeds away.

Moments later, the door at which the driver waited, BANGS open. TRAVELLE, a thugged-out young black man with menacing eyes, charges through the opening. He looks up and down the street, swivelling one way and then the other.

DEVANTE staggers through the gate, wearing a pained grimace and putting no weight on his left leg which is covered in blood. He looks up and down the alley.

DEVANTE

Where's he at?

In frustration, Travelle kicks over a garbage can. The sound of SIRENS can be heard in the distance. Devante tries to takes a step and a wave of pain crosses his face.

DEVANTE (CONT'D)

Give me a hand, we got to go.

He extends an outstretched arm towards Travelle. Travelle doesn't move, but looks back and forth between his hobbled friend and the empty alley ahead--ground he could cover more easily on his own.

Reluctantly, he moves to Devante's side, puts one of Devante's arms over his shoulders and drags his friend up the alley. The siren's WAIL grows closer and closer and is soon joined by the rhythmic WHOOMP of helicopter blades.

TRAVELLE

You got to move your feet.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Travelle and Devante continue their three-legged stumble up the alley, but their pace grows slower as the men lose steam.

DEVANTE

My cousin lives two blocks from here.

TRAVELLE

We won't make it.

A police car, with its lights flashing, turns into the alley ahead of them, blocking their route. Travelle quickly muscles Devante behind an overflowing dumpster.

TRAVELLE (CONT'D)

You got to look after yourself. You're on your own.

DEVANTE

You leaving me?

Travelle removes his black sweatshirt and tosses it in the trash.

TRAVELLE

If it was me shot, you'd leave too.

Travelle steals a glance from behind the dumpster at the cruiser bearing down on them.

DEVANTE

With everything we've been through...

Devante grabs Travelle's arm.

DEVANTE (CONT'D)

Don't leave me like this.

TRAVELLE

Take your hand off me.

Travelle pushes Devante's hand away, which leaves a bloody smear on Travelle's sleeve. Irritated, Travelle glares at Devante and then the stain. They fall silent as the police car races past their hiding place on its way to the crime scene.

DEVANTE

I'd never leave you. Travelle. Ever.

With the police officers past them, Travelle climbs to his feet and darts across the alley towards an open back gate.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

DEVANTE (CONT'D)
 (fierce whisper) Come back, Travelle.

Travelle keeps running.

DEVANTE (CONT'D)
 Travelle.

Travelle slips through the gate, banging it slightly as he disappears. OFFICER LINDSEY turns toward the gate at the sound of the FENCE RATTLE.

OFFICER LINDSEY
 Hey you. Stop.

2 EXT. BACKYARD. SOUTH CENTRAL--NIGHT 2

He darts through an obstacle course of junk and climbs over another fence, landing in:

3 EXT. MISS GINNY'S BACKYARD--NIGHT 3

Travelle scurries across the yard, but ducks back behind the house, as a police car, with its lights flashing, cruises the street in front of Miss Ginny's house. Travelle sees a half open window in the back of the house. He pulls himself inside.

4 INT. BEDROOM. MISS GINNY'S HOUSE--NIGHT 4

Travelle catches his breath in the cramped semi-dark bedroom. No one is in the bed and it is covered with boxes. Anxious searchlights poke through the window before disappearing. Travelle pulls a gun from his pants and slips into the:

5 INT. BATHROOM. MISS GINNY'S HOUSE--NIGHT 5

Moving through the bathroom, he emerges into the:

6 INT. LIVING ROOM. MISS GINNY'S HOUSE--NIGHT 6

Instead of couches and coffee tables, a large hospital bed dominates the dimly lit room. Laying on the bed, hooked up to IVs and monitors is MISS GINNY, a fragile white woman in her nineties, barely holding on to life. Clear plastic tubes run oxygen to her nostrils.

She wears a stained and ratty gown and a frayed blanket is pulled up as far as her chest. Remnants of past meals are dried on her chin and her unkempt, thinning hair looks long estranged from a comb.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

At the side of the hospital bed, CRYSTAL (20) roughly forces four pills into Miss Ginny's mouth, all the while laughing into the cordless telephone that is crunched between her shoulder and neck. Crystal opens Miss Ginny's mouth with one hand and pours a glass of water down her throat with the other.

CRYSTAL
(to Miss Ginny) Swallow.
(into phone) You don't owe her nothing.
Nothing at all.

Crystal forces Miss Ginny's mouth closed, squeezing her jaw tightly.

CRYSTAL (CONT'D)
(to Miss Ginny) Swallow.
(into phone) I've got to call you back.

Crystal hangs up the phone and leans in close to Miss Ginny's face. Her thumb and fingers dig into Miss Ginny's jaw.

CRYSTAL (CONT'D)
If you know what's good for you, Miss
Ginny, you'll swallow.

Crystal slaps Miss Ginny's on the cheek. Miss Ginny swallows slowly.

CRYSTAL (CONT'D)
All you had to do was swallow. Was that
so hard?

Crystal pushes Miss Ginny's head back against the pillow. Travelle, watching from the hallway, shifts his weight and accidentally bumps a picture that sits on a small table.

Crystal looks up and sees Travelle. Her eyes widen in fear. She drops the pill bottle on the bed and dashes into the darkened kitchen just off of the living room.

Travelle raises his gun and hurries after her to the kitchen, but stops short at the door. The kitchen is pitch black and full of CLATTERING and CRASHING, which abruptly stops.

CRYSTAL (CONT'D)
I've got a knife, asshole. You come in
here and you're going to get stabbed.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

He looks deep into the void of the kitchen, but can't make anything out. He reaches inside the door and feels on the walls, but can't feel a light switch. Travelle walks over to Miss Ginny and puts his gun to her head.

TRAVELLE

I'm going to count to three. You come out or I shoot the old lady.
One....Two....

Travelle cocks the gun.

TRAVELLE (CONT'D)

...three.

He waits for a moment. Nothing. She called his bluff. He gently releases the hammer on his gun and sighs. His eyes meet Miss Ginny's for a moment before he turns them back to the kitchen. Miss Ginny palms the bottle of pills that Crystal dropped on the bed.

He slowly enters the:

7

INT. KITCHEN--NIGHT

7

And advances towards her. Something begins bothering his face. He swats awkwardly at it with his free hand, while still trying to point his gun at Crystal. He finally grabs hold of it. And pulls down. CLICK. The room is illuminated. The kitchen light is on a string that hangs in the middle of the room.

Crystal rushes at him with her arm poised to strike. He grabs her arm and pins her against the kitchen counter. After a moment, she stops resisting. In her hand is a spatula.

Travelle notices a roll of duct tape in one the drawers Crystal opened in her search for a knife. He grabs the tape and steers her back into the:

8

INT. LIVING ROOM--NIGHT

8

As they walk past Miss Ginny...

TRAVELLE

You were going to let me kill the old woman?

CRYSTAL

She's got cancer.

He sits Crystal down in the corner of the room.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CRYSTAL (CONT'D)

She'll be dead in six months. You would have done her a favor.

He puts down his gun, and tapes her hands and feet together.

TRAVELLE

You her nurse?

CRYSTAL

I make seven dollars an hour. More like a baby-sitter.

He covers her mouth with tape. He spies Crystal's purse and dumps the contents out, but finds only a couple of bills. Travelle walks to Miss Ginny's bedside, looks her over. Sunken cheeks. Wrinkled, sweaty skin. Her face marked with pain. He prods her in the side with his gun.

TRAVELLE

I know you got some money. Where you keep it?

Miss Ginny slowly reaches out and takes hold of Travelle's forearm--the one holding the gun. She studies the gun carefully and then looks up at Travelle.

TRAVELLE (CONT'D)

Take your hand off me.

His words don't deter her. He takes his free hand, grabs her hand and peels it off him.

TRAVELLE (CONT'D)

Don't touch me again.

Miss Ginny's intensity unsettles him for a moment. He looks up and notices open curtains. He goes to the window and pulls the curtains closed before peeking out through a small opening.

9

EXT. STREET--NIGHT

9

A police car with its light turning sits in the middle of the street. Up in the sky, a helicopter circles overhead, it's searchlight skimming over rooftops and alleys.

10 INT. LIVING ROOM--NIGHT 10

He pulls the curtain shut and heads toward Miss Ginny, stopping to pick up the photograph that fell earlier. It shows a younger Miss Ginny in an evening gown, wearing an expensive-looking necklace and earrings.

11 INT. BEDROOM--NIGHT 11

He looks out the bedroom window.

12 EXT. ALLEY--NIGHT 12

Soft red and blue light emitted from an unseen police car bounces off the sides of houses.

13 INT. BEDROOM--NIGHT 13

He closes the curtains and turns on the light. He empties the small little decorative boxes from the dresser top onto the bed. He opens Miss Ginny's dresser drawers and rifles through them one-by-one. The larger drawers at the bottom he turns upside down, spilling their contents on the floor.

Frustrated, he moves to the bed, gets on his knees and looks underneath. He slides his arm between the mattresses and feels around, but there's nothing.

He walks over to two paintings hanging on the wall and runs his fingertips against the back side of each frame. Something on the back of the second frame catches his fingertips. He tilts the painting back from the wall. Taped to the back of the frame, he discovers a small key.

He examines the key, but is interrupted by frantic BEEPING from the living room.

14 INT. LIVING ROOM--NIGHT 14

Travelle strides into the room and looks around. Miss Ginny is wheezing and gasping for breath. Her body writhes spasmodically. Travelle relaxes when he sees the beeping is only coming from Miss Ginny's medical equipment. He walks to Miss Ginny's bedside.

TRAVELLE

Miss Ginny, where's this key go? I want to help you, but I'm not running a charity.

Miss Ginny's face twists grotesquely as she struggles for air.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Travelle walks over to some cabinets and begins going through the contents, periodically glancing back at Miss Ginny to gauge her reaction.

TRAVELLE (CONT'D)

This looks like it opens a box or something. You want someone to help you, you got to help them. That's how the world works.

She continues to wheeze and gasp, with a panicked look in her eyes.

Finishing with the cabinet, he disappears into the kitchen. He eventually re-emerges with small scissors.

He cuts the duct tape that binds Crystal's hands and feet and pockets the scissors.

Crystal goes to Miss Ginny's side, turns off the alarm and switches Miss Ginny's oxygen cables to a fresh tank. Miss Ginny's body stops twitching and her breathing slowly returns to normal. Travelle drifts over to Miss Ginny's bedside.

TRAVELLE (CONT'D)

Is she alright?

CRYSTAL

Her oxygen tank was empty.

Travelle studies Miss Ginny's dry, cracked lips and red, watery eyes and a look of pity crosses his face. He notices Miss Ginny looking past him and he looks behind him just in time to see Crystal slide a hypodermic needle up her sleeve.

He points his gun at Crystal and grabs her arm, shaking the needle out onto the floor.

TRAVELLE

Were you going to stick me with that?

He walks her back to a chair in the corner. He sits her down and tapes her arms and legs back up. A siren WAILS in front of the house. Travelle dashes to the window, just as a police car speeds past the house and down the block.

He looks relieved as it keeps going and closes the curtains. He notices Miss Ginny eyes are locked on him. As he paces back and forth, her eyes follow him.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

TRAVELLE (CONT'D)

What are you looking at?

CRYSTAL

She can't talk. Stroke or something.

Travelle resigns himself to Miss Ginny's gaze and puts a last piece of tape over Crystal mouth.

He notices Devante's blood dried on his sleeve. He heads to the:

15 INT. KITCHEN--NIGHT 15

Travelle holds the sleeve under the water and scrubs maniacally at the stain with a sponge. It lightens, but doesn't come off. He adds soap. The stain still doesn't budge.

16 INT. LIVING ROOM--NIGHT 16

Travelle returns to the living room and finds Miss Ginny in the middle of a coughing fit that grows progressively worse. He sits down in a chair and watches her. She begins vomiting. He continues to sit, watching her gag and choke, until he can't stand it any more.

He walks to her side, but recoils at the sight and smell of her. He looks over at Crystal, thinks about letting her clean Miss Ginny, but decides against it.

He hesitatingly rolls her over on her side. As he rolls her over, he sees the sheets under her are stained with blood and pus.

Her exposed back, only partially covered by her half-tied hospital gown, is covered with bed sores that have eaten through her flesh.

He walks around to her face and gently wipes it with a towel. He reaches in her mouth and pulls out more vomit with his fingers.

Something in the vomit catches his eye. The gooey mess is full of pills. He sees the empty bottle next to Miss Ginny's bed. Miss Ginny looks ashamed and averts her eyes.

He finishes cleaning her and rolls her carefully back into her resting position. She smiles weakly at him. He wipes sweat from her brow with the towel.

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CONTINUED:

He sees a radio on a small table next to her bed and turns it on. THRASH METAL begins to play.

TRAVELLE

You listen to this?

He smiles at her and then begins to turn the dial. He stops on a Big Band station that is playing "Sassafras." Miss Ginny smiles. Travelle goes back to looking out the window and poking at the stain on his shirt sleeve. The song ends.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

And that was "Sassafras" by Eduardo Penna and his Orchestra. A manhunt continues in South L.A. for two men involved in an armed robbery earlier this evening. The suspects are believed to be still in the area and police are asking local residents to report any suspicious activity. We now return to more music on K-O-L-D.

Music begins to play again.

TRAVELLE

(rhetorical) Miss Ginny, you wouldn't have any men's clothes, would you?

MISS GINNY

(struggling to speak) In the bedroom closet.

TRAVELLE

You can talk?

MISS GINNY

(with difficulty) When I want to.

17 INT. BEDROOM--NIGHT 17

Travelle opens the bedroom closet. Womens dresses. Slacks. Scarves. In the far corner of the closet, he sees a couple of old suits and shirts.

18 INT. LIVING ROOM--NIGHT 18

Miss Ginny snoozes quietly amidst her medical apparatus.

TRAVELLE

Miss Ginny. What do you think?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Miss Ginny looks up and sees Travelle in a tight golf shirt, plaid golfing pants that looks four sizes too small and holding a putter.

A smile slowly spreads across her face.

MISS GINNY

You look quite sharp. Almost as good as my husband.

Travelle smiles at her praise. She begins coughing, but gets her breath back.

TRAVELLE

Where's your husband?

MISS GINNY

He died four years ago.

TRAVELLE

You got kids?

MISS GINNY

No. He was all the family I had.

Miss Ginny straightens her blanket and falls silent.

TRAVELLE

I'll take a chance with my own clothes.

19 INT. BEDROOM--NIGHT

19

Travelle pulls his jeans back on and cuts the sleeve of his stained shirt off at the elbow. He turns the sleeve between his fingers for a moment before tossing it in the trash. He looks at the shirt's asymmetry, trying to decide what to do. He cuts the other sleeve off, just above the elbow.

He puts his short-sleeve shirt on and notices the old photograph of Miss Ginny again. He picks it up, but this time really looks at Miss Ginny's face and takes in the whole picture.

20 INT. LIVING ROOM--NIGHT

20

Travelle emerges from the bedroom and shows Miss Ginny the picture.

TRAVELLE

Miss Ginny. This you?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

She take the picture from him, though her hand shakes uncontrollably. She steadies the picture with her other hand.

MISS GINNY

A long time ago. (pause) You don't recognize me?

Her face saddens as she looks at the photograph.

MISS GINNY (CONT'D)

When I was young I wanted to live forever....

She hands him back the picture and looks away from him sadly.

MISS GINNY (CONT'D)

Please turn off the radio.

Travelle turns it off.

MISS GINNY (CONT'D)

You said that you would help me if I helped you.

TRAVELLE

Yeah.

MISS GINNY

Since you want to know, that key is for a box in the pantry.

21 INT. HALLWAY--NIGHT 21

Travelle rummages through the hall closet.

22 INT. LIVING ROOM--NIGHT 22

He returns with a battered, old strong box. He sets it on the edge of the bed and pulls up a chair. He slides the key in. It doesn't turn immediately, so he works it in the lock.

MISS GINNY

I helped you. Now you help me.

The key turns with a CLICK.

TRAVELLE

What do you want from me?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MISS GINNY

I'm very tired. Tired of suffering. I
want you to help me stop suffering.
Please.

Travelle opens the unlocked box. He pulls out two
passports, a deed for the house, old stamps and various
other papers.

TRAVELLE

Where's your jewelry?

She looks at him confused.

TRAVELLE (CONT'D)

The stuff in the picture.

MISS GINNY

I sold my jewelry years ago to pay bills.

He empties the box on the bed.

TRAVELLE

There's no money here neither.

Finding nothing of value, he knocks the contents of the
box off the bed.

MISS GINNY

You asked me for the key to the box and I
gave it to you.

TRAVELLE

Well don't you got money hidden here
somewhere? Look, Miss Ginny, I got to lay
low for a while and I need money to do
that. You must have something.

Miss Ginny looks at him sadly and shakes her head.

TRAVELLE (CONT'D)

You got nothing? I thought you were going
to help me.

Travelle sits there stunned.

TRAVELLE (CONT'D)

You know what? Fuck this.

MISS GINNY

Please help me. Don't leave me like
this.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

A tear rolls down her face.

TRAVELLE

You think I should help you just to be nice? No one ever does shit just to be nice. Not in this life.

Miss Ginny turns sadly away from him. Travelle stands to his feet and glances out the window.

TRAVELLE (CONT'D)

...maybe in your world. Not in mine.

He crosses to the door, opens it and starts to leave. He looks suspiciously out the front door, then pulls the gun from his pants and leaves it inside the door.

TRAVELLE (CONT'D)

Take care of yourself.

Travelle slips out.

23 EXT. MISS GINNY'S HOUSE--NIGHT 23

Travelle looks cautiously around as he makes his way down the steps and walks toward the street. He turns to look at the house for a moment, then slowly turns and keeps going.

24 EXT. STREET--NIGHT 24

As he turns onto the sidewalk and starts walking, a car parked two hundred yards behind him turns on its headlights and pulls away from the curb.

This nondescript sedan creeps slowly up behind him. Just as he is about to cross a driveway, red and blue lights on the dashboard and back window of the car start flashing and the unmarked police car, carrying two officers, pulls into the driveway and blocks the sidewalk in front of Travelle.

A plain-clothed OFFICER STILES jumps from the passenger seat and points his gun at Travelle.

STILES

Police! Stop right there. Put your hands behind your head.

Travelle hesitates, glancing around for an escape route.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

STILES (CONT'D)

Don't even think about running.

He grabs Travelle by the back of his shirt and pushes him over the trunk of the car and cuffs him. The officer swiftly pats him down.

STILES (CONT'D)

Where do you think you're going?

TRAVELLE

I ain't done nothing. What do you want?

STILES

Save it. We caught your buddy a few minutes ago in the alley.

Stiles finishes with the search and turns Travelle around.

TRAVELLE

Look. I was just going for a walk.

Stiles looks Travelle in the eye, sizing him up.

STILES

Your boy is cooperating with us. It's in your best interest to cooperate more than him, if you understand me.

TRAVELLE

I don't know what you're talking about.

Stiles can't make up his mind about Travelle. He pulls a walkie-talkie from his pocket.

STILES

(into the walkie) This is Stiles. I've got a guy around the corner who fits your description.

TRAVELLE

Everyone in the neighborhood fits the description.

Stiles looks at Travelle, while pondering that thought.

STILES

Are you still waiting on that ambulance?
(pause) Great. Yeah.
(to Travelle) I want you to come with me.

25

EXT. ALLEY--NIGHT

25

The unmarked police car pulls up next a marked police car parked near the dumpster. Devante sits on the ground next to the dumpster with his arm handcuffed to the fence. The officers haven't moved him. Officer #1 walks the handcuffed Travelle over to Devante.

STILES

Is this your partner?

Devante studies Travelle face, then glances at Stiles and shakes his head slowly

STILES (CONT'D)

Look. If we tell the D.A. you cooperated, he cuts your time in half. Don't cooperate, and we put the murder on you. The balls in your court.

Devante thinks for a moment.

DEVANTE

No. That's not him.

OFFICER #1

Don't lie to us?

Devante looks at Travelle, then Stiles.

STILES

You want to do all that time by yourself.

Devante slowly makes up his mind.

DEVANTE

That's not him. I'm not going to say he is if he ain't.

Stiles kicks the still-cuffed Travelle behind the knees, buckling his legs. Travelle's knees hit the pavement and he wobbles awkwardly, trying to keep from falling over onto Devante.

STILES

Take a closer look?

DEVANTE

If this was my partner, you think I'd protect him. He left me in the street. I got no reason to do a damn thing for him.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Devante turns and looks off into the night sky.

TRAVELLE

You heard him. I'm not the guy you're looking for.

OFFICER #1

Shut up.

TRAVELLE

Look. I live over there. You saw my house. You know where to find me.

Stiles makes up his mind.

STILES

We'll be watching you.

TRAVELLE

Watch all you want.

Officer #1 removes Travelle's handcuffs. Travelle searches Devante's face desperately, trying to read his expression. Devante glances at him slowly. Sadly. But without malice. Then he turns away.

As Travelle climbs from off his knees, he puts his left hand on a piece of wet ground. He looks at his hand. It is half-coated with blood from Devante's leg. An ambulance arrives and paramedics load Devante onto a stretcher.

Travelle walks quickly up the alley. As he reaches the street, a caravan of the two police cars and the ambulance race past him and turn onto the main street. He watches them head off into the night. He looks down at the blood drying on his left hand.

26 EXT. MISS GINNY'S HOUSE--NIGHT 26

Travelle walks up the sidewalk to Miss Ginny's house and opens the door.

27 INT. LIVING ROOM. MISS GINNY'S HOUSE--NIGHT 27

He picks up his gun near the door and walks past a sleeping Crystal. He walks over to Miss Ginny who also snoozes in her bed.

He sits down next to Miss Ginny and strokes her hair gently. She doesn't awaken. He picks up the emptied bottle of pills and plays with it between his fingers for a moment.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The photograph of Miss Ginny in her younger days rests on her chest. He picks it up and compares "Miss Ginny past" with "Miss Ginny present".

Her breathing is labored and raspy. Miss Ginny stirs and opens her eyes.

TRAVELLE

Are you sure?

Miss Ginny nods. He points the gun at Miss Ginny and holds it there for a moment.

Slowly, he lowers the gun and grabs a towel. He throws the towel loosely over his hand holding the gun. He places the gun, covered by a towel against her chest, takes a deep breath and pulls the trigger. A muffled BOOM.

Her body convulses and her eyes open wide. There's a calmness in her eyes. As her head settles back into the pillow and her breathing stops, something resembling a smile crosses her face. Her eyes close. He watches her for a few moments.

Crystal begins making incomprehensible noises from underneath her gag, but Travelle ignores her. Travelle slides his hand out from between the pillows. There is fresh blood on his right hand.

He heads into the:

28 INT. KITCHEN--NIGHT 28

At the sink, Travelle stares at the dried blood on his left hand and the fresh blood on his right. He sticks both hands under the running water and washes them. He examines his newly clean hands.

29 INT. LIVING ROOM--NIGHT 29

Returning to the living room, he picks up Miss Ginny's photograph and heads toward the door. Crystal squirms violently on the floor mumbling incoherently. He pulls back the piece of tape to permit her to speak.

CRYSTAL

You had no right to do that. How dare you?---

He puts the tape back over her mouth and shakes his head remorsefully. He slips out the front door.

30

EXT. STREET--SUNRISE

30

Travelle disappears into the new day.

FADE TO BLACK.