

"A Quarterly  
Published Strictly  
Quarterly"

# Works & Days

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Spring 2012

Nº 2

## Against Specialization

by Luke Cissell

No, this is not a fascist call to conformity. Quite the contrary. It just so happens that in today's Looking-Glass world, *specialization* itself is that great conformer – a sort of religion that everyone has been baptized into without realizing. Our world, now so crowded with highly-trained specialists, is short on breathing room for any seeking a bold new platform from which to say, "I am here."

{Cont'd}

## Sierras

by Johnny Williams



## Building Three:

*Strata Comma Philo*

*Gamma: On What is*

*Emergent*

by Eric Bland

## Recipes:

Seasonal Ingredients,  
Perennial Methods

by Ashley Suzan and Eric Wines

## Teeth

by Rebecca Bersohn



"At dawn get to your fields, and one day they'll be full." - Hesiod



## Tidal Basin

by Michael Hodgson



## A Call to Practice

by Sarah Marriage

Ten years ago, when I began to dream of becoming a woodworker, I didn't know exactly what that would mean. I didn't know, not for certain, that I wanted to work with wood in particular. I was drawn to the scale and to the accessibility of the material and the tools it requires, but I didn't even know what working with real wood felt like, what wood smelled like, outside the formaldehyde spiked aroma of a Home Depot lumber aisle.

{Cont'd}

## Cosmography

by Luke Cissell

## Gears

by Prue Hyman



## Prism Series

by Field Kallop



## My Own Private Bayreuth

by Arturas Bumšteinas

After enquiring at the Bayreuther Festspiele box office, I was sent a letter explaining that the wait list for tickets is currently nine years long.

{J}

## Chain Study

by Penelope August



## Our Trespasses

Part Two of Three

by Cara Marsh Sheffler

The bar three cornfields from Downtown was called The Manger, so named because it stood where the Nativity Scene was staged during Prohibition.

The pair arrived around 10pm and confusion was instantaneous: Gabe was mistaken for his high schooldoppelganger, who had—of course—stayed local, granting the couple immediate, completely misplaced intimacy. It also allowed for the commotion that Nat's conspicuously urban presence provoked to be put to words...

{Cont'd}

## Madrone Box

by Sarah Marriage





# Our Trespasses

## *A Pilgrimage in Three Parts*

"As I was walking, I saw a sign there  
And that sign said, 'NO TRESPASSING';  
But on the other side, it didn't say nothing!  
Now that side was made for you and me!"

—Woodie Guthrie, "This Land Is Your Land"

"The moderns, carrying little baggage of the kind that Shelly called  
'merely cultural'...are the true pioneers...Their computers hum no  
ghostly feedback of Home, Sweet Home. How marvelously free they are!  
How unutterably deprived!"

—Wallace Stegner, *Angle of Repose*

[READ PART ONE HERE](#)

## II

The bar three cornfields from Downtown was called The Manger, so named because it stood where the Nativity Scene was staged during Prohibition.

The pair arrived around 10pm and confusion was instantaneous: Gabe was mistaken for his high school doppelganger, who had—of course—stayed local, granting the couple immediate, completely misplaced intimacy. It also allowed for the commotion that Nat's conspicuously urban presence provoked to be put to words:

—Shit, Hank! Where'd ya find a pretty thing like that?

—Look, sweetheart: whatever he's told ya, it's a lie!

Roars of laughter and violent backslapping ensued until their acquaintances spied Gabe's newest tattoo which crept just below his rolled-up sleeve: "HE WHO WAS BORN TO HANG NEED NOT FEAR DROWNING." Clearly, they reasoned, *if this feller's sayin' he was born to hang, Hank'd better watch out for that Flood!*

Gabe ordered them each a beer and the mood settled into the awkward banter Nat had anticipated. *Gabe does not fit in at all*, she mused, *Maybe the most astounding feat of hospitality he's pulled off on this trip was getting mistaken for a native son who does*. Again, she scolded herself for thinking this, but she did not go so far as to tell herself it somehow could not be true—that this feeling of distance from the locals had to be hers and hers alone.





# Our Trespasses

by Cara Marsh Sheffler

Nº 2, Spring 2012

She looked her boyfriend over and noticed that just a few days back home had given Gabe the local yokel tan and, even beneath the strategically rumpled flannel, the chronically late five o'clock shadow, and the \$200 jeans, Gabe had a certain bone structure that came from here. No matter how much he learned about wine in this lifetime, no one would ever mistake Gabe for European. The bartender was now impressed that Gabe had made it to the City—in this economy, no less. His awe was demonstrable in the way he strained to project nonchalance, yet proceeded through round after round of questioning. What kind of food did the Blue Ox serve? What neighborhood is it in? How many folks do they seat a night? Gabe talked his best talk, hastening to add that while, yes, he was a bartender, he was hoping to open his own place in the next few years.

—Well, hot damn! Best of luck to ya, son.

With that, they knocked beer bottles.

This bartender was so bowled over, Nat thought, yet he had the same exact job. The same job! This led Nat to wonder, *What the hell makes Gabe's job so special? What the hell does he think he's showing off anyway? And to whom?*

Yet, what really chafed was that paltry distinction between *being* a bartender and *hoping* to be a restaurateur. Nat could say with certitude that she was a photographer. It certainly was not how she paid all of her bills and she was almost never paid to take the pictures she actually wanted to take, but the bottom line was this: Nat took pictures; therefore, she was a photographer. Gabe made drinks; therefore, he was a bartender. *Simple enough, no?* Why this denial of his current job? Why did he always have to qualify what he did? Why did everyone in the City seem to do that all the time? Nat had tolerated Gabe spacing out all weekend at the wake and the funeral, but this small, quite common vanity was the last straw.

She knew that small, quite common vanity was driving him crazy and, more to the point, her, too. Gabe, she thought, *you've got your restaurateur ambitions, but really you're ALL bartender, aren't you?* She could have blushed with the malice, she was so fed up—momentarily, always momentarily, then it's all *fine* again, all because *she makes it FINE*.

Perhaps sensing the heat, Gabe slid her another cold one. Soon, she was a couple of beers ahead of him. The bartender took notice,

—Right. So, you're from here, but ya left; what's she about?

Gabe began the cleaned-up story of their relationship's genesis, the dirt plainly visible between the lines, but just as plainly unspoken. Yes, they met at the Ox. Yes, they realized they had some mutual acquaintances. Yes, Nat started coming around more and more and, before long—*just like that!*—they were dating. What Gabe didn't mention was that Nat's boyfriend at the time was among their mutual acquaintances.

The Blue Ox was decidedly the flavor of the week, but these things always fade at some point. What would happen after that? A period of uncertainty as Gabe moved on, doomed to be repeated as he followed the party every time it moved? Nat knew the type: casually, oh maybe ten years on, they would mention the wife or girlfriend at home with the newborn and show some photos on their iPhones between drink orders. A good bartender spends his talent on observation so discriminating and arcane that it renders itself useless outside of its singular habitat—its *scene*. Gabe's job was the reason Nat had met him, but she had grown to hate nothing more about him, and the hours weren't the half of it.





# Our Trespasses

She felt developmentally delayed to the point of shame as she spent time with Madison. Madison was so curious about her life in the City, but she also had no need for it. What was it that Nat needed? What kept her so trapped in this place people used to come to so that they could be free or reinvent themselves? Sure, she went to lots of openings and socialized. Sure, she worked alone at her craft to the point of madness. Sure, she made ends meet. But mostly, Nat fucked Gabe. Her greatest success as an adult was probably her sex life, so she had no choice but to be proud of it. This was probably why she could stay up with Gabe naked until noon after a night out and feel like a total loser.

*Sure Mom, still waiting to hear if I got into that group show, but—guess what?—we broke the bed last night! Really! Kid you not!*

All right, she hadn't actually told her mother about that, but she had gotten a little sloppy over a bottle of red and bragged to one of her friends. She told the tale of how Gabe broke the bed when she had been the one on top when the headboard came apart in her hands. Why did she make that revision? Of what was she trying to convince that friend? Of what was she trying to convince herself in some sexually sated, slurring voice?

A few months back, she'd seen a photograph of the point where the Rio Negro meets the muddy Amazon in Brazil, a spot called "The Meeting of the Waters." This immediately made her dub the spot where Gabe's chestnut-brown hair met his slightly reddish beard "The Meeting of the Hairlines." She had never shared this observation with anyone—it was so dumb—but she always thought about it every time she mused that one hairline's tide was doomed to ever wane.

*Waxing, waning, balding, death, The Flood.*

She probably wouldn't be able to afford another trip out of the City this year. Then again, if she got a few good pictures, who knows what she'd be able to afford that year? Who could say where she might be sent or where she might have to go, but there was the matter of getting those pictures, of delivering on exactly what she had yet to break to Gabe... And just how would she do that? When? Would she at all? A sensation rustled her out of her half-buzzed reverie, transfixed as she was by the neon in the jukebox. It took a whole bar of Dwight Yoakam before she recognized the vibrating of her phone, alerting her to a text message—probably from Wiseman. Had Gabe heard her phone or had she alone felt it? Nat was suddenly distracted from this frantic line of thought by the unmistakable feeling of being talked about in the third person by someone less than two feet away:

—So that's how you met *her*, a scrapey voice twanged in awe.

Gabe's arm was now completely encircled about Nat's waist and she leaned back into his chest as he stood behind her perch upon the barstool, stroking her collarbone with his opposite thumb. His arm stayed put even as he guided her across the parking lot, waving good-bye in a long rectangle of light that cut across loose gravel to someone else's misremembered friends.

It agreed with her to feel like a possession for some reason—to make sense in a scheme of things. Nat's mind did not approve of this feeling, but her body begged to differ.

\* \* \*





# Our Trespasses

The next morning, she had him all to herself for the first time in weeks.

Gabe's parents were out of the house and Nat insisted on the shower, not even giving him a chance in bed, ready though he was. She threw her pillow at Gabe, jumped out of bed stark naked, and ran down the hallway to the bathroom. Gabe chased after her, throwing off the top sheet that had somehow wound itself about him like a toga.

In the bathroom, she was already running the water. Gabe grabbed her, picked her up, and threw her onto the counter next to the sink, where he pried open her legs and went down on her until the room was so full of steam they could hardly see each other. Nat returned the favor as Gabe moderated the water temperature. Once that was accomplished, he ran his hands down her face and through her hair so that she pulled back and he could lift her up from under her arms.

Nat could have watched the way running water sheeted off of Gabe's torso for hours on end, but she did not get to look for long that morning: after the two got suitably wet, Gabe turned her around, bent her forward, and fucked her with such force that Nat had to brace herself against the towel rack mounted on the wall beside the shower curtain. After a near-slip, Gabe lowered them both to the bottom of the bathtub and Nat turned to face him, wrapping her legs around his kneeling frame. Over the next 20 minutes, she nearly ripped the soap dish out of the wall.

Afterwards, they sprawled out alongside one another and marked the individual drops of water as they fell seven feet to splash their bodies. Gabe was sure his kneecaps would never recover from mornings like this, but he hardly cared. He kissed Nat on the forehead and reached up to get some shampoo, throwing a gob the size of an ice-cream scoop on her head. She laughed and made a grab for the soap to attack him with, and so it was they bathed.

After Gabe stepped out of the shower to shave and wrapped a towel around himself, Nat remained in the bathroom, muttering something about how her conditioner needed to act (which might have been code for having to shave her legs). Gabe strode out to the den to see Nat's iPhone was buzzing.

It was Wiseman.

Worse, at some point in the past 48 hours, Nat had turned off the preview function on the phone, so he couldn't even see the text message's contents.

Once again, his mouth went dry and the backs of his hands went cold. The blood rushed to his face so fast it bottlenecked around his throat and he could not be sure whether to gasp or vomit or choke attempting to do both at once. His ears rang as though so much static were bombarding their insides like wild, painful pellets of hail. He steadied himself with clammy palms.

*Would today be the day? Now that the body was in the ground, was it time to dump his sorry ass? Maybe she might wait until the airport, while they were checking her two dozen camera bags? Why was she torturing him like this? Why not just come out with it? Did she have a shred of decency or did he no longer deserve that much respect, since he had dragged out so much for so long...ohgodohgodohgod...Was she formulating her break-up speech as her fucking conditioner "acted"? What else could she be formulating in there?*

Now it was his iPhone's turn—always in pairs! However, Gabe had a real, live phone call on his hands: it was his manager. Now he knew he was about to faint.

*What could it be? What could it possibly be?*





# Our Trespasses

A bolt of adrenaline brutally illuminated his field of vision; Gabe grew frantic. Was he about to be taken to task from 1,000 miles away for reasons his own blasé sense of routine damned him never to comprehend? His comprehension was wasted in the overdrive of these pre-dawn panic attacks so that he would then spend the entire shift dulling them with any substance at hand, trying not to remember they would come again for him shortly. In such a state, how easy it was to trip and to wake up the next day assuming he had simply lain down, rather than stumbling horribly in front of a crowd, falling hard in front of everyone who supported him...

*What had he said? What had he done? Who would finally come to punish him?*

The phone was one ring away from going straight to voicemail; Gabe snatched it up.

—H—hey, man.

—Hey, Gabe, so sorry to bother you. Is this an okay time? I was hoping I'd go straight to voicemail.

—Naw, bro: it's okay. Shoot!

—Are you sure? You aren't in the middle of anything with your family? Really, you can hang up and let me go to voicemail. This doesn't need to be a conversation.

Gabe exhaled and told his manager the funeral had been the previous day and he was planning to come back the following afternoon. And, as long as he had him on the phone, would it be possible to pick up extra shifts Monday and Tuesday?

—Aw, Gabe, I wish you could...

Gabe's stomach re-knotted, until the coil was sundered by surprise—or, more precisely, confusion:

—You see, we've got a locust infestation on our hands.

Gabe thought he had heard incorrectly, that the air back home had already filled his head with farms, firearms, and brimstone.

—You mean *cockroaches*?

—No: *locusts*.

—You're shittin' me.

—Well you know that Dylan song, "The Day of the Locusts"? I read an article that says that our locusts are *just like* those locusts! Actually, they aren't locusts at all: they are *Magicicadas* that get buried and reemerge after 13 or 17 years. Dylan sang about the 17-year locust, what entomologists call The Great Eastern Brood...

Gabe's eyes glazed and his ears rang—perhaps with the racket of rutting cicadas—until his manager cut to the chase: the restaurant would be closed all week. The City inspector needed to drop by for a visit before they could reopen and that was that. The owner was pretty sure the whole issue would be resolved in a six-day window, but no one was taking any chances. Gabe's manager was very sorry about the inconvenience, but warmly encouraged him to take a little vacation, adding that he certainly deserved one.





# Our Trespasses

Gabe smiled tightly as he tried not to curse,

—Well, ain't it funny how we get what we *deserve* more often than what we want!

Gabe's manager reassured him that things would be fine in a week: plenty of restaurants needed the same inspection and there was likely to be little fallout in the food press or with the Department of Sanitation.

The way his manager entirely sidestepped any mention of the previous weekend positively galled Gabe.

It terrified him more than if he had called Gabe up to lecture him. Somewhere in his gut, Gabe knew he was being left to twist in the wind, so he confronted his executioner head-on:

—Does he actually think that *I stole it*?

Silence. Silence so profound, Gabe momentarily doubted he was on the phone with somebody back East.

A siren 1,000 miles away from Gabe finally cut through it.

—Does he? You know I'd *NEVER*—

—Gabe, I can't. Not now; I'm at the Ox. Just get some rest. Relax and we'll deal with it when you get back. You know I'm in your corner and you *know* how he gets. Just give it a little time to blow over and we can—

—How'm I supposed to “relax” when—

—Gabe, I know! I'm working on it. Please: *trust me*.

Another long pause. Gabe heard his own breath—thin with dread and serrated with fear—pulsing into the receiver.

—I just want to say, y'all are like family to me and I really want to be a part of the new restaurant or whatever happens next. Y'all mean the world to me.

This was what Gabe had wanted to say, even fantasized about announcing during a toast some cozy night after closing at their favored local dive. He was satisfied that—however reduced and pathetic the setting—someone had heard it this week.

His manager cleared his throat.

—Gabe, you're really—you're one hell of a guy. And I...I really *appreciate* that and you know I'm in your corner. Tell me you know that, Gabe.

Gabe's breath returned to some semblance of its normal rhythms,

—I do. And I appreciate you goin' to bat for me. I'm not always the easiest cause to champion.

They shared an overly hearty, mutually drawn-out laugh, until Gabe's manager sighed—*ah, shit*—and hurriedly said,

—Hey listen, I've really got to run right now, but thanks for everything and remember: *we're in your corner*. K, bro?





—Thanks, man.

The two said their good-byes and Gabe stared at the phone for a while, his towel slowly slackening around his waist, one tired terrycloth loop at a time. Nat emerged from the bathroom in an explosion of steam and droplets of expensive conditioner.

—News from the office?

—Yeah, we're closed all week. That brings me to *ten days* of missed shifts. Christ! That's over a third of this month's work!

Gabe gave the run-down to Nat, failing to mention second half of the conversation.

—Locusts?

—Technically *Magicicadas*.

Nat bit her lip and waited for the punch line. None was forthcoming.

—Ten days! I cannot believe this! I cannot *afford* this!

His true, deep panic crept up over the temporary financial one onto which he had to project all of his emotions, at least while Nat was paying attention. He felt his grasp slipping as his panic grew disproportionately large to the cause he had assigned for her benefit. He had to quickly turn it around into terms she could understand and instantly seized on the perfect ones,

—I mean—it's not the end of the world, but I just thought with you lookin' for apartments, I'd get all my ducks in order and this just...this just fucks *everything* up again.

He dropped down onto a couch and Nat stroked his damp hair for a while until she decided to join him. She sat down gently.

Nat's own pulse was quickening. However odd his mention of moving in together seemed—and only a week prior she would have been struck dumb by the incongruity—she moved past it and clearly saw the moment was hers to seize: *she could convince him to go on a road trip; she could get her pictures, after all!*

She needed to stifle her enthusiasm, rein it in. Gabe was clearly upset. She did not entirely believe that he was so upset about the apartment hunt, but he was upset about something and—*who knew?*—maybe it was just that. At any rate, she had to step delicately, very carefully...

—You know, I was still supposed to be away for half of this week with my family and now that you don't need to be in the City either...

Gabe looked at her hopefully; she continued,

—Maybe this is our chance to take a little vacation together! You got those "grieving family" tickets anyway, right? I used frequent flier miles, so let's just push back our dates! I'm sure it won't cost that much.

—What do you mean "just push back the dates"? You wanna *stay here*? Babe, that ain't a vacation for me.





# Our Trespasses

She had started to gather momentum, but she saw she needed to gently tap the brakes for a second. Her pitch was half slick and half frantic, when it really could be neither. *She was THIS close...*

Without giving any ground, Nat demurred, throwing in a little emotional blackmail for good measure:

—I'm not proposing we *stay here*. I know you've had an intense few days with your family, but maybe a road trip is just the thing! This could be our chance to see the country, to get back to the land for a minute or two! It's my country and I'd like to see a little more of it. Besides, you're from here and I want to see a little more of that, too. You've seen where I'm from *plenty* of times. I hadn't even met your family until this weekend, you know. I'd like to look around a bit, see some more.

Gabe was utterly floored that she was incredibly, undeniably serious. *Get back to the land*. This land was her land, as she pointed out, correctly, though the folks around here would have laughed at the very notion—Gabe chief among them, Gabe who had run so far away.

She had to be kidding, but she was serious as surely as she was sitting on that couch with him.

*Shit, Nat, he thought, You started out with such a strong performance, but you're slippin', darlin'! Damn, you're slippin'! Beggin' to go on some ROAD TRIP like this is a goddamned vacation! I think you even used the word "vacation"!*

No, anger would not do. Logic would prevail. After all, he worked in the restaurant industry. He had connections, acquaintances. He could put a better offer on the table; he could *find them* a better table. He felt a breeze of incipient heroism ripple his super-bartender hair:

—Can't we just take the gas money and go someplace decent like Miami?

She was unmoved. Quick, suggest something more *American!*

—Or New Orleans?

She sighed.

—Hell, even Vegas!

She looked down over her shoulder at the floor and he had to suppress a scream at his involuntary suggestion of a town with casinos. He did so masterfully and continued:

—Look, I'll see where I can get us hooked up and what airfare's like. We'll do it up right! We'll stay somewhere amazing, eat good food, drink spectacular wine...Who knows? Maybe I can feel out Sonoma County! Remember Sherry? That gal who left the restaurant last fall? Well, I think she's managin' this place right by—

—*I want to see where you're from.*

—You're lookin' at it!

\* \* \*





# Our Trespasses

Two hours later, they were on the road: through the wicket gate at the top of the drive and down onto King's Highway, wending West with the early afternoon tilt of the sun.

In that time, Nat had taken the initiative to call Madison—whose number she now had—to inquire after borrowing the pick-up for a few days. Madison assured her that she could split one ride with Christian all week and they wouldn't need the truck again until the weekend. All she asked was that they get the oil changed at some point, since a tune-up had been on the agenda. Nat was thrilled and Madison was flattered that Nat wanted to spend some time in her neck of the woods.

In fact, so flattered was Madison that she offered her family's cabin near Zion Bend to Gabe and Nat for a couple of nights, telling Nat there was a spare key in the glove compartment and that she would call ahead to a man named Buck Fearing, who kept an eye on the place during the off-season, along with what Madison referred to as Good-Slay.

—Excuse me?

—Oh, sorry, Good-Slay's an Old Cherokee who hangs around. Kind of a handyman. Handyman-slash-shaman, says the cabin's on tribal land, like everything else in this country.

With that, Madison apparently signed off, warning Nat that the place wasn't much and the boat wouldn't be in the water, but it would be a nice couple of days deep in the woods if they wanted it. Nat shrieked like a victorious game show contestant when she hung up the phone, leaving Gabe to wonder about this human he dated, who apparently lusted after a backwoods getaway the way daytime television viewers lust after a fully furnished rec room, as dangled before them by Bob Barker. Why hadn't he known this about her before? Nat had never even been camping in her entire life, as far as Gabe knew.

Nat decided they should run the vehicular errand first; Gabe assented—silently praying there would be something irrevocably wrong with the clunker. They made the promised pilgrimage to Ol' Hermie, whose dyed pompadour waved with quiet dignity in the slight wind, like Old Glory (or Old Dixie) itself. He whistled a lot as he jerked around the various engine parts and pointed out the bumper was wanting some attention, but it was nothing he could fix on the spot. The door was in the same boat and, he pointed out, the gas gauge was a little tricky. With that, he changed the oil and Nat snapped a few photos that he gladly mugged for, saying he was quite used to it and quite flattered, indeed.

After they filled up and paid, Herman assured them they would probably be fine, but warned them that if the bumper continued to droop, they risked getting pulled over for obstructed tags. Nat then had to be told what "tags" were and cheerfully informed Herman all about "license plates." He gave her a cursory salute and winked with a great depth of empathy at Gabe. Gabe reiterated that this wasn't his ride and that as long as Herman thought—in his expert opinion—that nothing terrible would happen, he'd rather wait and have his brother's fiancée—shit, girlfriend—get it all fixed up and paid for the following week. Herman nodded,

—Man's gotta do what a man's gotta do!

Gabe returned the earlier salute and they were on their way down the Interstate once more, heading West toward the setting sun as people from these parts have been wont to do. The rare old craft would have to do and Herman told them it could be done, despite its worn and wrinkled bed. *A noble craft, but somehow a most melancholy! All noble things are touched with that,* Herman seemed to tell them.

The line of sandbags pointed West endlessly and the Flood loomed to the North. This would be their orientation all the way to Zion Bend, weaving above and below the level of the towering waters as they





# Our Trespasses

zoomed about the hillocks and the farms, skirting forests all the way. The trip started out smoothly enough and they made a pit-stop at the County Museum two counties over from where Gabe was raised. Mostly, there were lots of photographs of men with prodigious facial hair and missing limbs. Nat went to town with her Holga. She was glowing from their session that morning and Gabe, even for all his misgivings, had to admit she looked adorable.

However, after a good five-and-a-half hours on the road—including the County Museum break—he was fading and his mood was slipping again. Gabe was in dire need of coffee. And, not just any coffee, mind you, but Goodwill's Coffee. Goodwill's Special Blend.

—What's so special about it?

His voice dropped an awe-struck octave,

—Oh, Nat. It's sublime. In fact, I got them to start servin' it at the restaurant. You've had the coffee at the Ox, right? This is *the stuff*.

—So, why can't you just get it at the Ox? Like, when we *get back*?

—Because it's *here*. It's here, *I'm here*, I need coffee, and this is just about the best damn stuff I've ever had. It'll only take us about 20, 25 minutes out of the way.

—Why bother? Just hit a gas station.

—'Cause I'm drivin' and I would really like *this* coffee.

—I can dri—

—No.

He corrected himself,

—No, *thank you*.

Here, Gabe knew, lay the dirty secret of most every Red State in the Union: an adorable college town is never more than six or seven hours away on the Interstate. This being the sixth hour of the road trip, they were ripe to hit one. Gabe felt vindicated: Nat had no desire to see a city. No, Nat was from the City. She wanted primordial rural strife, real American dilapidation, the kind straight out of a Walker Evans photograph that knows no big box stores, but—goddammit—Gabe was going to get his Goodwill's Special Blend right at the source. For the first moment in this entire trip home, Gabe was enthusiastic about showing his girlfriend around.

All this time (though Nat would not dare confess it after the look she got across the couch from Gabe that same morning), both Guthries and Pete Seeger rattled around Nat's brain the deeper they drove into the country. The busted truck had only a functional AM radio and, as surely as the locals would tell you talk's cheap, its offerings had proved too thin even for Gabe's sadistic need to give Nat a galling taste of what she was after. In the windy silence, Nat wondered at the vast gulf between country and folk—and their respective fan bases.

Nat knew what Gabe was about in this. She fretted about the pictures—about everything that was at stake—but she was confident she could handle Gabe. All she had to do was get him in a motel somewhere. Once she had turned it from obligatory heritage tour to a dirty long weekend, the Road





# Our Trespasses

by Cara Marsh Sheffler

Nº 2, Spring 2012

Trip muses—wherever they might now be—would come to her side and allow her to get her pictures. (That such a constant glut of sex had become their status quo and perhaps had devalued it as a bargaining chip eluded her line of otherwise sound reasoning: Nat knew for a fact she couldn't hold out for 20 minutes at a clip, but she failed to see what was lost in this—or, more likely, did not want to believe tradeoffs perversely grazed on such sacred, happy grounds.)

In the meantime, there was this detour to see what she was sure was a warren of communal kilns, book shops, art galleries that sold wind chimes, and vintage clothing stores run by hippie burnouts, those maimed veterans of the Culture Wars who stayed local, but were too stoned to man an organic farm. Her hostility to such isolated college towns was to be as expected as Gabe's hostility toward the trip in general: just as he had left this part of the country, Nat had so nearly ended up in it—of course, not this exact part of the country, but more generally in something like it, at least from her perspective. She recalled looking at boarding schools and, a little later, colleges or visiting her parents' academic friends in such small towns across the country during the summertime when they were emptied.

With the students gone, the only folks left were those hippie burnouts, once in a while married to one of her parents' colleagues. Inevitably, these were second or third marriages to local yoga instructors or landscape architects with whom her parents drew obnoxiously on Vietnam Era camaraderie to form instant, ineluctable bonds. It was all so easy, so affable! As she thought about that camaraderie and her knee-jerk contempt for it, she wondered if she wasn't just jealous. What the hell did her generation have going on?

One fine day in her seventh decade on this earth, would Nat find herself reminiscing with her contemporaries about the iPhone 4G launch? *Oh, oh, oh! And then they came out with THE WHITE ONE. And then the one you could talk to! Did YOU have a crush on Siri?* She would bet money that the conversation would not be about the war thing. Things? There were two, but were they the same war? This, she reasoned, would be too annoyingly vague to reminisce about late in life—especially with one's memory already going. Antiwar demonstrations and outdoor concerts seemed more palpable, if druggier. Yes, this is why she was bitter: it was unfair.

Well, as Gabe liked to say with a smile, *Call it a day and bitch to the Internet: he'll listen.*

That brand of disaffected, shrugging optimism was exactly what Nat liked to think kept Gabe and her together. "Brand" was the wrong word: it was the only thing she had in the City that wasn't branded. Yet, whatever it was, she saw it fade the further they drove. As they neared the adorable college town, Nat remembered her teenage fantasies about such places. She had mostly grown up in a major academic town, not too far from the City, but the City was always *her* city. At least the City was the nearest city, so its presence in her life always felt preordained, as much as her eye color or height.

Perhaps this doomed proximity to the Center Of the Known Universe led her to fantasize at a precocious age about going off the radar. It was the dream of an old soul—if a very vain old soul: she would see these grand, old houses now divided up into multiple apartments. She would imagine herself always in the quirkiest one, the one with the balcony at the top of the winding stair, the one with the curving windowpanes and sashes, the one in the turret, the one they don't make anymore. She would work in a café or a record store and drive a beat-up old convertible with a torn and frayed cream-colored top.

Most central to this fantasy was the local boyfriend, the one whom she would love with greater depth than love was owed, the one to whom she would give the better part of, say, half a decade, but the one who wouldn't be *the one*. She never pictured how this fantasy would end, perhaps with stunning creative success? A residency in Rome? A sojourn on the Serengeti? But surely the fantasy ended and surely but one thing could follow: real life—the rest of her life—in the City.





The instant that they pulled into that parking lot, she knew this feeling was true. She knew how pure her recollection was by the way her imagination leapt to sights neither conjured nor construed since she was 16, 17 years old. Her mind flashed on a lime green corduroy coat she had wanted so desperately at 14 but never could afford or talk her mother into buying for her. She smelled the basement belonging to a sophomore summer fling.

As she entered Goodwill's Coffee Shop with Gabe, she held fast to these shreds of memories and their unique juxtaposition, knowing fully that their initial geneses would be forever clouded by this fresh recollection, destined to grow ever staler and more pat and fraught with each visitation. She was back, she now saw clearly; she had returned to her fantasies with no less than what she had most coveted: a local boyfriend. She had fallen hard for someone who had roots somewhere and, in so falling, had fallen largely for her conception of those roots. Gabe allowed her to fulfill a decade-old fantasy, all without leaving the Big City that actually had her heart, despite what passed as wishes.

The coffee shop was much as she expected: WPA-era brickwork, worn paperbacks, and white women with dreadlocks. Everyone was talking about the Flood. Gabe and Nat were waylaid for an additional 20 minutes as a stoned art student finished cleaning the espresso machine, whispering to it half-consciously. For their troubles, they were given complimentary wheatgrass beverages and a free online download of some local musicians.

—Fuckin' yuppies!

Gabe grouched and groaned as they walked past By-End's Bookshop, outside of which stood a piece of clapboard scrawled with a QUOTE OF THE DAY:

*YEA, FOOLISH MORTALS, NOAH'S FLOOD IS NOT YET SUBSIDED; TWO THIRDS OF THE FAIR WORLD IT YET COVERS. —MOBY-DICK*

After they pulled out of Goodwill's parking lot, Nat teased Gabe about the wheatgrass so mercilessly that he finally attempted the radio again. Miracle of miracles, they heard some music playing! Naturally, it was the song that had been in the heaviest local rotation for all of Gabe's time on this earth: the Allman Brothers' "Ramblin' Man." The signal was weak and wouldn't hold for long, but Gabe and Nat belted it out for all it was worth,

*Lord, I was born a ramblin' man  
Trying to make a living and doing the best I can  
When it's time for leaving, I hope you'll understand  
That I was born a ramblin' man*

*My father was a gambler down in Georgia  
He wound up on the wrong end of a gun  
And I was born in the back seat of a Greyhound bus  
Rolling down Highway Forty-One*

The crackling grew worse, so they sang the refrain with even greater gusto to compensate, nearly shouting as they hit the last verse and the station started to completely die,

*I'm on my way to New Orleans this morning  
Leaving out of Nashville, Tennessee  
They're always having a good time down on the Bayou, Lord  
Them Delta women think the world of me*





# Our Trespasses

However, Nat had not sung "Delta women," but rather "Downtown women." Gabe started laughing and Nat asked what it was.

—Well, hon, I know Dickey Betts is a little marble-mouthed sometimes, but it is Dickey Betts.

—So?

—Delta women. He's not Downtown; he's on the Bayou.

—Isn't New Orleans right there?

—Sure, but that ain't what he's singin'!

Gabe laughed some more; Nat started to get annoyed.

—Okay, so I missed a lyric, why the hell is that so funny?

—Oh, relax. Anyway, I guess I'm laughin' so hard because you're a Downtown woman. It's like ya put yourself in the song! It's like—

She did not share his amusement.

—You're not from here, anyway, so it's not a crime. I mean, hell, ya probably wouldn't even know the song if you weren't datin' me.

—"Ramblin' Man"? Really, Gabe? You mean, I wouldn't know about the Allman Brothers if it weren't for you? Oh, or maybe I wouldn't know that Hank Williams also wrote a song called "Ramblin' Man"?

—Okay, just drop it. I wasn't aware of your encyclopedic music knowledge prior to our relationship. *Mea culpa*.

He smacked the knob of the radio to turn off the static. The sun started to go down and Gabe attempted to change the subject,

—You're on an adventure even though ya don't know it: I've never driven this road before.

She pretended to sleep, but soon was staring blankly his way, mostly at his newest tattoo which faded with the evening light: "HE WHO WAS BORN TO HANG NEED NOT FEAR DROWNING"

Everyone fetishized Gabe, didn't they? Wasn't being a fetish object behind a bar his stock and trade? Gabe was part of the grand marketing plan for anything from Budweiser and Marlboro to Chevy and Levi's—or even the Reagan ads that showed our 40th President chopping wood. Gabe pedaled his services (never wares in this economy) to an intensely sincere and elusive craving: the insatiable nostalgia of a country always on the move from its first incarnation, the raw need for legitimacy that never existed, the quest for permanence.

Yet, there was something apart from this homegrown mythos—this scam—that drew her to Gabe in the first place. Gabe was self-made and Gabe was self-reliant. She would reassure him of this to allay his moments of doubt, but she did not reference the darker extreme of it: Gabe succeeded in inventing himself as a genuine phony. He embodied an image always sold, yet never actually extant, like so many shares of stock.





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by Cara Marsh Sheffler

Nº 2, Spring 2012

And just what the hell was he selling? Gabe was underweight, pale. He never slept soundly through the night, even though he killed himself chatting and running around. What did he waste himself pushing? Ambiance? To be wasted on art or love was one thing, but what was he? Just wasted. Whether this was fact or just her fears, she could not say, though if only fears, they seemed rather prescient.

At the beginning, Nat wanted to think, she saw through the sales pitch. At the beginning, it was not some commercialized fantasy. It simply *couldn't* have been. It was only later, Nat reassured herself, as she learned where he was from—in a way more significant than the twang he leveraged like an implicit pick-up line—that she contextualized his apparent roots into something she needed.

Perhaps she decided his background would fill some void she couldn't name, her own desire for roots that seemed more noble than—*well, fine, let's admit it*—her crippling dependency on his cock and a simple predilection for strategically rumpled flannel and spindly blue tattoos on a pale and lanky frame, topped by raw cheekbones etched with a five o'clock shadow that usually telegraphed five the following morning, rather than five in the afternoon.

This, she now could see, was the kind of beard that declared he couldn't hack it back home. It was *de rigueur* for a refugee from a perfect family. Even Gabe's facial hair seemed to undermine him.

\* \* \*

They had started off on a coke binge. Well, not exactly a coke *binge*, per se, but the sort of outing that could be termed such by members of a generation that will term anything from swapping spit to having a foursome "hooking up." Gabe and Nat, like many of their peers, sought to blunt the extremes by blurring them and so it was that they had started off on a coke binge. It was 48 hours they'd never get back, assuming either of them would ever take it.

It wasn't just that Nat used Gabe's Great Uncle Dall's belt buckle to open the first beers they ever drank in her apartment. They took a cab back to her place as Gabe convinced his manager at the Blue Ox to close for him—his manager who had told him *he didn't have a chance in hell with that one*. They didn't exactly have a bet going, but it was quite clear Gabe had won something and his manager deferentially offered to close. (His manger also unnecessarily volunteered that he'd be sure to tell the owner that Gabe had been at the Ox to the bitter end, which should have been a tacit assumption among friends. Gabe might have paid more attention to the incongruity of this detail to had he not been struggling to walk out the door normally in a pair of his skinnier jeans).

In the taxi, Gabe kissed Nat with the desperation of a soldier back from war in an old movie; her silent film star looks perhaps inspired this, but sheer disbelief and drunkenness caused him to moan over and over that he'd thought about kissing her cupid lips like that for so long. Nat, on the other hand, assumed he was giving her a standard line, so much so that she stiffened and laughed, as though to protect herself from Gabe.

This was why Gabe was plainly shocked when, after Nat announced she was fetching a couple of beers, he watched her crouch down so that she was entirely hidden by the large refrigerator door and she emerged wearing nothing but a pair of thigh-high stockings and heels, her dress in one hand and two Miller High Lives in another. She threw the dress on the floor, walked straight up to him, and popped the caps off both beers at once, steadying the belt buckle with her free hand. That accomplished, she turned around and hoisted herself up on the kitchen counter, taking a good long pull on her beer, as she placed his between her legs and asked if he cared to taste *The Champagne of Beers*.





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For a moment, Gabe was unsure if he hadn't liquefied into a puddle on the floor, but somehow he found the cool and composure to stride right up to her and, in one practiced motion, dump out and snort a bit of blow right beside the spot on the counter where she had placed his High Life. He then bit her thigh, moved the beer well out of the way, and had a good, long taste. He gave Nat a line off the back of his hand when he finished and then started on his High Life.

In under five minutes, he was kneeling on the counter with Nat, who had to brace herself against the cast-iron security bar across her kitchen window as she wrapped her legs around Gabe's back. The bruises on her shoulders would remain clearly visible for a month after. Yet, they did not actually end up in her bed until well past dawn, opting for more creative venues and overturning a fair portion of her furniture in the process.

They spent the next day in the relative safety of her bed, icing wounds and laughing at the substantial damage they had done. Daylight coruscated through the peeling red slats of the fire escapes as the sun crossed the sliver of sky far above Nat's bedroom window. The radiator knocked and hissed and some neighbor somewhere along the airshaft practiced Mozart's Clarinet Concerto in A Major (a detail Nat filled Gabe in on). Gabe watched in wonder as the winking light traced Nat's body and drew haphazard lines between all the parts he'd never seen or had the chance to fully appreciate the night before. Nat did much the same, but with a far more purposeful eye, even framing him now and then or changing the way the sheets and comforter fell around him.

That night—let's say Tuesday, for the sake of the argument, but most certainly a weeknight since Gabe had off—they ordered Chinese and never made it out to a bar to meet some of Gabe's friends who were also off work. They mostly napped between sessions, laughing whenever they awoke to note the time, running yet another bath or shower, and blurting out the odd plan they hoped to make together. Finally, the morning after that, Gabe woke up alone to a surgically precise yet plummy *PLAH-schop!* *PLAH-schop!* Nat was looking down into a camera on a tripod,

—What in hell?

She forced a little laughter,

—Go back to sleep! There's no film in here. I'm just testing the light a bit...

*PLAH-schop!*

This was the first lie he ever caught Nat in: a couple of months later, when they were firmly and formally attached, he saw a picture of himself in just that light and he *knew* in his gut it was from that second morning. True, he had slept in that bed many times since, but somehow he *knew* it was the second morning he'd ever spent with Nat.

Yet, he never called her out on it. He was saving it, he supposed—saving it for...for what? Why did he stockpile ammo? Was this normal behavior? It definitely wasn't healthy, but *what was it for?* Did he just not want to admit how much the pictures bothered him? Nat was a professional photographer and wasn't it normal for artists to portray their partners? Did he just not like playing the woman's traditional role? Or was it something specific to do with *her*?

It would have taken one hell of a romantic imagination to see Nat as stable, but Gabe had that in spades. Perhaps because Gabe had strived for her for a good long while (more in theory than in practice and more for months than years, *but still*) she seemed like a foothold completely out of reach. Now that he





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by Cara Marsh Sheffler

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had gained it he both couldn't believe his luck and deeply resented any work required to maintain the position. What he didn't realize was that Nat's illusive stability at least partly owed to her ambition and steady sense of an upward climb; this momentum was something to which she expected him to contribute.

Over a year on, her basic aura of unattainability had yet to fade away and it was starting to seem to Gabe more like an elaborate security system meant to keep him—and him alone—out in the cold. Gabe would never admit it, but her education was the thing setting the codes and constantly changing the locks on that system. Nat often called her diploma a *real dick-shrinker*; but Gabe, a college dropout himself, had eagerly composed a mantra-like chant about loving smart women. Nat seemed to wince whenever Gabe trotted it out in public, mostly for his own benefit—he was obviously not paying attention to her reaction to it.

So it was that a single fancy diploma and a steady, self-sustaining, and somewhat merciless work ethic apparently rendered Nat *stable*. Those outside of Nat's most immediate circle were often surprised to learn she possessed either one of those things—especially those who knew her after 2am, which is to say most of Gabe's crowd. Gabe himself was drawn to this perception of her stability as much as he was to her silent film star profile and her pin-up legs, but her wild streak both turned him on and threatened him as much as his designation of her as *stable* began to choke and confine him.

From their earliest days, his idea of her never quite squared with the person he was with. To Gabe, Nat always had something to fall back on, even though she was the freelancer. She had institutions, a diploma, even health insurance. This last item owed to her parents' own academic backgrounds. There was no real money to speak of in her family, but a cloying amount of prestige based on tenure and tenure alone. Maybe Nat was not rich, but she was born established. The way Gabe saw it, he started from scratch every single day and it was killing him. He had convinced himself that Nat would never understand this. On his better days, he would tell himself he'd never wish his worries on the girl he loved; on his worse ones, he'd wish just for one goddamned time she could take a bullet for him and see what it felt like.

Somehow, in desperately trying not to focus on the aforementioned *dick-shrinker*, Gabe lost sight of the demented, petty nature of Nat's broken family of academics. Nat had asked herself a few times if this oversight didn't owe to the way Gabe had run from his intact family. Like all children of divorce (or children of any marriage, for that matter), Nat was doomed to wonder if she would repeat her parents' mistakes in a way that Gabe never seemed to. But she never brought this up because of the pass that the distraction of her education afforded her:

During those fabled first 48 hours, Nat was cheating on her boyfriend who had some friends in common with Gabe. They say once a cheater, always a cheater, but that kind of 48 hours would entice most any man to make an exception—no matter how threatening the proximity of a rogue diploma. That boyfriend (more than anything that Gabe liked to believe he had surmounted) was why the manager at the Blue Ox had said Gabe *didn't have a chance in hell with Nat*.

Yet, Nat had come clean immediately. She told Gabe that the relationship was more or less over anyway (Gabe saw a clear argument for "less") and that she selfishly needed an excuse to end it. Nat even used the word *selfishly*, something Gabe would alternately laud or vilify depending upon his mood. She said she shouldn't have been in it for the last few months, when it all began to run on autopilot and they both got lazy.

Just about anyone will sputter and spout this sort of bullshit the morning after a fine tumble in the hay—or sharp-edged furniture, as it were—but not just anyone would kick out the new fling with the express purpose of *immediately* dumping the old, so as to avoid having to lie about it at all. Nat broke up





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with her boyfriend that very night, specifically telling him that she had met someone else, but declining to say whom. (Though, that much her ex found out fast, which is another story for another time.) It was blunt and it was self-serving, but it was at least honest.

What followed was almost too smooth a transition. They met up a few days later and Gabe looked into Nat's eyes against a nacre autumn sky and a sunset mute and runny as a dying oyster. They began as a couple at this sunset and they lived thereafter in its shell, knocking about in mad, claustrophobic rutting. They were truly, willfully lost within their sex lives; therein—and only therein, despite Gabe's smooth talking and Nat's art—did they express themselves to one another, all with a certain brutal physicality, deliberately unvarnished and always changing. Euphoria was a given, contentment all but unknown.

But the apartment hunt had nudged their little bivalve. Nat's need for *what was next* outpaced what Gabe could give at that moment. He meandered frantically about her apartment when she slept, wondering *what the fuck was the point of owning a place like this* and yet craving it as though it were the only thing that could confer legitimacy on anyone at all, whatever that was and whatever that meant to either of them. He honestly didn't know. All he did know was that it was out of his reach and that Nat would one day soon demand it.

Gabe was now paranoid that Nat might be one of those people who couldn't be alone. Certainly she passed many hours of solitude with her images, but those texts from Wiseman sent his stomach up his spine. Nat was oblique. Nat was never one to force a confrontation until not doing so meant somehow compromising herself. At that point—and he'd only seen her reach it once—Nat was without mercy or sentiment.

Maybe she was just waiting for the next moment to come clean, but didn't have the heart to do it at the wake or at the funeral. Now, she had this little road trip, a certain pilgrimage to nowhere. She'd get to fuck and she'd get to take her photos and then... When would it happen? The next day? At the airport? Would she wait until they got back to the City? Would she do it on the counter, so everything came perfectly full circle? Would he hear the very same words—whatever they were—that Nat had uttered to the ex that Gabe had unseated?

Gabe sensed some sort of guilt in Nat and it was something he had never sensed before—not even during those first 48 hours when she certainly had something to feel guilty about. There was a roadblock to her unburdening herself and he *knew* this excursion had something to do with it. Every mile West he drove, the more certain he became, and the more the prospect of this certainty exhausted him.

\* \* \*

Darkness was general over Gabe's State. It was his time of day again. Twilight was almost gone and the only thing bluer than the grass was the stripe along the bottom of the sky. The power lines loomed here, too, though just barely over hills cresting as waves just high enough to damn the strongest swimmer. Yet, Eisenhower's highway system cut through even these, merciless in its shape, monomanically level.

The pick-up continued West along the sandbagging, brushing the Space Age polymer fibers with incandescent headlights that seemed to expect burlap sacks for the occasion. They had driven a long way in one day, especially considering they hadn't started out until late morning. A couple of hours before they hit the motel, they gained an hour as they crossed the dotted line to Central Standard Time.





Nat fiddled with the truck's clock, lighting the console with her iPhone as she pushed back the long hand one minute at a time. Gabe winked at her,

—Told ya we'd get here by nine!

They passed a sign indicating they had entered the Township of Progress, population: 667. However, the half-lit sign in front of a Pentecostal church with a flat roof and moldy siding gave Nat a second thought. The following was spelled out in crooked, plastic letters matted with insects and grime,

BEHOLD, I WILL MAKE THEM A SYNAGOGUE OF SATAN, WHICH  
SAY THEY ARE JEWS, AND ARE NOT, BUT DO LIE: BEHOLD, I  
WILL MAKE THEM COME AND WORSHIP BEFORE THY FEET, AND  
TO KNOW THAT I HAVE LOVED THEE.

—REVELATION 3:9

Gabe whistled and Nat blanched.

—Ain't that a beaut!

—Oh?

—You know, 'round here, they all say the Catholic Church is *THE BEAST* in Revelations.

—That's great, Gabe.

A little too soon thereafter for Nat's taste, they pulled into the Wilderness Motel. Behind the desk, a tiny woman was dwarfed by a giant, luridly colored crucifix on the wall behind her and a sign that insisted the establishment only gave single rooms to *lawfully wedded couples*. Under the lip of the registration counter, Nat switched her ring from her right hand to her left; Gabe designated an abstract tattoo on his left hand his "wedding band." In typical bartender fashion, he conjured an elaborate tale of how they had eloped out East, where they lived, but how Nat had come home to see his family and to take a drive around where he was from.

The clerk put an improbably small hand to her chest and smiled broadly. She said her own husband, a veterinarian, had passed, but she kept him on her desk, indicating a vase. She then went on to describe the motel's amenities, including an on-site chapel and the only pet cemetery in all five surrounding counties, since the motel had previously been a veterinary hospital—owned and operated by her late husband. But, that was before her husband died, the jobs moved overseas, and most of the local farms began failing.

—So, now, we're takin' tourists!

Nat and Gabe laughed uneasily as Gabe excused himself to use the bathroom. The key was attached to a pocket-sized Bible, perhaps for handy reading material, but Nat felt too queasy to make the joke. Once Gabe was locked safely in the bathroom, Nat realized she did not have any cash left to pay for the deposit after that goddamned yuppie coffee house. The motel keeper informed her this was okay, but she'd need to take an imprint of her credit card. Nat rummaged around her wallet as the tiny lady rummaged around a drawer large enough to hold an expired Shetland pony—perhaps it once had.



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The little clerk emerged with the sort of analogue credit card swiping device that went *ka-CHUNG* and jammed nearly every single time. Nat handed her a card and the lady labored to work the device, until she finally extracted the card rather gingerly, took off her glasses, and matter-of-factly asked Nat if her last name was Jewish.

Nat felt that horrible tightening she always felt when asked this question in a strange accent, which was always promptly followed by guilt at her inability to be more defiant or proud or—more to the point—less presumptuous about her interrogator's intent. She swallowed,

—Um, yeah! Yes, it is.

—Do you believe in *God*?

—Excuse me?

Now both of them were red to the ears.

— Well, I'm sorry, but it's—y'understand I never met...

Through forced laughter and a slight stutter, Nat quickly explained that Jews, in fact, read the Bible (though only the first half) and certainly believe in God. Nat gingerly added that this is the same God that Christians believe in, though demurred from pointing out that Jesus was one of the Tribe. She altogether avoided her own thoughts on this Supreme Being.

The diminutive clerk took a moment to digest the theological lesson.

—So you *do* believe in God?

Again, Nat punted:

—You see, my *Dad* is Jewish; I'm not. I'm the wrong half.

—What do ya mean "the wrong half"?

Again, Nat sputteringly told the motel keeper that Judaism is a matrilineal religion and that even though her father is Jewish if Nat wanted to properly worship, she would have to convert, since her mother was Christian (though she demurred from saying Catholic—and lapsed at that). The shorthand for this situation is simply being the wrong half.

Again, the tiny clerk took a moment to digest the theological lesson.

—How's one half a person different from the other?

—I do not know.

Gabe finally reappeared, warmly reassuring the little widow that Nat was *his* better half.

They took the keys and drove the pick-up directly in front of their room, which, to Nat's great relief, was on the opposite side of the parking lot from the front office with the ashes, the chapel, and the pet cemetery. The pair began to laugh a bit, Nat out of relief and Gabe out of delirious exhaustion. As Gabe slipped the key in the lock, Nat slid a hand around Uncle Dall's old belt and tugged.





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Sometimes Nat would get a capricious, diabolical glint in her eye and that might signal all manner of sexual miscellany: when that glint was on, there was no telling *what* would get her off. Candle wax? Light bondage? Cartoons? It was something like the Potpourri category on *Jeopardy!* or the final round of *Trivial Pursuit*.

As he turned the key, Gabe saw *The Glint*. At present, he strongly doubted he possessed the fortitude to meet it.

As Gabe brought in the last of the bags, Nat emerged from the bathroom naked, with the water running and steam blooming out the door. She was holding a bar of soap and beckoning him with her finger, demanding that he scour every inch of her and describe exactly what he was doing as he did. Nat said he had to do this until the entire bar of soap had dissolved. (It was thankfully small.) She made him keep all his clothes on—even his boots—and told him to keep talking to her about her body and what he was doing to it the entire time, even as he grew sopping wet from the soap and the steam. Gabe dared not ask a silly question, like *why*: this was *The Glint*.

Once he had dried her off in much the same fashion, so that she actually came on the towel (again, *The Glint*), Nat made him strip the bed, but still would not let him get undressed, aching as he was to get off and, quite frankly, attempt to sleep. The whole time, she would not stop talking or ordering him around. She laid down on the bed, spread her legs, and commanded,

—Describe my pussy to me.

Gabe gamely obliged, confident the bizarre-o foreplay was drawing to a close, until she followed up with this one:

—Now tell me how mine is different from the other girls' pussies.

*Jesus H. Christ*, he could get into trouble here! What in hell was *THIS* about? How the fuck do you field *THIS ONE*?

—Babe, you know I ain't that verbal...

He spanked her lightly—mockingly—and started to go down on her, which he figured would require little to no effort after that scene with the towel. No sooner had his tongue made contact than she grabbed his hair, pulled up his face with no small amount of violence, and hissed,

—The fuck you aren't...

With that, she flipped on top of him, forcing his face into the motel mattress and biting the back of his shoulder,

—I said I want you to *talk to me*.

He obliged for what he hoped would pass for not-too-dry technical jargon and threw in a predictably floral metaphor. He then talked color and contrast, and before long realized that he was imitating Nat's very own artspeak. Once he identified a model to follow, he truly picked up momentum and Nat started to masturbate and moan until she announced,

—But, I don't want you in my pussy tonight...





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And then she dragged him back into the bathroom, where she bent forward over the sink in front of the mirror and ordered him to put the dregs of the bar of soap to good use. Gabe marveled at the ingenuity of *The Glint* and eagerly complied, until he had to suppress an eye roll when Nat told him he was *still* not allowed to take off his clothes, only open his fly. Gabe bent her further forward and got to work with the improvised lube, as she kept talking and talking, as she had *never* done during sex before, ordering him to hold eye contact in the mirror the entire time, not even letting him look down to see what his other hand in front was up to.

Again, she was very fast work. (This time, a washcloth was involved; *The Glint* had a hankering for terrycloth that night.) The task, once again, completed, Gabe flipped down the lid of the toilet, sat on it, and had her suck his cock so that he could get off in peace without her making any more fucking demands of him. Afterward, he leaned back, ripped off his shirt, and wiped his face with it,

—You're gonna goddamn *kill me*, Nat!

She giggled like a schoolgirl and demurely kissed him on the forehead before she brushed her teeth and fell dead asleep, perhaps exhausted by the passing of whatever had possessed her. All the while, he reclined, half-dead on the covered toilet, his shirt off and his pants rolled down to his pelvis. He grunted like a man twice his age as he dragged his body off to bed, but—*of course*—once there, he could not for the life of him sleep.

\* \* \*

Naturally, this was his first thought when his head hit the pillow: *Was she asking about other women because she's seen someone else's cock?*

Gabe felt as though he were falling, squirming helplessly all the way down a dreamlike freefall of indeterminate height—who knew when he'd smack the ground and splatter? Who even knew what the ground would be like? The fall was painfully drawn out, so much so that he was growing delirious with nausea, adrenaline, and promiscuous regret.

Here he was, “pardner” always, “partner” never; a goddamn gimmick! He was more a peer to the stuffed barn owls and jackelope skulls on the walls of the Blue Ox than anyone who would ever manage the place, let alone own or invest in it. The only difference between Gabe and the taxidermied critters was that he yet drew breath. Really, he was most like those women who perform in a giant aquarium as “mermaids” at some seedy restaurant in Vegas. He, however, was playing a (slightly less) mythical creature at the Blue Ox: the Pioneer.

Did the pioneers ever have panic attacks? Rather, what did they *call* their panic attacks? To Gabe, moving West continually seemed like one giant panic attack, a way to keep hopelessly busy at daily life simply by doing it on the move and without any conveniences. The gratuitous hyper-alertness and continual struggle seemed something to which he was eminently suited, yet—like a working dog without a herd to tend—all of those qualities had gone sour at the restaurant and turned him away from even a single night's sleep. Gabe was a border collie cooped up in a City apartment, bent on destroying the place in the absence of a concrete task or goal beyond his next shift.

Gabe was a pioneer of sorts, mostly by dint of genetic fancy. Yet somehow he suspected he possessed a skill set that might have been useful at another point in time. Or, more likely, had he lived in an earlier time, someone who hadn't actually known him could have looked back a century later and successfully





# Our Trespasses

by Cara Marsh Sheffler

Nº 2, Spring 2012

romanticized him. Gabe had romanticized far too much in his lifetime; it was a sin secondary only to his bullshitting, perhaps its less appreciated cousin. Perhaps someone would return the favor and romanticize him someday. Wasn't that what karma was all about?

In the meantime, Gabe was all momentum with no direction. There, you see, the pioneers had it easy: all they had to do was point toward the Pacific Ocean and an entire nation got it. Gabe had no such big picture. His forebears—whoever they might have been in their unknowable private lives—had *The West*. Now what was left? *The East*? Perhaps the City was the Final Frontier, after all that fuss and imperialism. Maybe those in the future will look back and say, *Well, there was nowhere else to go, so they all decided to turn around and implode*. But, in the meantime, the former colonizers came home to roost looking a lot more like the colonized and fueled entirely by unadapted expectations. Gabe could most certainly consider himself washed up in that tide.

As he'd driven along that day, he'd held off the specific feeling that the Flood was his and his alone. The sheer narcissism of this notion at least made it somehow significant, suitably tragic, maybe even heroic. But he was fast approaching the point at which this would no longer matter. It was all gaining on him: all the decisions piled up, all the times he simply put off deciding simply washed away and now there was nothing left for him to scramble onto. In the Year of the Flood, he was turning 30 and could afford neither barge nor ticket to higher ground.

Why? Why had he failed to act? Well, those were his priorities. He hadn't known if they were the right priorities at the time, but that's the funny thing about priorities. Reaching this logical cul-de-sac, he was reminded of something Nat had told him after they gone a bit over the edge on some speedy coke one night,

—You can't tell a paranoid person he's acting paranoid. Just try it sometime.

Well, Nat, Gabe thought, *I think I've got some just cause on my hands*. Why was she so eager to take this trip? There was a bold streak of anxiety in that eagerness. She'd used the Holga now and then today, but the Hasselbald would be out in full force the next day, as they headed toward Beulah and Zion Bend, where the barns had all collapsed and even the post offices looked haunted. It was a place he had found blighted—if lush—when he was a kid Gabe doubted the Great Recession could have done much more damage, yet was fairly certain it had somehow managed.

It would be a whole day of *PLAH-schop! PLAH-schop!* alternating with Nat's iPhone buzzing over and over with texts from Wiseman. Did Wiseman like it when Nat talked? Did Wiseman bathe her like that? The thought that Gabe might have just acted out someone else's kinks filled him with a rage so vast and so cold his body froze in place. He simply could not move and, had he been more awake, he would have perhaps realized that his inability to get up and pace about like a madman in the motel parking lot or pet cemetery owed more to fatigue than anger, but this emotional mirage was too consuming to let up.

*Just when would she up and dump his sorry ass?*

Truthfully, this rage was directed at himself in equal measure. Perhaps the most demeaning, confusing, and disturbing detail of the night at the casino was this: he had more or less blacked out—though not entirely. Gabe was a champion substance abuser and, having cut short his college career, his binge drinking was mostly professional and, so it goes, extremely practiced. How had he gotten so drunk? Things were getting desperate fast and, as a desperate man, Gabe was aching to make his confession, to unburden himself somehow. He was quite unsure as to what he had to confess, but as the night wore on, he began to come around to what had most likely happened:





# Our Trespasses

*There was a good chance he had fucked Faith.*

Once he allowed himself to have that thought, it struck him as most certainly the last great sin of that lost weekend. In many contexts, confession is a largely selfish act and even this wordless confession had the benefit of checking his rage at his idea of Nat and Wiseman, *of getting back at them*. But this felt doubly hollow and horrible.

At heart, he knew he was not deserving of righteous anger and so it seemed only correct and proper to make himself dwell on his trespasses:

He had woken up alone and naked in his hotel room's bathtub with a nose too bloody and a stomach too sour to conduct any sensory analysis, but Faith's lipstick was on the floor. True, she had probably helped him up to the room because *someone must have*. Previously, Gabe had concluded his detective work at that point—abruptly slamming shut the case. Everyone at the restaurant was on pins and needles around him for those few days between the casino and the funeral, so he hadn't allowed himself to think there might have been something more to it with Faith. Besides, she was caught up in her own mess with her own relationship falling apart.

Faith and Gabe had fucked around when the restaurant opened, the last time Faith's relationship with her live-in boyfriend was going south. They had a decent, six-week run that ended when Faith decided to patch things up at home and Gabe finally won over Nat. The timing was so agreeable to Faith and Gabe that they maintained a very friendly working relationship—one that obviously revolted Nat. Gabe caught wise to this precisely because of Nat's oblique politesse; it was, in fact, his introduction to that mode of hers.

The whole thing struck Nat as *too convenient*, much as Nat's own transition out of her old relationship struck Gabe as *too smooth*. In short, Nat never quite bought that there was nothing left between Faith and Gabe, but was too arrogant to get upset about it. "Beneath contempt" was the phrase that leapt to mind when Gabe considered how his current girlfriend viewed his previous fling. Now that Faith was on the rocks with the very same live-in boyfriend again, she had been reaching out to Gabe over the past couple of months quite a bit. Mercifully, she had yet to text during the road trip, but the radio silence only added fuel to Gabe's theory.

After the poker game that may have derailed his career, he had probably sought refuge by blind-drunk fucking the worst person he possibly could have fucked—which is almost certainly why he'd fucked her, if he indeed had. Faith was on the rocks again with her boyfriend, Faith was confiding in Gabe about it constantly, and Gabe had probably fucked Faith along with fucking up everything else. Why not? It made almost too much sense. This almost certainly had to have happened; Gabe decided it was only right and reasonable to dwell on this instead of Wiseman.

Yet, if not a comforting thought, it was at least a predictable sideshow to the whole mess. If anything, he at least wouldn't have to come clean about it if Nat beat him to the punch and dumped his sorry ass. This could go to the grave along with the rest of the relationship; it was just a little something he was sliding into the casket, like a piece of jewelry or a flask of booze—or another corpse. Ah, yes, it was a cozy feeling and an obvious choice: hating himself thoroughly was far easier than feeling any further emasculated, any further out of control. It wasn't much, but it was *something* about which he could feel relieved...

Finally, Gabe felt himself about ready to nod off or at least at peace enough to close his eyes, when a thought seized him and jolted him awake. Faith's lipstick was on the floor, but with terrible certainty he remembered what wasn't: *a condom or its wrapper*. Nat was on birth control, but what about Faith?





## Works &amp; Days Quarterly

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*OH, CHRIST.* Gabe, if nothing else, knew he was in no position to bank on his luck at the casino that night. *Fuck me! Fuck me! FUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUCK!!!* Suddenly, nothing else was in his head at all and he ran into the bathroom but could not vomit. And, precisely because he could not vomit, everything he wished to throw up ran wild in his mind:

However, Gabe knew full well it was not the Queen of Spades who had sent him to the block, but the money he had bet on her: everything in his left pocket. And, for some reason that Gabe had yet to figure out, that money just happened to be two weeks' take at the Ox. Why he had that money in his pocket, in a slim manila envelope, frankly baffled him. How had it even come along to the casino? He did not even know if anyone thought he stole it in the first place, but everyone knew he'd gambled it away. This was because the chef, his roommate, the brother he'd wished was his own, ran around screaming about it, as though the building were on fire—as though it were an urgent situation that could be remedied with shrieks and flails.

He'd gotten so wrecked alongside everyone else, but while his manager was getting promoted, he was struggling—without evidence—to prove he wasn't a common criminal. A common criminal with perhaps a *child* on the way! Yet, his manager was in his corner; he *swore* as much. They *had* to know he hadn't stolen that money. There was simply *no way* he had! He had taken the wrong envelope somehow and somehow he'd make it up, but he had *no idea* why he even had that money in the first place!

NO:

He hadn't actually stolen it, but did they know that? Were they just pretending to know that? He hadn't actually stolen it, but he certainly didn't know how he'd gotten it—only how it had disappeared: on a poker table with a straight flush to the Queen of Spades. But *WHY* had he gotten so drunk? How did he basically black out? Why was this happening lately? Stress?

But he couldn't have stolen anything... *Could he?*



# Our Trespasses

Gabe's sense of tragedy rose to meet his amped up sense of panic and loss: all that he had longed for so rapturously in the future was slipping away. He would never have his own neighborhood gem of a restaurant where Nat would hold gallery dinners and launch parties for the coffee table books she'd one day publish. Nat was gone, his stake in a growing business was gone, his prospects in the City and the industry he loved were doubtful—even if he dodged *oh-just-the-usual* bullets of hard time and unwanted parenthood.

In what might have been a fever dream, Gabe crept back into bed beside Nat, who slept so soundlessly, Gabe was certain time had stopped. Time was frozen, dawn would never come, and Gabe honestly could not say if this were a damn shame or a *deus ex machina*. The ringing in his ears was the only thing that alerted him to the continued passage of seconds, minutes, hours—or at least his oncoming doom.

Earlier that day, Nat had run around a blue-green field with her Holga, chasing ravens, saying she would send a picture of one to Gabe's family in memory of Aunt Addie. Gabe thought this was morbid, but wasn't everything he touched? He wanted so desperately to think this was all a one-time fuck-up, but it's hard to comfort yourself with such optimism when your girlfriend is frolicking with carrion-eating birds.

The patterns ravens make when they fly are not so different from playing cards and aren't they even shaped like spades? Gabe counted ten as they plunged down behind a hill in the middle distance all at once. He was sure Nat had seen it, too: ten ravens plummeting into a hill shaped like the body of a defeated man. The ten of spades, the ten of swords, the hill's ruin and the rising waters, and Nat snapping pictures as he drowned. The defeated hill-man slumbered all the while, willfully oblivious to the ravens which had come to dine.

*And his eyes have all the seeming of a demon's that is dreaming...*

\* \* \*

*One day, Raven flew low over the face of the faceless waters, torrid and without edge. This day was a day without name: it was a day not long after the Flood which Raven had accidentally caused, though he knew not how; Raven had ended the Age of Animal Beings and, for a time without time, there was no age at all. However, Raven, insentient to the destruction he had somehow wrought, was consumed with fatigue, desperate for solid ground on which to rest. So, he raised a cry and commanded the waters,*

*—Become dust!*

*It was then that he gathered the few straggling survivors of the deluge and turned them into humans. He next created new animals to cohabit the earth. Gabe knew he was among both these new men and beasts, all which crawled and swam and flew.*

*Gabe felt his brain's most primal power, an urge to create, that, for one sublime moment, overcame his breathless panic to survive. Gabe flew over the waters of what was becoming the Pacific as they smashed against a rocky, piney shore. Seals barked and eagles dove; but Gabe stuck with his flock of black birds. Mixed they were: half murder and half unkindness, out to create a new world. Gabe, one among them, flew and thieved and cackled.*





# Our Trespasses

They were both the spray hazing the coast of Pacific and the plume of the Iron Horse that met it at a century's gallop, heaving black smoke that stained the birds, blackening even their talons, a black pierced only by the mad glint in their eyes. Gabe was that spray and that smoke and that locomotive, shooting across a land of cold, wild mountains spread beneath a sky alive with extinct constellations, lights roaring æons away.

In a sooty boxcar with a single gaslight swaying Gabe was playing poker. The room was so dim that Gabe could hardly see his hands, but he saw that they held cards: a straight flush to the Queen of Spades. Gabe made out an unearthly, smoke-stained cackle. Across the boxcar, an old man was taking off his belt; he threw it in the pile for the pot...Double or nothin'...Double or nothin'...

The old man cackled and cackled and his skin slowly smoothed; his hair darkened from white to silver to black until it grew so black it had a bluish sort of halo and that halo burned with the same blue menace as the gas, a phantasmic crocus that flickered and swayed. Before long, in that terrible flower, Gabe saw his youthful reflection: his own face exactly, but for the blue-black hair and brows.

Each man showed his hand: two straight flushes to the Queen of Spades. Dall let out a quick croak and then an easy, yet hollow, cackle. He threw Gabe his belt and suggested they hit a strip joint.

A totem pole, all ravens, loomed above them in an Alaskan summer sky, starry and purple-orange. A girl began to grind on the pole; Dall said she was "some half-Eskimo broad" and Gabe corrected him: "Inuit." Again, the cackle—almost cawing—emanated from Gabe's own mouth as in a mirror below Aunt Addie's head of hair.

Gabe suggested they fly to the Blue Ox for a proper bender. They talked and talked, first of women and cards, then of blow and booze, and finally of how these brand new humans will never accept that something taken from reality can never transcend it, much as matter is neither created nor destroyed. They talked and talked and cackled and cawed, until the night sky shone itself upon the ceiling, ravens circling black beneath the bright white stars. They came in an unkindness of ten, shooting straight down into the altarpiece bar: a ten of spades, of swords, of ruin.

One alighted on Dall's shoulder and he cackled even as it ate him, dead as he was. Another attempted to nibble on Gabe, who protested that he was not yet deceased—and had been promised a closed casket, at that—but Dall would only crow at this, laughing too hard to brush away the pecking bird, who now had mangled most of his ear in its bloody beak. The two then noticed that the water was rising in the Ox and, before long, they were waist deep, but still going shot for shot as the ravens supped and decimated chattily, shattering whisky bottles with their wings and generally raising hell.





# Our Trespasses

Soon the water was neck-deep and Gabe discovered that he had forgotten how to fly. As he sputtered and flailed, Dall looked his way and raised a final glass, declaring:

—Boy, a hero ain't nothin' but a tumble in the hay!

And Gabe knew at once—as one gleans truth instantly in dreams—what Dall meant by this:

All myths are essentially romantic and, as such, they will  
break your heart.

\* \* \*

He had been staring at the Wilderness Motel's wood-paneled wall for perhaps an hour or five—his mind frantic, his body frozen—when finally he had passed out into a sleep so deep that Nat, alone, was jolted awake by his snoring at dawn.

Gabe awoke a full two hours later, gasping wretchedly. He was alone in the room; Nat left a note to say she'd gone for a walk and to find coffee. Shaking horribly, he ran to the bathroom to take a steaming hot shower and collect himself.

*It was just a dream, just a dream, just a dream...*

He told himself this over and over again as he let the steam envelop his shivering, naked form. Why, with all the actual agita in his life, did he need to dream about Uncle Dall, the other family fuck-up? It must be the poker, or the belt, or those low whispers from the funeral home? Gabe had wavy chestnut hair like his mother's and Uncle Dall and Aunt Addie had that same blue-black mane, but otherwise Gabe and Dall were nearly identical—more so even than his mother and Aunt Addie, who were twins. But how shocking was this considering *Dall was his great uncle?*

Gabe's mother's mother's mother's side claimed Cherokee ancestry, and the family took it with a grain of salt but took to it nicely: it's swell to be neither entirely victim nor oppressor. So, yes, black hair, ravens, big fucking deal! Why was this *haunting* him so horribly? Why was this specifically what he dreamed about? Gabe always congratulated himself on not making too much of that rumored bit of Cherokee blood because—really—it wouldn't make a damn bit of difference in his daily life or conception of himself.

Perhaps this was also because Gabe secretly knew he was closer to his family myths than he was to his actual family. So, maybe that was the reason he'd sidestepped the typical lore a person from this part of the country might choose to embrace (the trace of Cherokee blood) and had gone for the long-shot instead (a degenerate poker-playing runaway). True, Uncle Dall's belt had a nice bit of Native American folklore about it, but it was from the Pacific Northwest, not these parts. *That belt*—not the Cherokee stuff—was what the dream was all about.

And still, what of it? It is a typically human tendency to write ourselves onto family histories in ways that serve us, not the dead relatives. Gabe wondered when this gets to a point that the distortion of memory is plainly offensive; Gabe wondered if he had specifically reached that point with Uncle Dall. *He didn't even know the man!* Yet, Gabe did feel a kinship with at least his idea of Dall. And, he was starting to get the feeling there was a lot about this kinship that a normal person would want to disown. Those





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low whispers from the funeral seemed to chase him westward along the floodplain. Against what might they finally crash and echo? Or, would they simply drown at water's edge?

As he reached for some of Nat's ridiculously expensive shampoo, he decided to ally himself with the world of facts, unpleasant a place as it was. What *ought* to he have been dreaming about? Business failure? Check! That was all in there wasn't it? A little horrifying allegory... Moving along! A pregnancy scare? Was that in there? Well, no, it wasn't, but what in hell was that train of thought, anyway? He wasn't even sure if he'd *fucked* Faith! What a lunatic he was being! How utterly paranoid was he? Besides, on the off chance that he *had* fucked Faith, what were the odds that she *actually* conceived, and—furthermore—wanted to be a mother *right now*? What about the morning-after pill, which was available over the counter in the City? Worst-case scenario, he'd be out a few hundred dollars and could say he'd learned a lesson, right? Even if he *still* remembered almost nothing...Gaining confidence, he lathered, rinsed, and got on with his day.

*It was just a dream, just a dream, just a dream...*

He told himself this over and over again as he towed off, kissed Nat good-morning, drank his coffee, paid for the room, pulled out of the Wilderness parking lot, and hit the road.

Nat quickly acclimated to the signs that quoted chapter and verse from Revelations; she was pretty sure she'd read a good portion of the final book of the Bible by the time they had gotten two miles out from the Wilderness. So, she got the idea that she should photograph them all and asked Gabe to retrace those two miles and the three prior. This intensely annoyed Gabe, so Nat reminded him in his own drawl,

—You know, 'round here, they all say the Catholic Church is *THE BEAST* in Revelations.

—Like it all ain't a load a' horseshit, anyway!

Six verses later, they were past the Township of Progress and onto a whole new kind of Wilderness.

There was no local industry whatsoever, just skeletal horses on dilapidated farms. The rains themselves had wreaked havoc falling here, so the Flood damage was presaged. It was as though the future itself were molding over, rotting what wood wasn't planted in the ground and uprooting that which was. The water seeped into blue-green hillocks that belched sickly black piles of sod; and into that bacterial turf gaunt, forgotten livestock sank and stared. Gone were the tourists. Shuttered were the county museums. Absent were the corporate distilleries, their Epcot-ready versions of local branding, and their tastings staffed by attractive 20-somethings with suspiciously deep knowledge of artisanal cheese. The only buildings were caved-in barns and scary churches.

AND THE SERPENT CAST OUT OF HIS MOUTH WATER AS A  
FLOOD AFTER THE WOMAN, THAT HE MIGHT CAUSE HER TO BE  
CARRIED AWAY OF THE FLOOD.

AND THE EARTH HELPED THE WOMAN, AND THE EARTH  
OPENED HER MOUTH, AND SWALLOWED UP THE FLOOD WHICH  
THE DRAGON CAST OUT OF HIS MOUTH.

AND THE DRAGON WAS WROTH WITH THE WOMAN, AND WENT  
TO MAKE WAR WITH THE REMNANT OF HER SEED, WHICH KEEP  
THE COMMANDMENTS OF GOD, AND HAVE THE TESTIMONY OF  
JESUS CHRIST.

—REVELATION 12:15-17





# Our Trespasses

Even Gabe had to admit the Biblical quotes were getting to him,

—They sure got a funny way of bein' timely...

—What do you think they put up for Valentine's Day?

The rare old craft rattled with parts that three generations of Madison's family had bought, scavenged, or cannibalized from other Fords, a reminder of a time when a car was something not discarded, but repaired—and often at home. Madison's grandfather had bought the pick-up and her brother now owned it, but the Ford was also held by various cousins, siblings, and neighbors, who each owned the value of a sparkplug, a fan belt, a brake pad or two. People in this country used to invest their money in automobiles, the same way they now do in cell phones and computers, bringing whatever interest they may.

So it was that as they started the morning with the signage project, Nat was always the last one out of the Ford and the first one back in; the passenger-side door was, indeed, still busted.

\* \* \*

It is one of the great vanities of Middle Americans to cast themselves as The Normal Ones. Nat was continually confounded at Gabe's insistence that he held majority opinions or somehow had the inside track on what "most people"—whoever *they* were—wanted and thought. Gabe kept up this delusion back East, despite the fact that he played his rural background shtick for all it was worth. Even more annoyingly, that shtick completely overlooked fact that Nat was the one who had grown up within 50 miles of the City. *She* was the local.

Given Gabe's powers of chauvinism in a City 1,000 miles from his roots, Nat was hardly surprised that this tendency was only emboldened the further West they drove. It seemed every time they got out of the car that day, there was nothing she was allowed to handle other than her camera, which he was happy to let her lug, since on that day it was the Hasselblad and tripod. In turns, he derided the austere Evangelical landscape through which they were driving and identified himself as somehow qualified to own it. All she was doing was taking pictures (albeit tendentiously), but this was not how Gabe saw it. The way he kept talking and talking—to no one in particular after the first 20 minutes of his ambivalent rant—Nat had to wonder what exactly Gabe was trying not to think about.

However, this, too, was a passing thought: after another 20 minutes, she was left with little option but to tune him in and out to preserve her sanity and keep working. There was nothing worth arguing over and, more to the point, he didn't want her to rain on his pretty little dialectic to nowhere. She wouldn't dare.

Glimpsing all the standing water, Gabe began to rant about Global Warming (that secular, eschatological complement to Revelations). He lectured the windshield about how America was doomed to a cyclical history that spirals out of control because of how we've used—and abused—our natural resources. That was why the Europeans came here, after all. We were shortening our line of credit with planet Earth, Gabe insisted; here was our interest, collecting in a very literal Flood. Now we were so greedy and short-sighted that we were like coke fiends, scraping under the polar ice cap for oil, eager to suck off any tyrant sitting on a gas reserve just so we could get one final hit. And, until we did, we'd never give a thought to getting our shit together and going to space again or inventing some other way of powering things. *Anything* for that last little bit of profit! Americans would con any little quick fix





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by Cara Marsh Sheffler

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they could. As he drove, Gabe said this is why Americans see romance in desperate men: *pioneers, Huck Finn, cowboys, prospectors, rags to riches tales, Horatio Alger, Gatsby, Steve McQueen*...He finally relented, but not before swallowing and weakly adding *hobos and gamblers* to that list.

Nat basically agreed with every part of this that she'd paid attention to, but did not chime in to add that these were all things she had always thought about *him*; much as Gabe did not add that these were all things that he had always thought about Uncle Dall. On any given day, Gabe defended his hard-line lefty opinions as irrationally as he defended his dumb State, so Nat hardly felt the need to search for any newfangled, underlying logic here.

By this point, he was driving her to such distraction that she had no choice but to concentrate absolutely. This was a lucky coincidence since there was much on her mind to distract her—but even more work to be done. She chose the work, because to choose anything else would be to lose track of everything completely, and Nat refused to do that. The first order of the day was getting the pictures and, beyond that, she could not concern herself with any conflicts of interest or how Gabe felt about this drive. She'd deal with everything else once she had her photos.

Nat was expert at burying anything at all in work. She always told herself the same thing: she didn't have all the answers, so all she could do was keep her head down and keep at it. She was mad about Gabe and she was very much bent on getting her photos; if she just kept working, those two basic facts need not come into conflict. One did not have to undo the other, much as one did not have to justify the other. During the day it would be the pictures, during the night it would be Gabe, and she'd figure out how it all did—or didn't—come together when they got back home.

Yes, it was selfish: she felt terrible about how things were going and, yes, work made her feel better. But, still it was work and work was productive. There was no arguing with it the way one could argue with so many other things. So, she was blocking out Gabe's chauvinism while admittedly exploiting and exploring it the further West they drove. But, if she was on the road, wasn't the West her experience, too? Couldn't Gabe see that? Couldn't Gabe indulge her connection to this somehow? Of course, he couldn't and, of course, she deserved no such indulgence. Yet, here they were: on the road—and, so, she worked.

Nat's obliqueness welcomed its own sort of Flood. In Nat's Flood, events piled up under the watch of her willful, stubborn passivity; Nat would only ever run—or otherwise act—to go down the one path left her, when all the others were flooded out. She would never, ever be the one to choose. Her situation was best defined as a gradual accretion of intransigence and indecision just barely allowed to slide. Hers was a guilty ambivalence, even when she was riding high; she lived with this feeling by letting her escape routes sort themselves. Nat actively sought both discipline and dissipation, but she would never let herself be derailed or even influenced by pleasure or pain. She went on what availed itself to her and soldiered on.

However, Nat very actively sought both her art and the career that would legitimate it—as she would admit to no one, but was obvious to all. Everything else was secondary. This notion was socially acceptable to admit (especially in her circles), but unlikely to be properly understood, mainly coming out of a woman's mouth. *Everything else was secondary*. Were Nat a man, she would have the drippy sort of helpmeet significant other for whom the title muse could mollify all of life's disappointments and betrayals. As a woman herself, Nat understood exactly what a hollow, demeaning, and corrupt bargain that was—but she also thought it was a damn shame she would never have the chance to impose it on someone. No man would ever be pawned off as her muse. Nope: anything with a penis would be far too busy panicking over where her diploma was from, trembling before *The Great Dick-Shrinker*.





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At heart, Nat was not romantic in the slightest; her capacity for romance was sapped by her vocation as a practicing artist, which required that she be damn near delusional. However, as a woman, she just wanted someone who could hold it all together and at least field a crisis. Chekhov once wrote something to the effect that any idiot can field a crisis, but it's the day-to-day living that will get you. Nat—as far as she could see (which wasn't far at all)—excelled at the day-to-day thing; she just needed the idiot. In feeling tremendously guilty about this thought, Nat glossed over what this might make her since she, in fact, waited for the day-to-day living to metastasize into a crisis before she would cope with it—and only then do so simply and brutally because she was always left no options. To date, this had been her M.O. for all her life's great transitions.

For these reasons, Nat tended to deal with people in terms of belated general assessments, and never with discrete reactions in real time. So it was that she was beginning to realize that, despite his glorious cock, Gabe would neither be able to hold it all together nor field a crisis. This, like her inability to pawn him off as a *muse*, Nat thought was really a damn shame. She'd come to this realization quite a while ago, but decided to let the end-date on her apartment's lease bring things to a head. Sure, there was the financial justification—they did spend *all* their time alone there, which was most of the time they spent together—but, really, it was the most convenient foot to put down. And, in the meantime, she'd get her pictures. Was that so terrible?

Yes, yes it was. Even Nat knew this and it only caused her to think back on the good times and fuck Gabe blue at every chance she got. In seeing her own Floodwaters rising, Nat made hay with what little time she had and, in so doing, only got in deeper.

But these were thoughts she only had marginally, mostly in passing. What Gabe had pegged as Nat's "obliqueness" went both ways—it was a genuine mode. This is not to say Nat was submissive, so much as to say that she understood the male ego and was happy to yield turf—and all the more so since somewhere she believed that sullyng herself with the dull work of making a relationship function was somehow beneath her.

Gabe was smart enough to see this and, in perceiving what it meant, it only further emasculated him: she gave him the reins not because she thought him worthy, but rather because she felt herself to be above domestic trifles. In the most polite terms, she was *delegating* her emotional and home lives to Gabe, who sometimes felt like he was working in hospitality both at the Ox and in Nat's apartment. However, what Gabe could not see was that this condescension did not owe to her diploma, but rather to how she ordered her life around her art. Nat's arrogance was occupational, not educational, but it was so unnatural on a woman even in the 21st century that no one—least of all Gabe—had been able to sort that out.

On that day-to-day level, Nat's obliqueness was often nothing more than a conservation of her energy—and even Nat was aware that this was something far too incendiary to admit, never mind parsing the roots of her specific brand of arrogance. She could scarcely admit it to herself. The older she got, more than anything, she wanted to stop burning the candle at both ends and concentrate on her work. This, more than rent, more than forcing any issues, was what was foremost in her mind when she'd thought to move in with Gabe: *whenever Gabe would be home, he'd be there with her—one less thing to schedule in.*

Gabe, meanwhile, had bigger problems on his hands. Gabe's biggest problem, as far as Nat could tell, was that he didn't know what that problem was. Gabe had no idea what he concretely wanted and, for this reason, could not establish himself. He didn't even have the option of selling out, but—if he did—Nat was fairly certain he'd have no clue what to do with the money. Gabe fantasized about having a restaurant of his own, but he was always chasing something larger that he couldn't name. No one could name it. It was what made him attractive, but it was also what made him desperate. Nat felt terrible the first time she had the thought that—despite his total lack of interest in or experience with running an





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actual business, juggling employees and investors and product in the daily grind—even if Gabe ever managed to pull off his restaurant pipe dream, he *still* wouldn't know what to do with it. Gabe excelled at the scramble, the last-ditch maneuver; somehow, he did not seem built for contentedness.

This, and this alone, was where Nat was eminently suited to the day-to-day: she loved her work. She loved being alone doing something that both fulfilled and sustained her. Whenever someone asked her what she did all day anyway, she knew the inquisitor did not understand this. Gabe asked that very question all the time and it figured: he was always chasing down a horizon, while she was thrilled by what was right in front of her—so much so, that she let everything else fall away in importance (even if she resented when someone wasn't there to deal with it all for her).

Perhaps this was why Nat was wonderful at talking craft—as she had to Gabe's family—but inept at talking about her actual work. She was trying to get better at this, even drafting talking points for things no one had bought nor commissioned. Gabe was her opposite in this way: he was *all* talk. He could rhapsodize about Stilton for hours, when he actually found the cheese revolting and always made the bus boys bring any plate with Stilton directly to patrons eating it at the bar. Gabe had no issues serving anyone; he just could not manage the proximity to that stench—but, *man*, could he sell the stuff! Gabe took pride in this skill that Nat found to be nothing short of folly. That was the thing about photographs; Gabe could talk and talk and talk, but she was guaranteed the last word.

This line of logic led Nat to despise digital photography: the pixels seemed antithetical to the totality of an image—even if, especially if—an analogue image were doctored. It was fast becoming a lost art. In our medicalized world, everything is always getting both diagnosed and getting better all the time. We discount the knowledge of our forebears and toss out their secrets as merely old. In this carelessness, we lose craft, we lose time—their time—while short-changing our own time in the future. We are robbed blind by neverending updates.

To Nat, her craft was an antidote to this, a sort of practical shamanism. Gabe always seemed to be reaching for a spirituality or something else he couldn't name, but Nat just practiced her craft. She lent significance where she saw fit by creating context itself; Nat constellated her own stars and created her own universe of meaning where transcendence was attainable—grace, even. Gabe was waiting and waiting to leap across some unknowable chasm, while Nat just got to work whenever and wherever she could. She intrinsically understood the value of small steps and steady progress. Ironically for someone who refuted the notion of *Infinite Progress*, Nat believed in progress on a daily, personal level: and so, she believed in the value of her work intuitively. Her only ends were her means.

As Nat saw it, in our techno-medical, hyper-specialized notion of progress, the country had mired itself in a service economy. Actual goods and skills and execution had been thrown away and—rationally or irrationally—Nat pinned her rage at this on the digital. In Nat's universe, light would not be binary and so she captured it on paper, on film, on plates. Nat reasoned that culture could not be rendered in a service economy. Art was not something meant to be outsourced and, yet, we had done just that: exporting it until it came back in a shipping container with instructions to call a helpline a dozen time zones away. So, Nat decided she would capture the light she knew and develop images on the air she breathed. What came out would speak for itself and whatever was behind the moment would die away, not be retained and encrypted on some wheezing, lecherous hard drive alongside all the gory, boring details of her personal life.

And the light that day was gorgeous! The sun had been in and out all morning, until they reached a town called Mine Under and it burst through the clouds like the Hand of God in a Renaissance fresco. The town had grown up around the old Lucre Silver Mine, whose vein was bled dry during the Civil War, when the State Treasury went flat broke. On one side of the road, at a short distance, they saw the Lucre Silver Mine, which many travelers had formerly turned aside to examine, but on approaching the





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brink of the pit, the ground had given way and buried them alive, and there they probably perished by falling over the brink, or by suffocation from the unwholesome damp which often arise in the mine.

Leading up to the mouth of the mine was a sort of miniature railway to nowhere, the perspective into the darkness magnified by the undersize gauge. The old mining carts that once used the rail were nowhere in sight and an eerie cold blew up from the mouth of the cave. The cave had likely, at some point, been someone's deity, but now it was a blighted place, raped, robbed, and blasted in. Yet, to say this was to say nothing of the dangerous work of the rape itself and the men desperate enough to do it—or perhaps forced to, during slavery, during the war. All that the place needed was a tourist museum selling t-shirts and the desecration would be complete, the violation of a deity graduated to out-and-out murder. However, because no one had yet built that museum, Nat knew her pictures would be phenomenal.

She grew giddy each time the shutter went *PLAH-schop, PLAH-schop!* Her mood was infectious and the outcome of the pictures was so certain to be great that Gabe even lent a hand assisting whenever Nat asked him for film, for the light meter, for another flash, for some strange appendage Gabe had never heard of before. As Gabe ran around, Nat from time to time watched him and marveled that she had spent so much time worrying that there was some conflict of interest between her work and her time with him. She was getting her pictures, after all, and *Gabe was even helping!* Gabe ran about in the sunlight from Ford to mine and back and forth a dozen times or more—even driving the Ford to the mouth of the cave to see what that might do. (*Not much*, Nat quickly decided once Gabe had put himself in physical danger.)

Gabe could hardly believe that he let a *dream* knock him so horribly off-kilter—and that he had worked himself into such a pernicious panic attack that would leech into his dream life. He probably needed to see someone about it, but as he made himself useful in the unseasonal warmth of the sun, he reasoned the panic was all probably medical or chemical—not actual or spiritual (such were his categories). He didn't have the health insurance to fix any of it, but knowing it probably could be fixed made his heart lighter than it had felt in weeks. Why hadn't this occurred to him before? Wasn't it almost certain this sort of thing would run in the family?

As to his professional woes, yes, he was in deep shit. But, hey: *shit happens!* He would just deal with it when he got back and, in the meantime, the most important thing was to bring Nat around to his side, right? Wasn't that easy enough? What wasn't easy when the sun was shining and they were having such a wonderful time together? It was just a matter of sleep deprivation that was driving him crazy. That and one nutty dream... The rest was just something—something to sort just as everyone has things to sort now and then. *Just relax!* See, his manager was onto something there! All he had to do was relax, have a nice time with Nat, and let the chips fall where they may back in the City when it was time. If they just could have a nice time together, Nat would come around to his side as she always had; this was all they really needed, anyway: a *break*. Nat was right: the road trip was a great idea!

Once all the gear was put away and secured in the bed under the tarp, Nat clambered back to her side of the cab through the driver's side door. As she did, Gabe smacked her ass and Nat turned around to kiss him for a little while, running her fingers up and down his neck as his hands spanned the entire width of her back. When they pulled their faces apart, they leaned back on the beat-up seats and smiled, holding hands as Gabe started up the engine and Nat confessed she could really use some lunch.

They continued West along the highway to a town called Conceit, which boasted a joint called Plain Ease—a diner that sold bait and supposedly had phenomenal food. Conceit could not even be said to have a main drag, just a single road with some stores on either side, so the place was a breeze to find. There was even a parking spot right next to the front door. Both Nat and Gabe decided to order fishes and loaves, the specialty, which was basically fried catfish on wonder bread, but it tasted *divine*. Gabe





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ordered a second sandwich and Nat sipped deeply on lemonade spiked with moonshine. The waitress laughed that they were less than two miles from the county line—and since Cross County was dry, they'd better get their fill at Plain Ease! The pair laughed and obliged.

After the better part of an hour, they decided to hit the road once more. Nat got up to use the bathroom and, as she did, she winked at Gabe with such blatant, public carnality, he thought he'd have to find the next weigh station and make her yield to *his* nonstop demands this time around. How could he have been so paranoid the night before? He had fallen for Nat *because* she was an uninhibited freak in bed. What was there to complain about?

Just as he asked himself this question, Nat's phone, which she had left behind on the table, lit up with a text message: it was from her mother. Gabe breathed a giant sigh of relief and chided himself further for being so irrational, so panicky, for almost throwing away his shot at happiness on a bad mood and some lost sleep, when suddenly his own phone buzzed (always in pairs). It was Faith:

I know you're with your family, but can we talk today?

In a car wreck, it is sometimes said that everything moves in slow motion, but the exact opposite feeling occurred to Gabe. He fast-forwarded straight through absorption of this question and a consideration of what it might mean to immediately texting back, without the slightest thought or hesitation, as though he'd typed with his eyes:

Is it about that night?

And as he watched the bar that indicated his message was sending begin to change colors, time suddenly slowed to molasses as he endured an utter free fall, more damning and protracted than any defeat he had ever before suffered. He had lost it all; he had lost everything. The table seemed to pulse upward at him as he lurched forward in a cold sweat, sure he was about to throw up. He ran toward the bathroom, which, by the smallest grace of God, was not unisex. He hung his head over the toilet, unable to bring up anything. He gave up fast and started pacing until Faith shot back the following message:

Yes... This should be a conversation. LMK when you can talk.

By the time he finally left the men's room, maybe three minutes later and maybe 33, he had drafted and erased at least a dozen replies. Nat, meanwhile, had paid the bill and was waiting beside the Ford.

—I was just about to come and get you; are you okay? Are you sick?

Gabe tried laughing, but his breath emerged as a dry and broken cackle, barely audible at that.

—Sorry, it's just—it's just that I got into a little back and forth about the Ox, about hours, about when...the bug, locust problem's, you know, everything's fixed.

He was grey.

—But you're sure your stomach isn't bothering you? You need me to pop into the drug store? Or, do you want me to drive?

With shaking hands and a hard swallow, Gabe took the easy lie Nat was handing him and asked her to run and get some Pepto or whatever they had across the street. She did and, while she was gone, Gabe continued to draft and erase, draft and erase any response at all to Faith's message.





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But something seemed deeply, deeply off. All his convictions gave way like the ground leading up to the old Lucre Silver Mine. All his sunlight perished in the unwholesome damp.

By the time they were within the municipal limits of a town called Shadow Vale (population: 23), Nat gave up on trying to wrest the wheel from Gabe, who was obviously unwell. The road narrowed and the hills grew steep on either side of it, with a tumbling mixture of gravel and ash bouncing off the windshield. The trees were few and young, as though a forest fire had scorched the place not a year or two before. Other than that "Welcome" sign, there was no indication of any community, human or animal. Nat tried to concentrate on ideas for the next slew of photos, scanning her map and phone as she had before, but she now had minimal service, barely one bar. She was about to inform Gabe that he was actually hyperventilating, but when she breathed in to speak, she was interrupted by the cry of a police siren.

The police car pulled directly alongside the Ford on Gabe's side. Gabe supposed it was a safe bet that no one else would be coming that way anytime soon. The cop car was a banged-up old Chevy Suburban (as though they were *remotely* near suburbia). As the cruiser came to rest, Gabe noticed that, although the "Welcome" sign had identified the town as Shadow Vale, the seal on the door of the SUV read *THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW*

—Y'all know how fast you were goin'?

—No, sir; I'm very sorry, sir.

↑



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politely yet again and—piercing through what Nat perceived as illness, but Gabe knew was the fog of utter ruin—Gabe still managed a little bullshit dance about showing his pretty East Coast *fiancée* around.

Nat's sweat glands slowed their production and she wordlessly congratulated herself on buying Gabe the mint Mylanta at the drug store across from Plain Ease. She also congratulated herself on having a boyfriend smart enough not to volunteer that they had just had lunch in the Westernmost town that served booze in the entire State. It was a little before three o'clock in the afternoon; the matter of drinking didn't even come up!

The cop asked Gabe for his license and registration. Gabe quickly obliged on the former, but as he explained that he was borrowing the pick-up, Nat rummaged around the glove compartment for the latter. The first item to tumble out was the very same beat-up manila envelope Christian had been clutching in the parking lot of the funeral home—the one whose contents he had lied to Gabe about. Gabe's eyes widened as he told Nat that wasn't it and pointed to a laminated, pleather folder behind it. Sure enough, that held the registration.

As the cop took Gabe's driver's license and the registration over to his Chevy, he whistled low and said to no one in particular,

—Looks like we got ourselves a *City boy*!

Nat's stomach fluttered up into her throat again, so that she complied numbly and, without much thought at all, when Gabe asked her to hand him the envelope. He did not debate opening it, but wondered why Christian had left it there. Surely, his straight-arrow little brother would *never* have been careless or irresponsible enough to leave it in the glove compartment by mistake, but—just as surely—Christian had no way of anticipating that Gabe would take the Ford for the rest of the week.

Right when Gabe was about to unlace the figure-eights of coarse red thread looped about two ancient metal grommets and glue that had dried out during the Kennedy administration, the cop returned faster than expected. He said that he saw Gabe had a perfect driving record for the past 11 years (not coincidentally the exact same 11 years Gabe had lived out East and hadn't owned a car). That being the case, the policeman was happy to let Gabe off with a small fine he could mail in and a *promise* that they would consider coming back for their honeymoon. Nat beamed and Gabe apologized again, this time more profusely, though he decided against making the obvious joke that they had been speeding off to a motel in the first place—this was still the Bible Belt, after all.

Nat waved good-bye from her seat with a pert, yet suitably contrite, *Thank you, Officer!* And, with that, the Chevy continued down the road, kicking up no small amount of gravel and ash. Right on cue, Nat crawled over Gabe's lap and went bounding out of the car to take some photos of this valley of ashes, this fantastic farm where ashes grew like wheat into ridges and hills and grotesque gardens. She was after the Tyndall effect of the light straining through the haze and shadows of young, lonesome trees, their trunks attenuated as though Giacometti had sculpted a series of hillbilly orphans. The landscape was rendered pretty much in black and white already.

This left Gabe alone with the old manila envelope. He extracted a single piece of paper, a birth certificate, Aunt Addie's birth certificate. However, Aunt Addie's last name was listed as his grandmother's maiden name, and the birthday was wrong, too. Addie was his mother's twin, but this birth certificate said she was more than a month older—40 days! Was that possible?

Two lines down, Gabe understood why Aunt Addie had his grandmother's maiden name.





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He also understood why Gran wanted only Aunt Addie's birth year—and not the actual date—on the tombstone.

He even knew why Aunt Addie's hair had been raven-black:

Uncle Dall was her father.

\* END PART TWO \*





## Editorial Staff

**Luke Cissell** (*Against Specialization; Cosmography*) is a musician and composer who lives in Lower Manhattan. Born in Louisville, Kentucky, he was a fiddling champion at the age of eight and went on to train as a classical violinist. Cissell's recent work includes a collection of chamber music, a full-length album, and a suite for solo violin written as a companion piece to Cara Marsh Sheffler's *Guide*. He is currently at work on his second studio album and an opera based on Henry James's *The Ambassadors*. Play with his jukebox at <http://www.lukecissell.com>.

**Sarah Marriage** (*Madrone Box; A Call to Practice; Spring Fauna*) is a woodworking student at the College of the Redwoods Fine Woodworking program in Fort Bragg, California. Conceived in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, born in Tulsa, Oklahoma, raised in Anchorage, Alaska, Sarah studied architecture at Princeton University and has at turns worked in the fields of architecture, structural engineering, occupational health and safety, dog-walking, data management, physics, youth empowerment, and construction supply. Recent projects include the rehabilitation of a nineteenth-century townhouse in Baltimore, Maryland. She also serves as Art Director, Designer, Programmer, and Calligrapher for *Works & Days*.

**Cara Marsh Sheffler** (*Our Trespasses*) is a writer who lives on Manhattan's Lower East Side. In her past life as an actress, she was featured in Woody Allen's *Celebrity* and in The Looking Glass Theatre's Off-Broadway production of *Much Ado About Nothing*. A recipient of the Eagles Prize, she has most recently been working on *Our Trespasses* and another novel about the guidebook used by the Donner Party, *Guide*. She performed an excerpt of *Guide* in tandem with Luke Cissell's (*The Myth of*) *Infinite Progress* at the Brick Theater last year. Sheffler is also providing the libretto for Cissell's adaptation of *The Ambassadors*. She likes road trips.

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## Contributors

**Penelope August** (*Chain Study*) designs interiors and furniture for an architecture firm by day. At night she makes things with her hands. She often works in mediums that require a transformation by fire or sun, where the end result is not entirely in her control. She has been working with clay for 22 years. She has 84 houseplants. She lives in Williamsburg, Brooklyn with her husband.

Born in Los Angeles, **Rebecca Bersohn** (*Teeth*) is a New York based artist. She received her BFA at New York University. Her work has been exhibited at Monster Island, Charlie Horse Gallery, the Market Hotel in Brooklyn, BWAC and The Commons Gallery at NYU. Her Awards in the Arts include Bank of America Art Award 2004, an Artist's Distinction Award (2003) for an ink/water color piece at the California Art Education Association Los Angeles County Exhibit and the Governor's Art Scholar Award 2002-2003.

**Eric Bland's** (*Building Three*) latest play, *All the Indifferent Children of the Earth*, was described as "death-obsessed" and "awesomely eloquent." He studied Writing for Performance at Goldsmiths College, University of London, and poetry and playwriting at Princeton.

A native of Vilnius, Lithuania, **Arturas Bumšteinas** (*My Own Private Bayreuth #1 and #2*) is a composer/performer of acoustic and electronic music. After graduating from the Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theater, he founded three musical ensembles: *Quartet Twentytwentyone*, *Zarasai*, and *Works and Days*. His various projects have been presented in dozens of exhibitions around Europe. Festival participation includes: The Holland Festival, Sensoralia/Romaeuropa, Angelica, Jauna Muzika, Sonic Circuits, Cut & Splice, Skanumezs, Wundergrund, KODY, and Full Pull. Collaborators include: Anton Lukoszevieve, Laura Garbštie, Jesse Glass, Piotr Kurek, Alina Orlova, Lina Lapelyte, Jeff Surak, Borut Savski, Pure, Vladimir Tarasov, Dominykas Vyšniauskas, Liudas Mockunas, and Max Reinhardt. His music has been published by the following labels: Belt, Zeromoon, Con-v, NUUN, Sangoplasmo, Cronica Electronica, Semplice Records, and Nexsound. From 2006-2011, he was represented by Galerie Antje Wachs in Berlin; today, he lives and works in Riga, Latvia. His work may be found at <http://arturasbumsteinas.tumblr.com/>.

**Michael Hodgson** (*Tidal Basin*) hails from the wilds of New Hampshire by way of Princeton, NJ and now resides in the Hudson River Valley. He is a photographer who still uses film. He mourns the pending bankruptcy of Kodak and is stockpiling his photapocalypse kit accordingly.

**Prue Hyman** (*Gears*) enjoys observing unexpected details and using historic photographic processes. She spent extensive time in the late aughts on the road, photographing musicians. A native New Yorker, she currently lives in Chinatown. Her work can be viewed at [www.pruehyman.com](http://www.pruehyman.com) and is available for sale via direct contact. She is a connoisseur of jokes pertaining to her surname.

**Field Kallop** (*Prism Series*) was born and raised in New York, NY. After working at El Museo de la Nación in Lima Perú, and at The Museum of Modern Art in New York, Field shifted her focus from curatorial projects to making art. She became an assistant to the artist Chuck Close and established a studio practice, allowing her to devote more of her time to her own painting. Kallop recently received an MFA from the Rhode Island School of Design in Providence, where her work underwent a significant transformation. After giving up oil paint, she began exploring new materials and experimenting with various processes. While her interests remained consistent—she continues to be inspired by mathematical principles and scientific phenomena—her work started to take on a range of new forms. Kallop is now back in NYC, and lately she has been working with indigo and bleach on fabric. To view more of her work, visit [www.fieldkallop.com](http://www.fieldkallop.com).

**Willow Jane Sainsbury** (*Spring Fauna*) is an artist and illustrator, who currently lives in Vicenza, Italy. She has lived in Melbourne, Australia; Auckland, New Zealand; and Oxford, United Kingdom in the past three years where she continues to teach, learn and work as an artist. She most recently returned to education, learning printmaking at the Australian Print Workshop. She is currently working on her own illustration project and a study of landscapes. She is not on Facebook.

California-grown and a New Yorker at heart, **Ashley Suzan** (*Recipes*) is a graduate of the Gallatin School at New York University. The youngest of four, Ashley was raised in the kitchen. An avid yogi and spinning enthusiast, her creative passions include drawing, food, and beverage. Follow her on Twitter @AshleySuzan.

**Johnny Williams** (*Sierras*) is an aspiring furniture maker gone missing in the headlands of Northern California. He was last seen building two children's chairs at the College of the Redwoods Fine Furniture program, one in madrone, another in bay laurel. If you see him, tell him to sober up and head home to New York: his boyfriend and mother miss him dearly.

**Eric Wines** (*Recipes*) enjoys trolling flea markets for treasures, playing with plants, and distance running. He is co-owner of Tre restaurant in Manhattan and a member of The Skylight Group. He hosts candlelight suppers and classy cocktail parties. Wines was raised in Detroit, MI and lives in New York City. Follow him on Twitter @EricWines.