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NON-FICTION | SPRING 2015

## The Baby on the Bus

By Nina Gaby

It is 1990, I have just finished my Masters in Psychiatric Mental Health Nursing, and I am the first nurse to ever be hired by our big, important teaching hospital to work on a program such as this. *This* being a crisis team with funding by a government grant that:

- 1) is supposed to validate the deinstitutionalization of the mentally ill (forcing them out of state run facilities into a community that is ill prepared to deal with their complex needs) and
- 2) is supposed to keep them out of our big, important teaching hospital.

Note: there are many “supposed to’s” and “not suppose to’s” here.

I am forty years old. My father has just died. I am pregnant for the first time and the timing sucks. I am supposed to, as the first nurse ever hired for such a position, be truly on my game. It is still very hard, in 1990, to convince the old guard that advanced practice nurses should be considered for positions such as this and my performance will be under great scrutiny. But I am not on my game. Since my father died, I have developed a tic in my thumb, a vast sense of disconnection (the world suddenly a barren field without markers, impossible to negotiate) and some poorly compensatory OCD traits, worsening significantly with the hormonal roulette wheel that is this pregnancy. My job entails doing whatever it takes to keep people out of the

hospital. Suicidal people. Psychotic people. Suicidal and psychotic people. It is 1990, so let's throw in the crack epidemic. People sit in my office instead of sitting in the safety of inpatient psychiatry.

Before I am supposed to go out on bed rest for stress related reasons, my caseload includes a crack addicted pregnant adolescent. She has lost her previous pregnancies to miscarriage. She wants this baby. She has no supports, not even a grandma. She is delightful, large, and black as is much of my caseload. I am not supposed to care so much about her. My case manager and I try to get her into an inpatient rehab, but they won't accept crack. Only alcohol. I lie.

It's one of the last important things I do before I'm ordered to go to bed. I am too preoccupied to grieve my father.

A year later, my child is in daycare, my car has broken down and I am on the city bus. I still have occasional moments, like now, where I am sure I see my father in a car ahead. I imagine racing after him with his granddaughter in my arms. Her middle name is his mother's. My face is flat against the grimy bus window when another baby, thrown into my lap, startles me. A beautiful, chubby, shiny black baby.

A woman shouts, "Thank you! She *is* because of *you!* This ain't my bus but I saw you in the window!" She grabs the baby, rushes off. And I go on.

It is 2015. Heroin has replaced crack. My daughter is in grad school. I now live and work along the Interstate 89 corridor, which helps to connect Hartford to Montreal. I hear of

patients packing bundles in their vaginas. Even the pregnant ones. Entrepreneurs. I have long ago given up on big, important teaching hospitals. They still don't do what they are supposed to do. They do even less. I imagine that my old patient is now a grandmother.

I never race after my father anymore, except as a good metaphor.

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***Nina Gaby is a writer, visual artist and psychiatric nurse practitioner. She has contributed to many anthologies and periodicals, and has edited the recently published anthology "Dumped: Women Unfriending Women." Her sculptural porcelain is in the national collection of the Renwick Gallery of the Smithsonian. Gaby is currently the coordinator of Psychiatric Services at an inpatient rehab facility in New England and has been on faculty at several university schools of nursing.***