

Diatribades

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Cet extrait de roman présente Paulette qui, dans le cadre de son travail doit aller interviewer Glen et Gabrielle qui n'ont pas coché les cases appropriées de leur formulaire de Statistique Canada. En arrivant chez ce couple, Paulette découvre qu'elle a connu Glen – diminutif de Glendora – à l'école secondaire et un dialogue amusant s'ensuit.

p. 4
Legal Marital Status
#5 & #6
unanswered

Though the prim yellow note on the cover directs Paulette to the section of the form left blank, she flips through the entire Census form and tries to picture the couple who will face her when she arrives in St. Phillip's.

Glen and Gabrielle. He teaches high school, she works at the airport. Education papers the walls of their family room: her criminology certificate from MUN and travel and tourism diploma from the Career Academy, his B.Ed.

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Maybe they're hippies, believing their equality in all things makes them too good for marriage.

Maybe they're saving up for the wedding, a big white wedding, since she was married before without the "proper" pomp.

Maybe he's miffed that she won't share his name.

Maybe they're too busy in their careers for nuptials.

Maybe they've struggled long with this question, mulled it over bottles of wine and come out only with foggy minds and soggy crotches.

Maybe they've been going out for some obscene amount of time. Since high school.

Maybe they've been living "in sin" for less than the required year and can't legally call themselves common-law partners.

Maybe they've been passing – as roommates – for years (since her parents would surely object).

Maybe they're best friends passing as a straight couple (since "no son" of his parents could possibly turn out "that way").

Maybe they've watched their parents' relationships lose their lustre and vowed never to let theirs do the same. Maybe they figure marriage slips sex drive into cruise control.

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Paulette barrels across the north-eastern tip of Newfoundland's Avalon Peninsula, from St. John's to St. Phillip's, in a dented hatchback. Numbers don't grace housefronts, and Paulette hasn't taken any special exams in orienteering. On her third go at the winding swells of Beachy Cove Road, Paulette pulls up the long driveway. She writes in her StatsCan logbook:

12:25 second attempt to verify form for Glen Butler and Gabrielle Tricco.

Before approaching the front door, she peeks around back: a small field, then a sheer drop to the water. She skips up the front steps, singing:

If you feel like singing, sing,

Tra la la your cares away

Supposing you *do re mi* slightly off key

The peephole silences her.

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"Paulette?" The door opens before Paulette reaches the top step.

"Glendora? I thought you were in Japan."

"No, girl. We got out of there last August. Almost a year now, we've been back."

"Oh." Even though Paulette feels the salt sting of insignificance, professionalism hooks her from the abyss of lapsed friendship. "This is weird. Because I'm here for Statistics Canada. I'm looking for a Glen Butler and Gabrielle Tricco."

"Gabrielle's upstairs, but I'm your man."

"Oh? Oh. They sent me to ask about your Census form. It's incomplete."

Glendora calls up the stairs, "Ria? Ri-A?"

When Gabrielle fails to appear, Glendora gets antsy, "The place is a mess. Let's go down to Auntie Crae's, there on Old Broad Cove Road. We'll meet you there in, say," she glances at her watch, "half an hour."

Paulette nods, and the door shuts, gently, in her face.

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Auntie Crae's Bakery and Roastery. Both sides of the door sport the sign:



The cashier tells Paulette to take a window seat on the other side of the room, if she's eating in, and someone will be right by with a menu.

Agoraphobia spreads like a field of sally suckers as the lunch crowd bangs its way in. Paulette hauls her journal out of her tote bag.

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Maybe Glendora wants to keep it formal by moving the interview out of her house.

Maybe Glendora has forgotten how messy I am.

Maybe Glendora doesn't think I'm good enough to set foot inside her new house.

Maybe they're going to have a quickie.

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The cashier also waits the tables, and Paulette's coffee arrives just as the door bangs shut behind Glendora and Gabrielle. Glendora does the honors: "Ria, this is someone I knew in high school. Ria – Paulette. Paulette – Gabrielle."

As she is shaking Paulette's hand, Gabrielle asks Glendora, "Is she one of that crowd you told me about?"

Glendora's nod is less than vigorous.

Paulette waits for their windswept hair to settle, then clears her throat.

Glendora begins the interview with a smile, "We are gathered here today."

"May I cut in?" Paulette asks. "We're here because there are discrepancies in your Census form."

"Discrepancies, huh?" Gabrielle rolls her eyes, then looks around the room and out the windows in mock paranoia. "What do you think, Glen – paddy wagon or undercover cop?"

Paulette's laugh ends the moment it begins. "It's not like that. Maybe it's different up at the airport – sure, you can't even make bomb jokes without

some guy in uniform leading you off by the elbow. Or so I hear."

Gabrielle sneers. "Gimme a break. Bomb jokes, at an international airport? I dare say buddy would haul you away. And proper thing, too."

"Stats Canada just doesn't want to get the numbers shagged up."

"God forbid they misrepresent the country to itself!" Glendora slaps her hand across her chest and pledges, "I swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and Oh! Canada!" she gasps, "We stand on God for thee."

"C'mon, Glendora, I'm just doing my job. Don't make me read out the legal spiel about filling in the form accurately."

Glendora flinches. "Read me my rights? My wrongs, more like. No need, is there? That government bullshit is pretty standard. And if they actually want to pay people to hunt me down and ask me if I own my own home, so be it."

"Alright, then. You didn't fill in this whole section on Legal Marital Status – question 5 and 6." Paulette double clicks her mechanical pencil.

Gabrielle tilts her head toward Glendora. "We didn't? Why not? Paulette, Glen does all the paperwork – bills, income tax, birthday cards, everything. Why'd you leave out a question, Glen? Next thing, you'll be leaving off postal codes and stamps. Sending letters without envelopes. Returning my paycheques to the government."

"Pretty funny, Ria. I'm anything but careless."

"Some might say a little too careful," Gabrielle winks. "Anal, even."

"If you're into that kind of thing," Glendora's eyebrows respond.

"Glendora?" Paulette's voice nicks their lascivious play in the butt. "The questions – why didn't you fill in the questions?"

"You have to tell the truth, right?"

Paulette nods.

"Well, none of the boxes fits us."

"What are you talking about?" asks Gabrielle. "Read me out the choices, willya Paulette?"

Paulette rhymes them off: "Legally married (and not separated), Legally married and separated, Divorced, Widowed, Never married (single)."

"Just tick the last one. What's the big deal, Glen? We're not married. Case closed. Next question?"

"Wait a minute, Ria. You consider yourself single? Because if that's the case, we've got some talking to do."

"But," Gabrielle hesitates, "why not just say married?"

"Are we? Legally?"

"Oh, Glen!" She whispers to Paulette, "Glen here, God love 'er, Glen gets all riled up sometimes."

"Ria, anyone with any sense would get riled up about this crap. Tell us how they describe the Legal Marital Stats in their booklet, Paulette."

Paulette rummages in her tote bag. "Okay, but I don't see how this is going to help."

"Exactly. Go ahead."

Paulette begins: "Information on legal marital status, when combined with other census questions, is used to study changes in family formation – see, they're interested in what's going on – and to measure, among other things, the growth and structure of two-income families, lone-parent families and the elderly who live independently."

"We don't even get a box for 'other,' Gabrielle." Flipping the page of the Census form, Glendora raps it five times. "Like *they* do for languages spoken at home, and for place of birth." She drops the form, holds her hand up in the gesture of a rhetorical question. "We don't even get to be 'other'."

Paulette's eyes scrape the form for possibilities. "Well, common-law couples tick Never Married. Couldn't you?"

"Sure. But common law is an accepted form of marriage, isn't it? The b'ys down at Stats Canada still call them husband and wife."

Paulette reels Glendora in. "Could you say you're a two-income family?"

Glendora takes a deep breath. "I'm telling you – you'd have to squeeze us pretty hard to fit us on the form. It's all about marriage."

"Let me get this straight: I can't tick 'Single (Never Married),' even though you've never been married?"

"I'm not single," Glendora states. "Tell the government they can add some g.d. options or come right out with it on the form: if you're queer, skip to the next question. For God's sake, they should have a whole different form for the so-called gay demographic. The homographic."

"Glennie, you're getting out of hand," Gabrielle ventures.

"Out of hand? Strident, perhaps? I wish you'd think before you speak, Ria."

Slowly, deliberately, Gabrielle asks, "Did you just say 'I wish you'd think before you speak'?"

Paulette squints to see the sign she's already read on the door. "Other options. Okay, I'll take note of that. Other options. Maybe we could finish this another day?"

Gabrielle pushes back her chair and extends a hand to Paulette. "No, go ahead. I've gotta get going, anyway. Nice to meet you." She bends toward Glendora and lowers her voice. "I can't sit through another one of your diatribes. I'm getting out of here."

Gabrielle does not glance back from the door before leaving.

Paulette asks into the pause, "Did you know Lisa's getting hitched?"

"Go on! How would I? Did she put an ad in the *Telegram*? Anyone I know?"

"I doubt it. Her partner is from Toronto."

"Partner? You mean to tell me Lisa's a dyke?"

Paulette shakes her head.

"I didn't think so. But you know, I hear 'partner' and I think 'queer.' It bugs me the way you guys have swooped in on that one."

"You guys'? What are you talking about?"

"You. Heterosexuals. Breeders."

"Breeders? That's a pretty big leap. I only said partner because I thought you'd be annoyed with fiancé. *You guys* are hard to please."

"I wouldn't say that, Paulette. But let's drop it."

"No arguments here."

"You still with that one, wasisname, Dwayne?"

"Hard to say." Paulette spins her ring around her thumb. "So, why 'Glen'? Did you actually – officially – change your name?"

"I didn't go in to the Confederation Building and stand in a line for hours at the Records office, but no one calls me Glendora anymore. Except my mother. And my sister's called me Glen for two or three years now. No biggie. I never was too fussy about Glendora."

"Go away witch! I think Glendora sounds glamorous."

"Sounds like a hat."

"What?"

"You know – a fedora – one of those hats from the movies."

"Never heard of them. But that's still glamorous, still from the movies."

"I never paid it any mind until my sister started calling me Glen. It feels like 'Glendora' makes me less than 'Glen'."

"But Glendora is longer than Glen, more than Glen."

"Oh, Paulette! Well, look at your name. You're the feminine version of Paul, like Smurf and Smurfette."

"Paulette's a family name," she sneers. "Let me get this straight. You're trying to slough off all femininity? So you'd rather be the masculine form

of Glen than the feminine one?"

"It's not about femininity. It's the way we're always defined in relation to men. Like the way all relationships are described in terms of marriage. So, I'm neutralizing Glen."

"Why couldn't you *neutralize* Glendora?"

"Huh?"

"I don't know." Paulette chaws on a hangnail. "How about putting in a capital 'D'? Capital G-l-e-n-capital D-o-r-a."

"Spouse."

"Or stick a hyphen in there: Glen-hyphen-Dora. Why didn't you just change your name completely? Pick up one of those names that can go either way, like Kelly or Kerry or Dana."

"Glen can go either way now, okay?"

"Sure." Paulette gives her ring another twirl. "Is it like that for you? Either way?"

"No, girl. I'm a filthy lesbian. One hundred percent. Tell *that* to Stats Canada."