

City Sages



City Sages

BALTIMORE

Edited by
Jen Michalski



CITYLIT
PRESS

Baltimore, Maryland

© 2010, Jen Michalski

Library of congress cataloging-in-Publication Data

ISBN 978-1-936328-01-7

[TO COME]

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or any information storage and retrieval system, without prior permission from the publisher (except by reviewers who may quote brief passages).

Printed in the United States of America

First Edition

Cover Design: Justin Sirois

Published by CityLit Press



CityLit Press

c/o CityLit Project

120 S. Curley Street

Baltimore, MD 21224

410.274.5691

www.CityLitProject.org

info@citylitproject.org

Nurturing the culture of literature.

“There is a saying in Baltimore that crabs may be prepared in fifty ways and that all of them are good.”

H.L. Mencken
“The Sage of Baltimore”



Table of Contents

Foreword / ii

Jen Michalski

Small Blue Thing / 1

Madison Smartt Bell

The Black Cat / 11

Edgar Allan Poe

Ada / 21

Gertrude Stein

Fugue / 23

Maud Casey

Joe Blow / 35

Jennifer Grow

Grey / 45

Lia Purpura

Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant (Excerpt) / 47

Anne Tyler

Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass,

An American Slave (Excerpt) / 63

Frederick Douglass

Assignations / 69

Jane Satterfield

Mush for the Multitude / 75

H.L. Mencken

Frog Made Free / 79

Stephen Dixon

Benediction / 85

F. Scott Fitzgerald

Dear Everybody (Excerpts) / 101

Michael Kimball

Family Pics / 107

Leigh Newman

Fourteen Things My Father Forbade / 123

Luca DiPierro

High Rise / 129

Susan McCallum-Smith

At the Beach / 143

Michael Downs

Downward Drifting / 151

Pat Schultheis

Their Eyes Were Watching God (Excerpt) / 155

Zora Neale Hurston

Bubbe and Zeyde / 159

Jessica Anya Blau

Koi Story / 175

Adam Robinson

Boy Stuff / 183

Jen Michalski

Easy as A-B-C / 195

Laura Lippman

My Small Murders / 203

Ron Tanner

Sister Rafeale Heals the Sick / 213

Rosalia Scalia

Where Hearts Lie / 219

Lalita Noronha

Two Plot Devices / 227

Rupert Wondolowski

Wedding and Wars / 229

Madeleine Mysko

Small Crimes / 239

Andria Nacina Cole

Forty-Five Years Ago / 249

Caryn Coyle

Charming Billy (Excerpt) / 253

Alice McDermott

Raise / 259

Betsy Boyd

Valet Parking / 271

Geoffrey Becker

The River Rushed On / 281

Todd A. Whaley

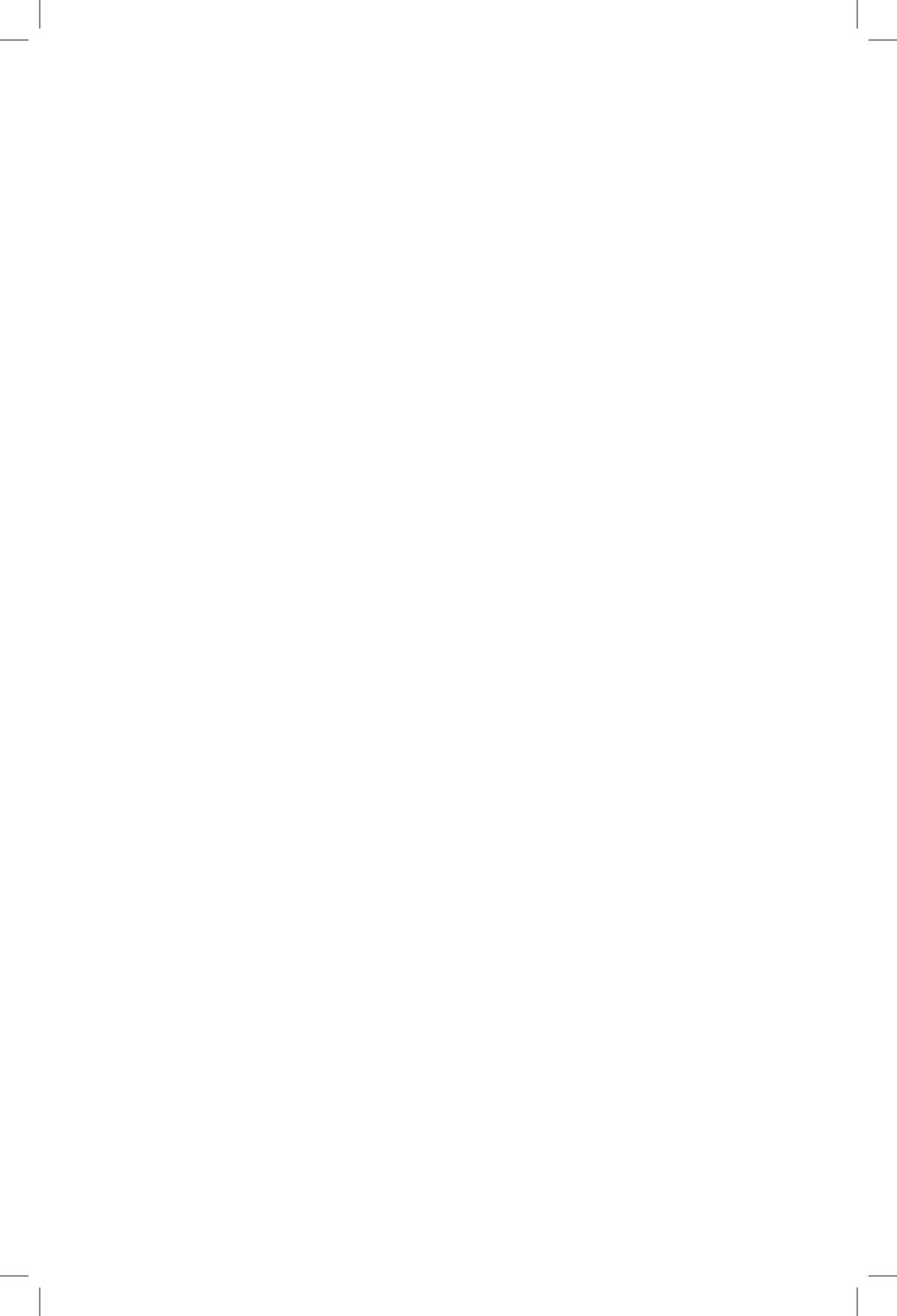
Fri*nd / Bk / Alp*ab*t / 293**

Joseph Young

The Velvet Room / 295

Rafael Alvarez

Contributors / 311



Foreword

JEN MICHALSKI

Where are the writers in Baltimore?

It is a question that has haunted me for the last four years and has culminated in my starting a literary journal, a writers' happy hour, co-hosting a reading series, and now editing this anthology. A not-so-brief summary of how this anthology came about: When I began to get involved in the Baltimore literary scene back in 2006, a great many literary scenes had happened in Charm City, and many were yet to come, but the city as a whole seemingly was at an impasse. There were a few literary journals, no conferences, no dedicated fiction reading series, no happy hours or coed literary sports teams, no outlet for writers to meet, to know each other when they crossed paths in Mount Vernon or Hampden or even Timonium. But surely, with its celebrated Writing Seminars at Johns Hopkins and the literary legacies of Edgar Allan Poe, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Gertrude Stein, John Barth, and others, Baltimore was a town with a literary swagger. It had to be. Either way, I was going to find out.

So I began an online literary quarterly, *jmww*, with the intent of showcasing Baltimore writers and beyond. Some of you may not have heard of it still, even as we have expanded to publishing print anthologies and appearances at CityLit Festival, the Baltimore Book Festival, and regional conferences. But the important thing is that running the journal led me to other folks, the first tendrils of local writers that became an explosion—writers in the Towson Professional Writing Program. Editors from the *Baltimore Review*. The celebrated Madison Smartt Bell and Baltimore “Wire” bad boy Rafael Alvarez.

And Gregg Wilhelm, head of Baltimore nonprofit CityLit Project, whose mission remains to “nurture the culture of literature in Baltimore.” Gregg and I began collaborating on some meet-ups in an attempt to bring writers together. After all, what was a culture of literature in Baltimore without writers? Our first idea was a monthly Writers Happy Hour, which ran once a month at various Baltimore bars in 2006–2007. Suddenly, all the pieces began to fall in place. We found that there were other writers, ones who had started their own journals and even their own presses. We were all coexisting in a vacuum.

It was at the Writers Happy Hour that I also met novelist and then-New York transplant Michael Kimball. As I had wondered where all the writers were, he wondered where all the reading series in Baltimore were. We began the 510 Reading Series, a monthly fiction series, in January 2008. Since then we've hosted more than fifty writers, many of them nationally known, regionally located, but mostly local. We found, and continue to find, when booking the series, that there are so many good writers in Baltimore that no one knows about.

Which is how this anthology came to fruition. Writer H.L. Mencken may have been our first "Sage of Baltimore," as he was known, but we've had many more since, and I was dumbfounded that they were not collected in one place. I discussed the idea with Michael Kimball (who helped adjudicate what I originally thought would be a modest anthology), and we made a list of all the Baltimore writers we knew, famous and not, dead or alive, who lived or had lived in Baltimore and sent them a call for submissions. We also posted public calls at area colleges, bookstores, coffee shops, and listservs. We searched through public domain for works of older writers we could include. When the submissions began pouring in, we read and read and read. We tried to include as many people as we could, but there are just too many good stories, too many good writers.

But a short list of who did make this cut: writers who are long dead and writers who are living, writers who are well known and writers not-so-well known, not even to us, at first. You'll find Frederick Douglass alongside Jane Satterfield, Anne Tyler alongside Zora Neale Hurston, Laura Lippman, and Stephen Dixon. What they all have in common is that they are writers who, at some point in their lives, took up residency in Baltimore. Or still do. And they have shaped our literary history and will shape our literary future.

Thanks to Michael Kimball, who believed in the project from the start and lent his expertise regarding editorial decisions and other publishing minefields. Also to Gregg Wilhelm, who was equally enthusiastic and immediately offered to publish the anthology through CityLit Project's new imprint, CityLit Press. And, of course, to all the authors who submitted their work and spread the word to make this anthology the beast it became. Finally, I want to thank you for believing in Baltimore writers. Without your support, there would be no *City Sages*, no CityLit Project, no 510 Reading Series, and no jmwv. But there will always be writers. Four years later, I know now that Charm City is swimming in them.

Small Blue Thing

MADISON SMARTT BELL

First of all, it wasn't a raven. I am not a raven, thanks a lot. Thank you. No applause, please. They always get it wrong. A raven, an actual raven with a five-foot wing spread and a beak like a samurai sword, probably wouldn't have even fit in the freaking house. I am a crow, thanks very much, an American Common Crow, *corvus brachyrhynchos*, harsh call and a ragged shadow on the lawn.

"Poetic license" is what they call it. When they get it wrong.

Ungainly fowl, he called me. *Stately raven?* Might have been flattering if he'd got the right species. Then, *fiend, devil, thing of evil*, etcetera, etcetera. *Ebony bird*—I could live with that.

House not big enough to swing a cat, much less accommodate a raven. I suppose you might have walled up a cat in there somewhere. One of his fancies: walled-up cats. *Lord have mercy on my poor soul*, he said at the end, and, some time before or after, *the best thing a friend could do for me is blow out my brains with a pistol*. Do I have that right? He also kept asking for someone named *Reynolds* which was wrong too because the only person he knew named *Reynolds* was not going to be any help to him then or there, not that anybody else was either.

Why did I come to them, the first time? To that house, that place. Far below the spiral of warm air on which I soared, there was a glint, a sparkle: sunlight riding a crack in a window pane. He lied about the weather too. It wasn't even night.

Poetry. Try cutting your tongue up the middle with a pair of rusty dull sewing scissors—I'll give you poetry. Think I'm kidding, do you? Think it's a joke?

We're not buzzards, by the way. Not stinking baldheaded wrinkle-necked puking vultures. We're crows. On the other hand, we do take notice of distress. We do.

Also, *Nevermore*, I never said it. The first word out of my mouth was a simple "Hello." Not fantastically original, I grant you. That bird-trapper, him with the rusty sewing snips, was not the literary type. He didn't teach me any brilliant conversation. So it was just *hello*

hello

hello

hello

just to fill up the dead air and create a distraction while I sidled nearer to the big round shiny thing on the mantel: that cloudy pearl with its curved reflection.

My greeting wasn't getting it for the poet though. The simple *O* sound didn't do it for him. It had to be *ore*, preferably with a few other syllables draped over the front. This was the guy, remember, who declared in one of his lengthy disquisitions that the most beautiful phrase in the English language was *cellar door*. Nutbag, you say? You wouldn't be the first to think so.

But here he comes, first flapping the same quill pen he'd been writing with, then a moldy old feather duster he dragged up from somewhere behind his table. Here he was, the ambitious or formerly ambitious writer, enacting a bunch of stupid feather puns. Can feathers cast out feathers? ...whatever. Of course he didn't expect me to know. I was an animal to him! He thought I was going to crap on his parchment or something, him with the inkstains all over his fingers, and on the cuff of his shirt too, where he'd unconsciously dragged it through his blots and cross-outs. Never get those stains out, never. It looked like an expensive shirt, too.

The cat, meanwhile, was scrunched up in a corner with its eyes bugged out and its fur all sticking up on end. They did have a cat even though there wasn't room to swing it. It was black too, but the adorable little white socks it had on kept it from looking as scary as it probably would have liked. I mean, come on, gimme a break, so you don't see a crow in the house every day, so? Let's wall your skinny ass up somewhere and then see what you have to say.

The poet is flailing the duster around in a way that obscures my objective. The window is open—why won't the crow fly out? It was hard to fly in such a small space without knocking a whole lot of stuff over (*ungainly fowl*, indeed—let's see you try and do better) so I adopted a pose on top of a lamp and tried to change the subject.

Feed me meat, I said. Then, in case he wasn't listening, with the big commotion and all, I said it again. *Feed me meat*.

See, that guy the kidnapper, Mister Scissorhands—I had to expand beyond his vocabulary in the end. It was my ticket out of there. The kidnapper sold my tailfeathers to some early captain of industry who intended me as a gift for his wife. Company for her was the idea I guess,

since (as I learned during my transportation, in various hotel rooms and even a time or two on the train) this early capitalist porker expended most of his own social grace on other women: sluts and whores normally, not to put too fine a point on it. Wifey kept me in a cage about big enough for a parakeet, and during her lonely evenings she'd try to chat me up. All this a long time before TV, remember, or even the radio. She didn't read much either, because she was a moron. Well, I thought of some other stuff to say, even if it was really just only quotations of things I had recently happened to hear, such as **** *me! Oh, **** me harder, Horatio!* (this was the capitalist porker's name) **** *me in my **** right now! Oh, Horatio, your **** is so big!* (Horatio had been paying for this dialogue, naturally). These quotations of mine worked a little too well—nearly got my neck wrung for my trouble. Luckily Mrs Horatio Capitalist-Porker was squeamish. Didn't want to touch the nasty crow. So she heaved it out the window, cage and all. Good job for me the door popped open when it hit the pavement.

Feed me meat, I said. Not the worst thing in my repertoire, you see? Besides, I meant it; I was hungry.

The poet has lowered his feather duster, thank God. He's standing there huffing and sweating from that little amount of exertion. He was never really in very good shape. Eyes bugging out at me big as the cat's. That's right, buddy, the crow is talking. Pinch yourself; it isn't a dream. The crow is talking. *Feed me meat*.

You looked at him, you saw the longing. I put my head on one side, then the other. Left eye, right eye, left. Dark hollows painted around *his* eyes. The mouth rather small, reddish, pursed; some might have called it weak. His hair too long and disheveled, pasted this way and that over his spiraling baldness by the cold unhealthy sweat. The little dandy's mustache had been left ungroomed for a long time. But there was a trace of the dandy about him still, gone seedy like the mustache and the shirt. His skin was delicate, pale, translucent. Blue vein beating there on his temple, still another beating in the hollow of his throat. Next to nothing between his blood and the open air! Everything got through to him. He was curious as a child, wanted to know everything. What would it be like to fly?

Then what do you know he went and got me some. Meat, that is. I mean, this was a sympathetic individual if you once got his attention. I felt like I sort of saw the idea form in his mind so I went hopping along after him when he left the room. The cat was still slinking around the base-

boards, not getting any too near. Don't even think about it, cat. I clacked my beak, hopping over the threshold. Crows aren't anywhere near the size of ravens, but get close enough to me and I'm bigger than you think.

In the kitchen my man is uncovering the slop pail and what have we got here? Item with a fine high odor, lustrous with slime. A slice of beef, would be my guess, which through the operation of time and neglect had evolved into a choice piece of carrion. Not that they could afford that sort of waste around this joint. They couldn't. But the lady of the house, through no fault of her own, had sort of been letting the housekeeping slide.

Lunch! I chowed on the thing. I'd flown a long way, it seemed all of a sudden. The cat was winding through the table legs the whole time I ate, pink nose wrinkled in feigned disgust, making like it didn't want a bite.

There was some tearing to be done. Got to work if you want to eat. I kept the meat pinned down with a claw (not that it was going anywhere) and tore strips out of it with my beak. There was commotion at the kitchen door. I was concentrating so I hardly noticed. Meat, you know. But a bustle, a gasp, whirl of shawl, sickroom smell, cough, crumple, *Darling, you mustn't exert yourself*, etcetera. He seemed to be guiding her out of the room. Leaving me alone with my meat, and the cat watching with its witch-green eyes. When I was full was when the meat was gone. Then it occurred to me that maybe now there was nothing between me and my goal.

Another thing, there wasn't any *pallid bust of Pallas*. There wasn't any bust at all. What he had on the mantel was a crystal ball. Like for a wizard or a fortune-teller, some gypsy con. I don't know what he was doing with the thing. Nobody in the house ever seemed to play with it. It sat above the fireplace and sucked up everything it could. All the room and its furnishings warped away in its curved reflection, and the window where I'd entered. Where he let me in.

It had been a cloud-blown day, damp, windy and warm. Darkness of the window pane when I landed on the sill. When the cloud passed from the sun the crack on the glass began to glitter once again. I saw the crow floating in the glass, glossy-winged strong black devil. Okay, I pecked a time or two. There's your famous *tap-tap-tapping*. But look—we don't actually think there's another crow behind the mirror! We're not stupid. When you fight your reflection, you know it's yourself you're fighting... that's the point.

That was when I saw him first, swimming up from the darkness of the pane. His face was inside my reflection. The shining of his eye matched mine. And through this pairing, somehow too, the shining of the crystal ball.

I don't really know why he opened the window. Maybe he thought I was going to break it. One of the panes was already cracked. He'd scrunched his writing table up against the inside sill to get the best of the daylight he could. It was a crooked little house, and poorly angled for natural light, but they had to scrimp on candles and lamp oil and things like that.

Besides, like I said, he was curious.

He used to play with logic like a rubber band. The Gold Bug, *Eureka*, all that stuff. The horrors came from somewhere else, floating upward from the dark depths of the crystal. He was thin-skinned; everything got through to him. There was that goofy story that pasted the logic to the horror. A guy is looking out his window and sees a gruesome arachnid monster laying waste to the surroundings, how absolutely utterly awful, etc. Turns out it's only a spider about the size of a dandruff flake, suspended on its invisible thread a half-inch from his eye.

All a matter of perspective, don't you see?

There was the crow in the crystal ball. I never considered pecking that. It was too beautiful. If only it had been the size of a marble I could have carried it off and hidden it somewhere. If I gaped toward it my craw slid over the surface stretching wide enough to swallow it altogether. But that was illusion. I hopped backward, turned my head from one side to the other. Right eye, left eye, each eye expanding on the globe to cover it completely. I took another hop, sideways on the mantel. The whole room swam inside the crystal, and everything in it. That cat, composed below the fireplace with its four white booties neatly together, looking up at me harmlessly enough, the picture of innocence, yeah, right. The poet struggling with the poker, trying to coax a little warmth from the miserable tiny coal grate. In the background which was more or less the center of the crystal was that one, the little girl, expiring on a divan. Not dead yet. I saw her raise against the cushion, the movement swimming in the crystal. With her fingers she curbed the edges of her mouth. It was unsettling to me somehow. I turned from her reflection to face her.

You always thought of her as a little girl even though she was twenty-four by that time, and a married woman. But she'd been eleven when

they met, sixteen when they married. Little Virginia Clemm—not the euphonious sort of name he liked. *Clemm*, come on, get outa here. Call her Ligeia, or Annabel Lee. Something sibilant and whispering.

Consumption, that was her situation. She still went creeping around the house at times. She'd leave her couch and wander, as she'd done this day. But she was already a goner by then. Her round little face turned all cadaverous, turned discreetly aside to catch the proceeds of a wet cough in her lace-edged blood-clotted handkerchief. There's your *lost Lenore* if you like. She was dead meat.

I never *perched upon a bust of Pallas*. I didn't perch on the crystal ball either. Too hard and slick for claws to get a purchase. And if they had, they would have scratched it. I didn't want that.

I perched on the mantelpiece beside it, shuffled my feathers and faced the room. There was fear in her face as she looked up at me. Recoil. Harbinger of her death she was thinking. Her husband's mad fantasies leaking through. *Grim, ungainly, ghastly gaunt and ominous bird of yore*, etcetera. She had reason to be frightened, poor small thing, though not of me. I'm racking my brains for something reassuring to say to her. Something decent, if it comes to that. *Feed me meat* seemed a little risqué. The tongue slit hadn't really made me more articulate. Most all of my phrases came from sailors and whores. Hell's Bells was mildest thing I could think of. Or *Ring my bells!* but in a way that was worse.

Bells, I said. *Bells bells bells bells bells bells bells bells bells*.

When she took her fingers down there was a smile. Dab of blood at the corner of it but still a smile. The crow talks. The crow is talking, what a novelty, *Bells*, it says. The poet straightened from the coal grate, the poker balanced in his fingers light as air. You could see in his face he didn't quite trust it. He was going to get this moment. Smile and never mind the blood, the bloody fingertips. A small orb of warmth swelled into the room. Just for this moment everything would be okay.

It's a crock about how I loomed over him for all eternity, *my soul from out that shadow that lies floating on the floor / Shall be lifted—nevermore!* and blah blah blah. I didn't stay forever and aye. Not perched on this nonexistent bust of *Pallas* nor anywhere else. There was the cat, for one thing. (It had a name but I wouldn't acknowledge it.) I'd have been a match for the thing in a fair fight, and it knew as much. But hey, you got to sleep some time. It was hard to relax with the cat's witch eyes all over me. And the house was too low and cramped for me to find a really

secure perch.

So I used to come and go. With weeks between and sometimes months. We've got migration to consider, after all. But whenever I lit on the sill they'd let me in and sometimes they would feed me. A place they let you in and feed you meat—now that's worth something.

I swear she lit up to see me return, the poor small thing. Like I was the first freaking robin of spring.... It proved that something kept on happening. Another day come and she wasn't dead yet.

It took her years and years to die, and she had little rallies. Evenings she'd come down and play the little spinet backed into the wall, opposite his writing desk. Him and her mother and me and the cat all sitting up polite like we were in church, attending her frail melodies. They never lasted long.

Such a bad rap he got later on for those relationships. Like he was a kid-fiddler, and a fiddled kid too, and I don't know what else. Think about it, sixteen was not so young to marry in those days, and raising your bride from a bulb, so to speak, wasn't all that unusual either. As for the mother, old lady Clemm, so, so what? He got along better with her than you're expected to get on with your mother-in-law, and that's it. She was a kindly old stick when you once got used to the fact that she looked like one of the witches out of *Macbeth*, once you understood that the flat line of her toothless mouth was meant to be a smile. I admit it, I used to sit on her finger sometimes. She liked it. She would feed me meat.

Just the three of them trying to make a nest was all it was, with some warmth and softness and some shiny things scattered here and there. You take what you're given and that's what he got. After all the guy was an orphan himself. I'd sit on the old lady's finger and see it her way. Later on people tried to make out it was some kind of child molestation, but really they were like two children clinging to each other and the cold night pooling all around.

He used to sing to her sometimes. I mean he would also read her his poems and essays and stories, though not the most horrible scary ones, but that was when she was lucid, and strong enough to sit up. When she was sick and off her head he would hold her and sing old lullabies, *when you wake you shall have all the pretty little horses* and so on. God love him, his singing voice was worse than mine. The girl was delirious, it was nothing to her, but the cat would slink off into the alley, while old lady Clemm lurked in the kitchen, fingers practically stuck in her ears. Maybe not so

much against the racket as...well, it was distressing. They were in a bad way.

Now what's the other verse to that one, *dumda dumda dum* and (can't remember the first line quite but it involves a calf I think and)

*...way down yonder in the meadow
Buzzards and flies, pecking out its eyes
Poor little thing cries Mammy.....*

I mean, quite a choice for your invalid moribund spouse, or for anybody else if you think about it; imagine singing that to some kid or whatever, into the cradle you're rocking. He must have picked that one up down in Virginia. This was still slavery time, don't forget, so some of the songs the Mammies sang were kind of grim.

Eyeballs now, take eyeballs for a minute. The eye of a dying creature is like cloud swimming over the crystal, dull milkiness, occlusion. Makes me hungry, sort of, just to say that. We eat eyeballs. Yes, we do.

Green cat's eyeball on a stick? Thank you, why yes, I will have another. They're good! Besides, you gotta eat.

But joking aside, it's hard to talk about it. The blind calf, yawning with its bloody sockets, is not an edifying spectacle. It's just a need we feed on.

In the crystal when the room was empty, flowed the warped crow figure and beyond: the vacant writing desk, the spinet with its empty bench, and above, her tintype portrait hanging on the wall.

Funny but he'd seem to know when I was leaving. He'd look at me with a sort of envy then. If only he could just shrug on a pair of wings and fly away from that whole death trap till it shrank away to a little tight ball, a marble, a dot, then nothing. With all the crazy stuff he wrote sometimes I think that was the worst he ever thought.

I mean, the poor guy—it was never anything weird or perverted. If not for all the stories he wrote probably no one would have thought so. The guy was into dead stuff, face it! It doesn't mean he loved her any less. Probably he'd seen the future. There's nothing in a crystal ball. No magic. It's empty. Because it's empty, you sit there and you look at it and the thing you're looking for appears in your own mind.

I wanted to fly like a mimosa leaf, one time. Stooping, flirting, drifting down. It was so beautiful even though it didn't really shine. That sadness in the papery dulling of its gold. I tried to follow it, accompany it, imitate its movement. But I couldn't. It's just not a feasible way for a

crow to fly.

We all have our little frustrations. I used to see that leaf in the crystal, or just at the back of my own eye. Feathering down to land on water silky smooth as oil. *Dark tarn of Usher*. The yellow fan-shape floating on that tide.

He'd have liked to fly off the handle too. That would have been another way out, go stark raving screaming mad like a hero of one of his grislier stories. But in reality the guy was pretty sane. He stayed that way. He just stood there and took it. Even the drinking and drugging was greatly exaggerated later on. Mostly it was just medicinal use. Of course at the end after she was dead and buried and he was sick himself and in great pain, he needed a lot of medicine.

Bells, I told her. Sometimes when the bells are ringing, I fly so high I can hardly stand it. Till the orb of the world shrinks away from me to the size of a blue-green marble. A dot, then nothing. And still I feel its bright eye watching me, in the night of the universe so black I couldn't pick out the shape of my own wing against it. The lonely distant glittering stars. Nothing but darkness and the darkness is me.

Keeping time time time in a sort of Runic rhyme to the paan of the bells of the bells keeping time time time in a sort of Runic rhyme to the throbbing of the bells of the bells bells bells to the sobbing of the bells as he knells knells knells in a happy Runic rhyme to the rolling of the bells of the bells bells bells to the tolling of the bells of the bells bells bells bells bells bells bells—ah Christ won't somebody make it stop?

I still fly over the place sometimes. It's the projects now, West Baltimore slums. All crack dealers and whores in spandex. Everything's right out there on the street. They lost something when they let go the whalebone and lace. Long fancy opium pipes and hookahs like he sometimes smoked. Something, certainly, has been lost.

How long do crows live? Take a good look at me and figure it out. We live as long as we're given to. *In the original unity of the first thing lies the secondary cause of all things, with the germ of their inevitable annihilation*. The horror and the logic both come out in the same place. I live, I live on, I am still flying.



The Black Cat

EDGAR ALLAN POE

For the most wild, yet most homely narrative which I am about to pen, I neither expect nor solicit belief. Mad indeed would I be to expect it, in a case where my very senses reject their own evidence. Yet, mad am I not—and very surely do I not dream. But to-morrow I die, and to-day I would unburthen my soul. My immediate purpose is to place before the world, plainly, succinctly, and without comment, a series of mere household events. In their consequences, these events have terrified—have tortured—have destroyed me. Yet I will not attempt to expound them. To me, they have presented little but Horror—to many they will seem less terrible than barroques. Hereafter, perhaps, some intellect may be found which will reduce my phantasm to the common-place—some intellect more calm, more logical, and far less excitable than my own, which will perceive, in the circumstances I detail with awe, nothing more than an ordinary succession of very natural causes and effects.

From my infancy I was noted for the docility and humanity of my disposition. My tenderness of heart was even so conspicuous as to make me the jest of my companions. I was especially fond of animals, and was indulged by my parents with a great variety of pets. With these I spent most of my time, and never was so happy as when feeding and caressing them. This peculiarity of character grew with my growth, and, in my manhood, I derived from it one of my principal sources of pleasure. To those who have cherished an affection for a faithful and sagacious dog, I need hardly be at the trouble of explaining the nature or the intensity of the gratification thus derivable. There is something in the unselfish and self-sacrificing love of a brute, which goes directly to the heart of him who has had frequent occasion to test the paltry friendship and gossamer fidelity of mere *Man*.

I married early, and was happy to find in my wife a disposition not uncongenial with my own. Observing my partiality for domestic pets, she lost no opportunity of procuring those of the most agreeable kind. We had birds, gold-fish, a fine dog, rabbits, a small monkey, and a cat.

This latter was a remarkably large and beautiful animal, entirely black, and sagacious to an astonishing degree. In speaking of his intel-

ligence, my wife, who at heart was not a little tintured with superstition, made frequent allusion to the ancient popular notion, which regarded all black cats as witches in disguise. Not that she was ever *serious* upon this point—and I mention the matter at all for no better reason than that it happens, just now, to be remembered.

Pluto—this was the cat's name—was my favorite pet and playmate. I alone fed him, and he attended me wherever I went about the house. It was even with difficulty that I could prevent him from following me through the streets.

Our friendship lasted, in this manner, for several years, during which my general temperament and character—through the instrumentality of the Fiend Intemperance—had (I blush to confess it) experienced a radical alteration for the worse. I grew, day by day, more moody, more irritable, more regardless of the feelings of others. I suffered myself to use intemperate language to my wife. At length, I even offered her personal violence. My pets, of course, were made to feel the change in my disposition. I not only neglected, but ill-used them. For Pluto, however, I still retained sufficient regard to restrain me from maltreating him, as I made no scruple of maltreating the rabbits, the monkey, or even the dog, when by accident, or through affection, they came in my way. But my disease grew upon me—for what disease is like Alcohol!—and at length even Pluto, who was now becoming old, and consequently somewhat peevish—even Pluto began to experience the effects of my ill temper.

One night, returning home, much intoxicated, from one of my haunts about town, I fancied that the cat avoided my presence. I seized him; when, in his fright at my violence, he inflicted a slight wound upon my hand with his teeth. The fury of a demon instantly possessed me. I knew myself no longer. My original soul seemed, at once, to take its flight from my body; and a more than fiendish malevolence, gin-nurtured, thrilled every fibre of my frame. I took from my waistcoat-pocket a pen-knife, opened it, grasped the poor beast by the throat, and deliberately cut one of its eyes from the socket! I blush, I burn, I shudder, while I pen the damnable atrocity.

When reason returned with the morning—when I had slept off the fumes of the night's debauch—I experienced a sentiment half of horror, half of remorse, for the crime of which I had been guilty; but it was, at best, a feeble and equivocal feeling, and the soul remained untouched. I again plunged into excess, and soon drowned in wine all memory of the

deed.

In the meantime the cat slowly recovered. The socket of the lost eye presented, it is true, a frightful appearance, but he no longer appeared to suffer any pain. He went about the house as usual, but, as might be expected, fled in extreme terror at my approach. I had so much of my old heart left, as to be at first grieved by this evident dislike on the part of a creature which had once so loved me. But this feeling soon gave place to irritation. And then came, as if to my final and irrevocable overthrow, the spirit of PERVERSENESS. Of this spirit philosophy takes no account. Yet I am not more sure that my soul lives, than I am that perverseness is one of the primitive impulses of the human heart—one of the indivisible primary faculties, or sentiments, which give direction to the character of Man. Who has not, a hundred times, found himself committing a vile or a silly action, for no other reason than because he knows he should *not*? Have we not a perpetual inclination, in the teeth of our best judgment, to violate that which is *Law*, merely because we understand it to be such? This spirit of perverseness, I say, came to my final overthrow. It was this unfathomable longing of the soul to *vex itself*—to offer violence to its own nature—to do wrong for the wrong's sake only—that urged me to continue and finally to consummate the injury I had inflicted upon the unoffending brute. One morning, in cool blood, I slipped a noose about its neck and hung it to the limb of a tree;—hung it with the tears streaming from my eyes, and with the bitterest remorse at my heart;—hung it *because* I knew that it had loved me, and *because* I felt it had given me no reason of offence;—hung it *because* I knew that in so doing I was committing a sin—a deadly sin that would so jeopardize my immortal soul as to place it—if such a thing were possible—even beyond the reach of the infinite mercy of the Most Merciful and Most Terrible God.

On the night of the day on which this cruel deed was done, I was aroused from sleep by the cry of fire. The curtains of my bed were in flames. The whole house was blazing. It was with great difficulty that my wife, a servant, and myself, made our escape from the conflagration. The destruction was complete. My entire worldly wealth was swallowed up, and I resigned myself thenceforward to despair.

I am above the weakness of seeking to establish a sequence of cause and effect, between the disaster and the atrocity. But I am detailing a chain of facts—and wish not to leave even a possible link imperfect. On the day succeeding the fire, I visited the ruins. The walls, with one excep-

tion, had fallen in. This exception was found in a compartment wall, not very thick, which stood about the middle of the house, and against which had rested the head of my bed. The plastering had here, in great measure, resisted the action of the fire—a fact which I attributed to its having been recently spread. About this wall a dense crowd were collected, and many persons seemed to be examining a particular portion of it with very minute and eager attention. The words “strange!” “singular!” and other similar expressions, excited my curiosity. I approached and saw, as if graven in *bas relief* upon the white surface, the figure of a gigantic *cat*. The impression was given with an accuracy truly marvellous. There was a rope about the animal’s neck.

When I first beheld this apparition—for I could scarcely regard it as less—my wonder and my terror were extreme. But at length reflection came to my aid. The cat, I remembered, had been hung in a garden adjacent to the house. Upon the alarm of fire, this garden had been immediately filled by the crowd—by some one of whom the animal must have been cut from the tree and thrown, through an open window, into my chamber. This had probably been done with the view of arousing me from sleep. The falling of other walls had compressed the victim of my cruelty into the substance of the freshly-spread plaster; the lime of which, with the flames, and the *ammonia* from the carcass, had then accomplished the portraiture as I saw it.

Although I thus readily accounted to my reason, if not altogether to my conscience, for the startling fact just detailed, it did not the less fail to make a deep impression upon my fancy. For months I could not rid myself of the phantasm of the cat; and, during this period, there came back into my spirit a half-sentiment that seemed, but was not, remorse. I went so far as to regret the loss of the animal, and to look about me, among the vile haunts which I now habitually frequented, for another pet of the same species, and of somewhat similar appearance, with which to supply its place.

One night as I sat, half stupified, in a den of more than infamy, my attention was suddenly drawn to some black object, reposing upon the head of one of the immense hogsheads of Gin, or of Rum, which constituted the chief furniture of the apartment. I had been looking steadily at the top of this hogshead for some minutes, and what now caused me surprise was the fact that I had not sooner perceived the object thereupon. I approached it, and touched it with my hand. It was a black cat—a very

large one—fully as large as Pluto, and closely resembling him in every respect but one. Pluto had not a white hair upon any portion of his body; but this cat had a large, although indefinite splotch of white, covering nearly the whole region of the breast.

Upon my touching him, he immediately arose, purred loudly, rubbed against my hand, and appeared delighted with my notice. This, then, was the very creature of which I was in search. I at once offered to purchase it of the landlord; but this person made no claim to it—knew nothing of it—had never seen it before.

I continued my caresses, and, when I prepared to go home, the animal evinced a disposition to accompany me. I permitted it to do so; occasionally stooping and patting it as I proceeded. When it reached the house it domesticated itself at once, and became immediately a great favorite with my wife.

For my own part, I soon found a dislike to it arising within me. This was just the reverse of what I had anticipated; but—I know not how or why it was—its evident fondness for myself rather disgusted and annoyed. By slow degrees, these feelings of disgust and annoyance rose into the bitterness of hatred. I avoided the creature; a certain sense of shame, and the remembrance of my former deed of cruelty, preventing me from physically abusing it. I did not, for some weeks, strike, or otherwise violently ill use it; but gradually—very gradually—I came to look upon it with unutterable loathing, and to flee silently from its odious presence, as from the breath of a pestilence.

What added, no doubt, to my hatred of the beast, was the discovery, on the morning after I brought it home, that, like Pluto, it also had been deprived of one of its eyes. This circumstance, however, only endeared it to my wife, who, as I have already said, possessed, in a high degree, that humanity of feeling which had once been my distinguishing trait, and the source of many of my simplest and purest pleasures.

With my aversion to this cat, however, its partiality for myself seemed to increase. It followed my footsteps with a pertinacity which it would be difficult to make the reader comprehend. Whenever I sat, it would crouch beneath my chair, or spring upon my knees, covering me with its loathsome caresses. If I arose to walk it would get between my feet and thus nearly throw me down, or, fastening its long and sharp claws in my dress, clamber, in this manner, to my breast. At such times, although I longed to destroy it with a blow, I was yet withheld from so doing, partly by a

memory of my former crime, but chiefly—let me confess it at once—by absolute *dread* of the beast.

This dread was not exactly a dread of physical evil—and yet I should be at a loss how otherwise to define it. I am almost ashamed to own—yes, even in this felon's cell, I am almost ashamed to own—that the terror and horror with which the animal inspired me, had been heightened by one of the merest chimæras it would be possible to conceive. My wife had called my attention, more than once, to the character of the mark of white hair, of which I have spoken, and which constituted the sole visible difference between the strange beast and the one I had destroyed. The reader will remember that this mark, although large, had been originally very indefinite; but, by slow degrees—degrees nearly imperceptible, and which for a long time my Reason struggled to reject as fanciful—it had, at length, assumed a rigorous distinctness of outline. It was now the representation of an object that I shudder to name—and for this, above all, I loathed, and dreaded, and would have rid myself of the monster *had I dared*—it was now, I say, the image of a hideous—of a ghastly thing—of the GALLOWS!—oh, mournful and terrible engine of Horror and of Crime—of Agony and of Death!

And now was I indeed wretched beyond the wretchedness of mere Humanity. And *a brute beast*—whose fellow I had contemptuously destroyed—*a brute beast* to work out for *me*—for me a man, fashioned in the image of the High God—so much of insufferable wo! Alas! neither by day nor by night knew I the blessing of Rest any more! During the former the creature left me no moment alone; and, in the latter, I started, hourly, from dreams of unutterable fear, to find the hot breath of *the thing* upon my face, and its vast weight—an incarnate Night-Mare that I had no power to shake off—incumbent eternally upon my *heart*!

Beneath the pressure of torments such as these, the feeble remnant of the good within me succumbed. Evil thoughts became my sole intimates—the darkest and most evil of thoughts. The moodiness of my usual temper increased to hatred of all things and of all mankind; while, from the sudden, frequent, and ungovernable outbursts of a fury to which I now blindly abandoned myself, my uncomplaining wife, alas! was the most usual and the most patient of sufferers.

One day she accompanied me, upon some household errand, into the cellar of the old building which our poverty compelled us to inhabit. The cat followed me down the steep stairs, and, nearly throwing me head-

long, exasperated me to madness. Uplifting an axe, and forgetting, in my wrath, the childish dread which had hitherto stayed my hand, I aimed a blow at the animal which, of course, would have proved instantly fatal had it descended as I wished. But this blow was arrested by the hand of my wife. Goaded, by the interference, into a rage more than demoniacal, I withdrew my arm from her grasp and buried the axe in her brain. She fell dead upon the spot, without a groan.

This hideous murder accomplished, I set myself forthwith, and with entire deliberation, to the task of concealing the body. I knew that I could not remove it from the house, either by day or by night, without the risk of being observed by the neighbors. Many projects entered my mind. At one period I thought of cutting the corpse into minute fragments, and destroying them by fire. At another, I resolved to dig a grave for it in the floor of the cellar. Again, I deliberated about casting it in the well in the yard—about packing it in a box, as if merchandize, with the usual arrangements, and so getting a porter to take it from the house. Finally I hit upon what I considered a far better expedient than either of these. I determined to wall it up in the cellar—as the monks of the middle ages are recorded to have walled up their victims.

For a purpose such as this the cellar was well adapted. Its walls were loosely constructed, and had lately been plastered throughout with a rough plaster, which the dampness of the atmosphere had prevented from hardening. Moreover, in one of the walls was a projection, caused by a false chimney, or fireplace, that had been filled up, and made to resemble the rest of the cellar. I made no doubt that I could readily displace the bricks at this point, insert the corpse, and wall the whole up as before, so that no eye could detect anything suspicious.

And in this calculation I was not deceived. By means of a crow-bar I easily dislodged the bricks, and, having carefully deposited the body against the inner wall, I propped it in that position, while, with little trouble, I re-laid the whole structure as it originally stood. Having procured mortar, sand, and hair, with every possible precaution, I prepared a plaster which could not be distinguished from the old, and with this I very carefully went over the new brick-work. When I had finished, I felt satisfied that all was right. The wall did not present the slightest appearance of having been disturbed. The rubbish on the floor was picked up with the minutest care. I looked around triumphantly, and said to myself—“Here at least, then, my labor has not been in vain.”

My next step was to look for the beast which had been the cause of so much wretchedness; for I had, at length, firmly resolved to put it to death. Had I been able to meet with it, at the moment, there could have been no doubt of its fate; but it appeared that the crafty animal had been alarmed at the violence of my previous anger, and forebore to present itself in my present mood. It is impossible to describe, or to imagine, the deep, the blissful sense of relief which the absence of the detested creature occasioned in my bosom. It did not make its appearance during the night—and thus for one night at least, since its introduction into the house, I soundly and tranquilly slept; aye, slept even with the burden of murder upon my soul!

The second and the third day passed, and still my tormentor came not. Once again I breathed as a freeman. The monster, in terror, had fled the premises forever! I should behold it no more! My happiness was supreme! The guilt of my dark deed disturbed me but little. Some few inquiries had been made, but these had been readily answered. Even a search had been instituted—but of course nothing was to be discovered. I looked upon my future felicity as secured.

Upon the fourth day of the assassination, a party of the police came, very unexpectedly, into the house, and proceeded again to make rigorous investigation of the premises. Secure, however, in the inscrutability of my place of concealment, I felt no embarrassment whatever. The officers bade me accompany them in their search. They left no nook or corner unexplored. At length, for the third or fourth time, they descended into the cellar. I quivered not in a muscle. My heart beat calmly as that of one who slumbers in innocence. I walked the cellar from end to end. I folded my arms upon my bosom, and roamed easily to and fro. The police were thoroughly satisfied and prepared to depart. The glee at my heart was too strong to be restrained. I burned to say if but one word, by way of triumph, and to render doubly sure their assurance of my guiltlessness.

“Gentlemen,” I said at last, as the party ascended the steps, “I delight to have allayed your suspicions. I wish you all health, and a little more courtesy. By the bye, gentlemen, this—this is a very well constructed house.” (In the rabid desire to say something easily, I scarcely knew what I uttered at all.)—“I may say an *excellently* well constructed house. These walls—are you going, gentlemen?—these walls are solidly put together;” and here, through the mere phrenzy of bravado, I rapped heavily, with a cane which I held in my hand, upon that very portion of the brick-work

behind which stood the corpse of the wife of my bosom.

But may God shield and deliver me from the fangs of the Arch-Fiend! No sooner had the reverberation of my blows sunk into silence, than I was answered by a voice from within the tomb!—by a cry, at first muffled and broken, like the sobbing of a child, and then quickly swelling into one long, loud, and continuous scream, utterly anomalous and inhuman—a howl—a wailing shriek, half of horror and half of triumph, such as might have arisen only out of hell, conjointly from the throats of the damned in their agony and of the demons that exult in the damnation.

Of my own thoughts it is folly to speak. Swooning, I staggered to the opposite wall. For one instant the party upon the stairs remained motionless, through extremity of terror and of awe. In the next, a dozen stout arms were toiling at the wall. It fell bodily. The corpse, already greatly decayed and clotted with gore, stood erect before the eyes of the spectators. Upon its head, with red extended mouth and solitary eye of fire, sat the hideous beast whose craft had seduced me into murder, and whose informing voice had consigned me to the hangman. I had walled the monster up within the tomb!



Ada

GERTRUDE STEIN

Barnes Colhard did not say he would not do it but he did not do it. He did it and then he did not do it, he did not ever think about it. He just thought some time he might do something.

His father Mr. Abram Colhard spoke about it to every one and very many of them spoke to Barnes Colhard about it and he always listened to them.

Then Barnes fell in love with a very nice girl and she would not marry him. He cried then, his father Mr. Abram Colhard comforted him and they took a trip and Barnes promised he would do what his father wanted him to be doing. He did not do the thing, he thought he would do another thing, he did not do the other thing, his father Mr. Colhard did not want him to do the other thing. He really did not do anything then. When he was a good deal older he married a very rich girl. He had thought perhaps he would not propose to her but his sister wrote to him that it would be a good thing, He married the rich girl and she thought he was the most wonderful man and one who knew everything. Barnes never spent more than the income of the fortune he and his wife had then, that is to say they did not spend more than the income and this was a surprise to very many who knew about him and about his marrying the girl who had such a large fortune. He had a happy life while he was living and after he was dead his wife and children remembered him.

He had a sister who also was successful enough in being one being living, His sister was one who came to be happier than most people come to be in living. She came to be a completely happy one. She was twice as old as her brother. She had been a very good daughter to her mother. She and her mother had always told very pretty stories to each other Many old men loved to hear her tell these stories to her mother. Every one who ever knew her mother liked her mother. Many were sorry later that not every one liked the daughter. Many did like the daughter but not every one as every one had liked the mother.

The daughter was charming inside in her, it did not show outside in her to every one, it certainly did to some. She did sometimes think her mother would be pleased with a story that did not please her mother,

when her mother later was sicker the daughter knew that there were some stories she could tell her that would not please her mother. Her mother died and really mostly altogether the mother and the daughter had told each other stories very happily together.

The daughter then kept house for her father and took care of her brother. There were many relations who lived with them. The daughter did not like them to live with them and she did not like them to die with them. The daughter, Ada they had called her after her grandmother who had delightful ways of smelling flowers and eating dates and sugar, did not like it at all then as she did not like so much dying and she did not like any of the living she was doing then. Every now and then some old gentlemen told delightful stories to her. Mostly then there were not nice stories told by any one then in her living. She told her father Mr. Abram Colhard that she did not like it at all being one being living then. He never said anything. She was afraid then, she was one needing charming stories and happy telling of them and not having that thing she was always trembling. Then every one who could live with them were dead and there were then the father and the son a young man then and the daughter coming to be that one then. Her grandfather had left some money to them each one of them. Ada said she was going to use it to go away from them.

Fugueur

MAUD CASEY

Albert Walks

AWhen Albert walks, he is astonished. To keep from being afraid, he sometimes says to himself, *Fascinating!* Or, *Magnificent!* Or, *Yet another escapade!* Even when he is lost, he is not lost. No *one fine day he found himself in a public square*. No *it seems or it appears or not able to say how he got here*. He *is*, he *is*, he *is*. He is here: somewhere on the road to Portiers, Champigny, Meaux, Lonsjumeau, Provins, Vitry-le-Francais, Chalons-sur-Marne, Chaumont, Vesoul, Macon.

The gentleman at the French consul in Dusseldorf gave him five marks; the one at the consul in Budapest gave him a fourth-class ticket to Vienna; the one in Leipzig gave him seven florins and a lodging ticket; the French ambassador in Prague took up a collection and gave him eight florins and a pair of shoes. When Albert walks, people treat him like a prince; they are that kind. Even the men who put him in prison—no passport, no livret, Albert is always without papers—have been gentle. *Yet another escapade and yet another escapade and yet another escapade!* The mayor of somewhere else entirely puts his arm around Albert's shoulder and says, "Now, go home to Bordeaux. There's nothing better than returning home." But to Albert, kicking a fallen apple through the tall grass of another cemetery of toppled, crowded gravestones, home is never more itself than when he is leaving.

When Albert walks, he is one of the new railway lines, cutting a path through the French countryside toward Paris. The earth's tremor fills his heels; it rumbles through his battered shoes and up his shins. He cuts a swath through the end of the century full of invention and endless possibility. He is the phonograph. When he walks, he is sound made visible to the human eye; he is the recording of Abraham Lincoln's voice on a piece of paper covered with lampblack. He is the telegraph.

What hath God wrought? Albert!

He annihilates distance like a bicycle—evolved from a mere toy, true, *le draisienne*, a hobbyhorse, but a cyclist is now referred to as *un marcheur qui roule*. Albert has no use for wheels but covers as much distance. When Albert walks, he is the steam engine, powering himself like a great

ship. Still faster, he moves faster, faster than time. When Albert walks, he is twelve. He is thirteen. Years pass differently on the road. He is fifteen, sixteen, and then twenty, twenty-one, twenty-six. He is full of all of those Alberts. He is himself and himself and himself again.

He is the prince in the stories his father told him as a child: the prince who went out into the world. When he walks, the whole world, the heavens and the angels, are in his head. Even his lost father and mother and brother are there. When he walks, he is no longer only moving toward death; he is no longer only dying. The gift of life is in his bones. The birds in the sky above him are utterly bird, the shadows cast by leaves totally and completely shadow. Their beauty is indisputable. They *are*. They are *here*. He *is*. He *is here*. Ripe fruit falls to the ground at his feet, offering itself to him. From riverbeds comes the song of frogs. When Albert walks, he has been kissed. When he walks, his existence is complete and his body is divine; he is elemental like the sky drenched with sun, then infused with red dusk, then asleep with night, then sun-bright again. Albert walks seventy kilometers in a day without stopping, without eating, without sleeping, in order to feel that gift.

But when he stops, he doesn't remember where he's been. He doesn't remember that the gift exists. He doesn't remember that he was ever astonished at all.

Albert Observed (St. André Hospital, Bordeaux, 1886)

Albert feels as though he will disappear into the Doctor's eyes. *Fascinating! Magnificent! Yet another escapade!*

Perhaps because the Doctor suggests, "You are disappearing."

The Doctor's words drift out the window, floating up like the smoke from the factory chimneys, up with the sound of the church carillons. There is the far smell of wildflowers and the nearer smell of poultices. The iron rings of bed curtains rattle down the hall.

Albert will disappear—hypnotized into sleep—but before he does, the Doctor will look into Albert's eyes as if he knows everything about him, even the things that are gone: his father who died of a softening of the brain; his mother who died of pneumonia; his brother who died of meningitis; the woman who Albert wanted to marry but who refused to see him after he walked to Brive instead of meeting her at four o'clock for tea on that Saturday.

The Doctor's gaze says *Shhh*. *Listen*, his eyes say, I know everything

you've forgotten. In the public gardens there are Spanish chestnut trees you loved to climb as a child though your mother didn't like it because the rats nested in the soft ground under the drooping branches. Listen, your brother shakes you from your first wandering trance when you were twelve, discovering you, and you discovering yourself, selling umbrellas for a salesman in a neighboring town though your father gave you money to go down the street to buy coke for the gas company.

"Not a very happy story, it seems," Albert says, forgetting that the Doctor isn't speaking out loud. "Still, thank you very much. Not being able to say how I got here, it is good to know all of this."

"Shhhh," the Doctor says, stroking the top of Albert's head. The Doctor's hand smells of pomade, cigars, sausage from his lunch. "Your eyelids are warm. They are getting warmer."

To make sure, Albert flutters them and there it is, the heat. The swirl of skin in the Doctor's fingertips on the top of Albert's head makes him pleasantly dizzy.

"Shhhh. You are sinking. You don't worry about anything anymore. You don't see anything. Your arms and legs are motionless. You are sleeping and you are nothing."

Albert tries to move his arms and legs and for the first time in fourteen years, since his journeys began, he can't. *Yet another escapade*, Albert thinks, but is careful not to say. He tries his best to be nothing so the Doctor will not move his swirling fingers. His warm eyelids flutter open despite themselves.

"Shhh, Albert, shhh." The Doctor's voice is steady and solid, like a tabletop that Albert would like to lay his head on. The Doctor's still, blue gaze continues to speak to Albert through his closed eyelids. Albert was once a gas fitter, like his father before him. He fitted the pipes and lit the lamps along the street and outside the shops. There is magic in gas, his father often said. *Shhh*, Albert, *shhh*. The spirit of coal was revealed after they tried everything else—olive oil, beeswax, fish oil, whale oil, sesame oil, nut oil. Public illumination, Albert! Turning night into day! Safer streets, longer factory hours. People read more, read better. Gas may be the reason for all that is good, his father would say, as if he had invented it.

A dropped basin clatters in the hallway. "Give me that," a nurse says irritably.

"Your eyes are very tired. Very, very tired. They've never been more tired. You are so very, very, very drowsy."

The Doctor's eyes speak Albert's ragged memory for him: It was like flight at first. His mother had forbidden it because of the scrambling screeching rats fighting over the fallen chestnuts. Still, the rats gave Albert's mother great pleasure. The fancy trees—recently planted, overrun by rodents—delighted her, a woman who took in knitting for extra money when her husband became sick and couldn't work. We are not a family getting fat off the triangular trade, she would remind Albert, whenever he asked for things. We do not own a sugar refinery built on the backs of others, she'd say and pinch his ear. But the leaves of the trees sparkled gold through the green when the gas lamps Albert's father had installed shone on them. They called to eight-year-old Albert despite his mother's warning that he would surely die from the bite of a filthy rat, and if he didn't die and she discovered he'd been climbing the trees, he would wish he'd only been bitten by a filthy rat.

The chestnuts rained down when he swung himself up into the spindly arms of the tree. He righted himself on a sturdy branch and looked out over the countryside, beyond Bordeaux, to places he'd never been before, to villages where the prince in his father's stories had seen prophetesses in trembling fits reveal secrets of the future, where wolves sucked the marrow from the delicate ankle bones of once plump children, howling for more. Albert looked up to the sky that went on and on, hovering over all of the oceans and distant lands the prince traveled in order, as his father told it, to witness the exact moment that darkness gave way to light.

"Very, very drowsy. So tired. And now you are asleep."

The lamplight in the hospital room flickers. Albert flickers too, and then he is asleep like he has never been asleep before. The Doctor's voice is the world and there is a sparkle in Albert's dark, forgotten heart, like the lit fuse of a gas lamp, illuminating blood and muscle.

"How old are you, Albert?"

"Twenty-nine? Inquiries could be made."

"Twenty-six."

"Ah! I am astonished to learn this, not even being able to say how I got here. Thank you very much. It is very useful to know my age."

Albert feels the prick, prick, prick of the doctor's pin along his jaw, a dream inside a dream. Across the bridge of his nose, prick, prick, prick, along one arm, and up the other. It disappears: *pric, pri, pr, p, p, p*. He wouldn't know the needle was through his tongue if the Doctor hadn't said, "Albert, the needle is through your tongue. Do you feel it?"

“Well, now that you’ve told me it’s there.”

Shhh.

“You are a good sleeper, Albert.”

Shhh, Albert, shhh, and it’s true, he is a good sleeper.

Shhh, he is thick with sleep and then he is walking again and he is astonished. The clouds float like reefs through the water of the sky. He walks and walks and the leaves he has used to stuff the holes in his shoes rustle.

There were days, before, that vanished into the woods between Bordeaux and Toulouse or splashed over the side of the boat into the deep black water between Marseille and Blidah or fluttered away into the sky like the sparrows darting beside him between Geneva and Strasbourg—or was it between Vienna and Budapest? Albert walks into yesterday and finds his finger dipped in a honey pot in the foothills of the Pyrenees. The Pyrenees are magnificent! *Yet another escapade!*

Not being able to say how he got there, he is astonished, his finger in thick amber drawn by industrious bees from the nectar of tiny flowers pushed up through rough soil.

Somewhere in the sky, the birds and the Doctor’s voice chirp together: You will stay in Bordeaux. You will keep your appointment with me tomorrow at eleven o’clock. Albert’s numbed lips form the words: I will stay in Bordeaux. I will keep my appointment with you tomorrow at eleven o’clock.

How did he arrive in the Pyrenees? He found himself in a public square in Pau, no livret, no passport, always without papers. A well-scrubbed man with large, kind ears gave him a kilogram of bread and twenty sous and told him about the old women in the foothills who ran bony hands along the stones, searching for healing herbs so rare they only have names in Catalan.

“Where have you been that your shoes are so worn?” The man’s large, kind ears wiggled when he spoke. “Have you come from Tours or Orleans?” Albert couldn’t say. Inquiries might be made. There wasn’t time to explain. Wiggle, wiggle went Albert’s toes, through the rustling leaves, poking out the holes in his shoes. Wiggle, wiggle went the large, kind ears. They told Albert that the nectar of the tiny, defiant flowers contained an ancient cure, perhaps centuries old. Ancient cure was all Albert needed to hear.

“Why do you cry?”

“I fear that I will leave you, Doctor.”

“Already? But you just got here. No need for tears yet.”

“I feel the urge coming over me again. I would like to walk far, very far, but with someone to watch over me and bring me back.”

“I am watching over you. You will stay in Bordeaux. You will come to see me tomorrow at eleven o’clock.”

The surface of the Doctor’s tabletop voice expands; Albert could lay his whole body on top of it if he needed to.

On each of the honey pots was written *les petits pharmiciens*. What luck to have discovered himself there! This was not a calamity. This was not an escapade. The Pyrenees are truly astonishing! Truly magnificent! Albert sucked his honeyed finger until it pruned and all traces of the magic sweetness were gone. I am here, Albert thought, and not there or there or there, but soon he would be somewhere else again.

He stirs in his sleep.

“I will not leave Bordeaux. I will come to see you tomorrow at eleven o’clock.”

On that stony hill, his own sweet finger in his mouth, Albert thought, *This* is real. The sweetness in his mouth was real. The ache in his teeth was the hope for an ancient cure. That ache hurt more than the first sting of the bee that landed on his lip and then all the bees came, a whole swarm of them. He shouted as he ran—*Make me real!*—trampling the healing herbs he couldn’t name.

And then he was here.

“Where are you?”

“I don’t know.”

“I will find you. I will bring you back.”

“Ah, thank you,” Albert says. “I’m very glad to hear that.”

The Doctor blows gently on Albert’s eye to wake him and Albert finds himself once again swirling underneath the Doctor’s fingers. Horses clop down the narrow, piss-drenched streets. Another basin clatters in the hall. “Stop that,” says the same irritable nurse. To Albert, it all seems quite beautiful.

The Medical Record

The Doctor has drawn a crude map of Albert’s peregrinations: the line zigs and zags all over France, through much of the German Empire, along the route Albert took by cattle car from Warsaw to Moscow, where he exclaimed to the baffled Russian soldier who took him prisoner, “Si-

beria? Magnificent! I've never been," before being marched to Constantinople instead. The line meanders through East Rumelia, Bulgaria, Serbia, Austria-Hungary, and then home again to Bordeaux. His travels would be the envy of any Thomas Cook tourist. In Lyon, he saw the funicular railroad (*Magnificent!*). In Trappe de Staouel, he smelled the delicate fragrance of the rose water manufactured there wafting through the whole town (*Fantastic!*). Somewhere in between polishing copper pots on the ship *The Moses*, unloading cars of ore in Charleroi, and working in the coastal saltworks in the Midi, he had been to Kassel to the castle in which Napoleon II was once held prisoner (*Yet another escapade!*).

The Doctor connected the dots between the towns and showed Albert the map. "How curious," Albert replied.

On the first page of the Doctor's notebook: *It is difficult to know whether someone is telling the truth in professing oblivion.* Between the first and second page, he slides the note (*I think he is off his rocker*) pinned to Albert by someone trying to be helpful. On the second page, the Doctor writes: *The word travel derives from a Latin word for a three-pronged stake used as an instrument of torture.*

The Doctor knows that three-pronged stake. He has traveled a great distance himself. His mother died of a fever when he was a boy, but first her bedroom filled with unimaginable heat. He hated that his father didn't understand the heat rising off his mother or how to cool it, and he hated himself for hating his father. Even when his father thrashed in the same hot bed a year later, there were particles of hatred in the boy as the smallpox blisters became sheets of their own, pulling the outer layers of skin from his father until he was no longer his father but any body unraveling.

The incompetent country doctor—his unbuttoned cuffs flapping frantically as he leached his father until it seemed there was no more blood left to take—wouldn't let him in the room so he left his home forever. He never knew when his father died exactly. To this day, he feels sure he could have saved them both, his mother and his father, if only they'd waited to get sick until he became a doctor. But first there were the long nights in the Toulouse railway station as a bookkeeper's clerk, and then longer days as a delivery man—carrying heavy chandeliers through streets jammed with basket-carrying kitchen maids and merchants—while going to school at night, then hopping aboard the *Niger* to become a cargo clerk on the Bordeaux-Senegal run. It was there the ship's doctor saw in him what he couldn't yet see in himself: the Doctor. He quickly returned home to take

a job as under-librarian for the medical faculty while completing his *baccalaureat* in the sciences. And then, after anatomy, botany, and hygiene, he found himself on this ward and in walked this man, weeping not because he was exhausted from walking seventy kilometers a day without food or rest but because he couldn't prevent himself from doing it again.

I am not real. Make me real. This is Albert's whispered refrain in response to the Doctor's own gentle whisper. In regular sleep, the sleeper dreams alone; in sleep by suggestion the sleeper and the doctor dream together. These are wondrous times: the train, the telephone, the steam engine, the Lumière brothers, the bicycle. The bicycle! The Doctor is the first doctor for the biking team of Bordeaux. He is astounded by the elegance of this supple machine, in awe of the unlikely communion of man and metal, the way the bicycle was almost perfectly evolved from the moment of its birth. And still, in the midst of all of this technological progress, what is most astonishing—*astonishing!*—is the progress in the realm of the mind. *Turning night into day*, Albert mumbled during their session. Albert's mind is a dark street and the Doctor is lighting the lamps, one by one.

Albert Walks

Before Albert walks, his body is all urgency. He must drink water—six, maybe ten, glasses of water in a row. He sweats and he trembles. There is an itch in his feet that finds its way up his legs and then into his cock, which he prefers to refer to as his beautiful instrument. He is compelled to play his beautiful instrument. Always gently at first, as if he is greeting it—hello, *yet another escapade!*—the buzz of *les petits pharmiciens* in his legs, hips, and groin, he achieves a steady cadence, holding the buzz inside, keeping it there as long as he can until the song reaches its crescendo. Sometimes he crescendos six, maybe ten, times in a day.

The urgency in his body is a question. It demands an answer when he wakes up along the road, forcing him to respond before he can continue. He has discovered himself crescendoing in the woods beside desolate roads, clouds casting purple shadows on the trees that make shapes—a hat, a bear; crescendoing behind the black blots of fir-woods near a stone cattle track, the wind carrying dust from a farmer's plough nearby, the thick necks of oxen fixed to their yoke; crescendoing in the dark marshy open, all of nature invaded by a fog and then, finally, he too is erased.

When he was kicked out of Russia, mistaken for an anarchist who

had attempted to assassinate the czar, a lovely Gypsy girl cuddled him as they were marched to Constantinople. She rolled on top of him, but all he wanted, despite her loveliness, even as his beautiful instrument put up a fight, was to be alone. He is twenty-six years old and he has never had sex. It is not the pleasure of union and oblivion he wants but the relief of knowing he exists. And besides, he knows best how to play his beautiful instrument. Why would he need any help? It is a song he knows by heart.

It's the silence lurking after the song that he fears. Even as he plays, he dreads sticky hands and that silence. There are days when the sky is smeared with charcoal clouds that darken the whole world and Albert too: harbingers of nothing, reminders that every night the black sky will obliterate even the ominous smears. But when Albert walks, his body's singing keeps him company and his sadness lifts into the air to become part of the clouds, eventually raining back down on him transformed, spilling from the branches of poplars turned pale gold when winter's coming.

Albert walks and walks and he is astonished. Albert cannot walk enough.

The Medical Record

On page three, the Baudelaire that came to the Doctor as he and Albert dreamed together: *"Most of the children want more than anything to see the soul.... The child turns his toy over and over, he scratches it, shakes it, knocks it against the wall, dashes it on the ground... finally he pries it partly open for he is the stronger. But where is the soul?"*

The Doctor swears this is not him. He is not a child playing with toys. He swears he will be careful.

Soon, when Albert becomes known throughout Europe as *the Doctor's voyager*, the Doctor will do things he swore he would never do: You are drowsy, Albert. You are tired. You are very, very sleepy. Your left knee will represent Virtue, Albert. Your right knee, Vice.

The photographer will render Albert in light and shadow as the Doctor touches Albert's left knee and Albert picks up an empty glass on the table and drinks as if there is water and he is parched, as if he will never get enough to drink. He will drink and drink until he falls to the ground. When the Doctor touches Albert's right knee, the blood will rush to Albert's face, he will put his hands down his pants and fall to the ground again, rubbing and writhing. *My beautiful instrument! Mon petit phar-*

micien! Afterwards, he will be despondent. He will seem almost to have died. The Doctor will wonder: What happens if he presses both the left knee and the right knee? Albert will put one hand down his trousers and with the other he will pick up the empty glass and pretend to drink. Instead of blowing on Albert's eyelids, the Doctor will clap his hand sharply to wake him. Studying the pictures later, he will think in amazement: Such a range of facial expressions! It is possible to watch Virtue and Vice write themselves on Albert's body. The series of photographs reveal psychic manifestations, the formation of an idea and then the idea put into action. The Doctor will note that this transformation takes precisely thirty-seven seconds. The three-second delays during which the photographer changed the plates will be imperceptible as if Albert knew how to hold the poses just long enough.

But where is the soul? The question will drift through the Doctor's mind the morning after that session, but he won't recognize it until weeks after the experiment when Albert is back on the road and the Doctor has gone for a walk outside the hospital to breathe air that isn't sick. He'll find himself pressing his face against the cool stones of the cathedral whose shadow looms over the squatting hospital. *I am not real. Make me real.* The Doctor will hear Albert's words as the glow of candles illuminates Jesus on the road to Cavalry. In a dark corner, inhaling the incense of the altar, the Doctor will wish fleetingly that he were a man of the church and not a man of science so that the answer would simply be God. In the Middle Ages, the hospital was a stop on the pilgrimage route to the tomb of St. Jacques and the Doctor wonders if, then, Albert's wanderings might have been mistaken for an effort to better his soul.

Now, the Doctor assures himself he is not interested in the theatrics of the Tuesday Lessons held by the great doctor in Paris, as much a performer as he is a man of medicine. So bold he recently diagnosed a man in a woodcut from the eighteenth century (all the signs of an hysteric, the contracture of the face, the fearful eyes). Albert would not be one of the great doctor's hysterics, who, the great doctor has boasted, are each as recognizable, as predictable, as the back of his own hand.

Diagnoses are stories and Albert is his own story, the Doctor thinks with pride. The first of his kind. Wasn't it the great doctor himself who said that the most difficult thing, the most rarely accomplished feat, even for wide-awake men in medicine, was to look beyond what has already been seen?

The Prince Who Went Out into The World

Every night when Albert was a boy, he watched as his father steadied a fellow lamp lighter's ladder as he lit their street. The lamp lighter and his father both worked for the gas company and Albert listened, waiting, as they talked about the most recent article in *Plumber and Decorator*—"How Water Works," "House Drainage," "Geometry for Plumbers." "I'm going to read that article to Albert tonight," his father would always say, but it was a joke Albert knew by heart.

It was the last step in the ritual before his father settled in to tell him stories of the prince who went out into the world. The prince spoke to magic toads and performed tasks in order to woo beautiful girls who were secretly princesses and possessed all the land in the world and all the riches. The stories about the prince were tales of happily ever after, tales of love, power, and riches. The wicked were punished, revenge and cruelty were a means to a moral end, and fathers and mothers and brothers became ill and died only for a purpose.

Even then, Albert was less interested in the arrival. "Tell me about the long journey the prince had to make," he would say to his father. And his father would add more hills, more dales, more rivers to cross, more forests in which to become lost. Albert loved especially the moments when it became dark, too dark to see, and the journeying prince would light a candle and something would be revealed—the most beautiful face in the world or a hideous poisonous toad. The light was the most magic of all. "And imagine what he would have discovered if he'd had gaslight," his father would say.

The Medical Record

Fugue means flight, the Doctor thinks. The name for Albert will go in the medical record; it will find its way into the annals of psychiatry; it will endure along with the steam engine, the train, the cinema, the phonograph, the bicycle.

On page four, he writes: *Someone comes... someone to whom one wants to give everything, to whom one would willingly sacrifice life itself. There's no need for words—people just find one another—they have glimpsed each other in dreams.*

It is a passage from *Madame Bovary*. Then the Doctor remembers: this is Rodolphe speaking. Still, thinking of Albert, the Doctor, too, is dazzled.

Albert Walks

Over hill, over dale, crossing rivers, Albert walks, astonished. *Il revien, il revien, il revien*, sings the Garonne, the Gulf of Lyons, the Rhone, the Tarn. The earth's heart rumbles through Albert's rustling feet.

Each time Albert sets out, he looks back on the slated roofs of his home, never more his home than as it disappears behind him. Bordeaux is the size of his forearm, then a finger, then a fingernail. When Albert walks, that darting bird and then that one and then that one are the Doctor watching over him, making him real.

Author's Note: "Fugueur" was inspired by Mad Traveller by Ian Hacking (University Press of Virginia, 1998), particularly the case notes (1886-1896) of Dr. Philippe Tissie in reference to Albert Dadas.