[illegible]
[illegible] but he will make a fool of [illegible] Samuel Butler

Cagemates

WHY ANIMALS AND HUMANS CAN'T ESCAPE EACH OTHER

NEW YORK *Tad Friend*

Gus the messed-up polar bear first claimed New York City's attention with his backstroke. In June of 1994, the New York tabloids suddenly noticed that he was swimming in his Central Park Zoo pool all day long, as glazed as an accountant doing laps at the Y. The zoo hired a $50-an-hour animal shrink to help Gus appreciate his urban surroundings. (In the wild, polar bears roam up to 30,000 square meters; in Central Park, America's first zoo and its second-smallest, Gus and his denmates Ida and Lily share 5,000 square feet.) "It really was a New York story," zoo public affairs manager Alison Power says. "It's like Woody Allen always being in therapy." Gus was the model New Yorker: screwed up, acting out, groping to ease an unnameable pain.

Gus' first stab at self-medication was something of a bummer. When he arrived at the zoo in 1988, Gus would lurk until a child smushed its face to the underwater portal. Then he'd bomb toward the child with claws out and mouth agape. "He was stalking them," Tony Brownie, animal supervisor at the zoo, says appreciatively. "He liked to see them scream and run in terror—it was a game. But we didn't want heart attacks, so we put up barriers to keep people farther from the glass."

Gus' subsequent idea was to swim. And swim. And swim. Such "stereotypic," or repetitive, behavior reveals something amiss; other problem indicators are listlessness and "hypersexuality," familiar if you've had a dog persistently hump your leg. Whereas humans doze off watching Leno, bored polar bears often pace backward in slow-mo moonwalk. Additional symptoms include bar biting, tongue play, head bobbing, overgrooming, playing with excrement, and self-mutilation.

To zoo critics like People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, this behavior vividly symbolizes the shame of captivity. "Animals like Gus aren't really fully alive," says PETA coordinator Peter Wood. "They're just shadows of what they are in the wild." Certainly, an animal in a bare cage—a gibbon unable to swing from vines or bars, a rambunctious spaniel locked in the bathroom—loses its essential animalness. "The small family living unit lacks space, earth, other animals, seasons, natural temperatures, and so on," the cultural observer John Berger has written, critiquing our urban codependence. "The pet is either sterilized or sexually isolated, extremely limited in its exercise, deprived of almost all other animal contact, and fed with artificial foods. This is the material process that lies behind the truism that pets come to resemble their masters or mistresses. They are creatures of their owner's way of life."

But this Manichaean view—wild is good, captivity is bad—fails to do justice to the complex relationship people have with animals and with freedom. "People seem to be obsessed with this word, *freedom*, particularly when applied to animals," the late English naturalist Gerald Durrell noted. "They never seem to worry about the freedom of the bank clerks of Streatham, the miners of Durham [who] are confined by their jobs and by conven-

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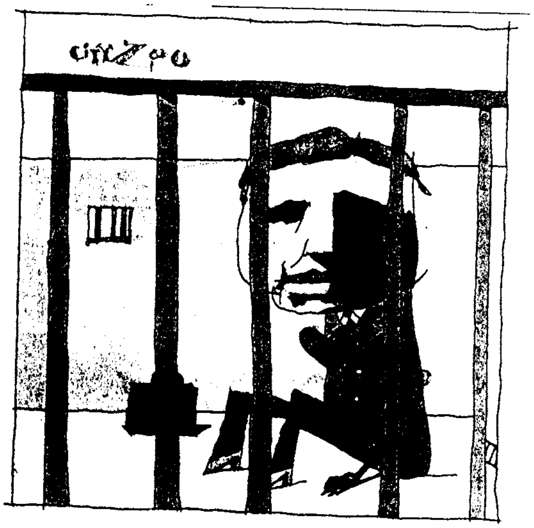
"My cat does not talk as respectfully to me as I do to her." Colette

Home Sweet Home



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tion as securely as any zoo inmate."

Why should animals believe that freedom, defined as life in the wild, is the ultimate good? We certainly don't: Civilization is the history of our attempts to loose ourselves from the tyranny of life in the wild, with its continual pressures to find food and flee predators. Instead of hunting, gathering, and defending our patch of savanna, we've plumped for a social contract that lets us shop at Foodtown and turn the deadbolt on our "territory."

There is a risk of conflating animals' abilities and goals with our own (if bats kept us as pets they'd lament our diurnal habits, our stupidity about echolocation). But the greater risk is of *undervaluing* animals' capacities. "It is often said of zoo animals that the way to tell if they are happy is to ask whether the young play and the adults breed," Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson writes tartly in his book *When Elephants Weep: The Emotional Lives of Animals* (Delacorte Press, 1995). "Most zookeepers would not accept this standard of happiness for themselves."

Even by Masson's standards, the curious fact about Gus is not how screwed up he is, but—in relation to us—how screwed up he *isn't*. "Gus is just bored and mildly crazy in the way that a lot of people are in New York," says Gus' behavioral therapist, Tim Desmond.

In fact, the city is a giant zoo. We are not animals' despotic, all-knowing captors so much as alpha males in a multispecies pack, trusties in the same cage of tiny apartments, shrieking subways, and anxious desires. We too grapple with treat-filled buckets, only our treats are called low-rate mortgage or junior partner and often require us to wear neckties. We too try to connect while simultaneously maintaining "flight distance"—the space needed for psychic comfort.

The bars around us used to be easier to see, because they were literal. Not so long ago, a visit to London's Bedlam was considered a lark: In 1753, a writer for *The World* observed "a hundred people at least who, having paid their tuppence a piece, were suffered unattended to run rioting up and down the wards, making sport of the miserable inhabitants."

The city, pandemonious to us with our relatively poor hearing, is such a scratch on the blackboard for keen-eared dogs that behaviorist Peter Borchelt has proposed "NYC phobia," half seriously, to explain why some dogs won't go out. And as Jacque Schultz, the ASPCA's director of companion-animal services, notes, "The fun is gone in having a beagle or any scent hound in New York. There are too many smells for walks to be pleasurable—you're constantly trying to rip up their heads from sniffing the chicken bones and condoms."

Summer in New York also features the dog and cat high-rise syndrome, a condition found almost nowhere else in the world: Hundreds of animals, including the odd turtle or snake, plummet from the windows of tall buildings and suffer from what the literature calls "extreme vertical deceleration trauma"—landing, in other words. Cats achieve a "terminal velocity" of 60 miles per hour, right themselves after falling nine stories, land with their limbs spread like a lunar module's, and often walk away

“[illegible] is a certain amount of madness when you marry a person with pets.”
Nora Ephron

relatively undamaged (one cat survived a 46-story fall). Dogs go boom. A 1993 report by Manhattan’s Animal Medical Center said some of the dogs appeared to be chasing squirrels, other dogs, or their owners’ cars as they drove away below; one owner suspected that her dog was thrown out the window by a child. According to Michael Garvey, the center’s chief of medicine, the alluring hara-kiri hypothesis is insupportable: “There is no evidence whatsoever to suggest the cat or dog is trying to end it all.”

Even when they’re not plopping from the skies, animals test our forbearance. Many mundane animal activities provoke particular outrage indoors. Chewing, spraying, intermale aggression, predation, possessiveness over food, scratching at the door, begging at the table, and persistent barking are all normal pet behaviors. Training can mask, but not efface, them. So New York vets are deploying the new shock troops of behavioral suppression—anti-anxiety and anti-depressant drugs, which work about half the time—to tweak pets into what we consider acceptable behavior patterns. Elavil and Tofranil help reduce separation anxiety; Valium fattens cats with anorexia; Xanax damps thunderstorm and firecracker phobias; and Prozac unruffles parrots prone to feather-picking. Dicier approaches abound, including pet psychics. One notorious consultant relies on Couéist suggestion. Faced with, say, a hyperactive Manx, she tells the owner to play the cat a tape of whale songs with her voice tracked in: “You’re a happy, healthy cat! A happy, healthy cat!”

Many pet owners frankly believe animals are not only morally capacious but also nobler, kinder, and generally more desirable than their fellow humans. As the North Shore Animal League’s subway ads encouraging pet adoption put it, “Imagine having a mate that’s good-looking, trustworthy, and never complains about dinner being cold.”

“A common problem is the woman whose male poodle won’t let her new boyfriend into bed,” notes the ASPCA’s Jacque Schultz. “[These women] are weak; they spoil the dog and elevate his dominance by sleeping with him in their bed. When the guy tries to shoo the poodle, it’ll lift its leg and growl, or bite. We’ll say to the woman, ‘You have to lower the dog on the pack ladder, and he can no longer sleep on the bed. You can either have a relationship with a human or keep things the same with the dog.’ Most of the time, they choose to keep things the same with the dog.”

We speak to animals as we do to babies, imprinting in “motherese” by raising the pitch of our voice, lowering the volume, and ending sentences with an especially heightened inflection: “Is the wittle woog-ums hun-gwy?”

What’s this all about? A number of experts suggest that the instinctive tug is transferred from our predisposition to children. We are seduced by pedomorphy (our preference for infantile human characteristics, such as big eyes and round faces) and neotony (infantile characteristics persisting into adulthood, a trait we have and a trait we’ve bred for in pets).

Aaron Katcher, a leading expert in human-animal relationships, points out, however, that “you don’t have to get married to have a companion animal, and you can abandon it at will. Furthermore, for most of us now in cities, the dangers we face are either other people or our own thought stream, which constantly rehearses the bad things people have done to us and may do to us in the future. Animals,” he concludes—perhaps explaining why there are so many New York pet owners who are single—“are a much less complex and difficult relationship.”

An intriguingly original hypothesis for this bond is provided by Robert Fagen, an “evolutionary aestheticist” and professor of biometrics at the University of Alaska. “Rather than there being a genetic logic in our love for animals, it’s an emergent property of complex brains to appreciate the way cats and dogs and horses move,” Fagen says. “The animals we have domesticated are on the top rung of sheer aesthetic value. Think of the photographs of Balanchine with his cats—cats really groove on this stuff; their play has choreography. Cats and dogs are genetically very similar to European wildcats and wolves, but there has been a major coevolutionary change in their tolerance for humans at close range, in their trust, and in their ability to forgive mistakes. The same holds for us.” In an extreme example of forgiveness at the Philadelphia Zoo some years ago, after a gorilla named Bamboo ripped an arm off keeper Sammy Guanato, Guanato returned to wave the stump at his charge. “You didn’t mean it!” he shouted. “I know you didn’t mean it!”

Man began by domesticating himself, moved on to cats and dogs, and now will inevitably domesticate zoo animals and coevolve with them. “The lesson of coevolution is this,” says Robert Fagen. “It’s more like making new dances than breeding new varieties of corn. Animals and people that are not good company don’t survive.” Survival, even New Yorkers’ crabwise approach to happiness, comes from choosing the terms of our mutual captivity.

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"[illegible] keep dogs. They are cowards who haven't got the [illegible] to [illegible] people themselves." August Strindberg

Where the Wild Things Aren't

PETS CAN'T FULFILL OUR NEEDS

PAUL SHEPARD

At an aquarium in California a fish swims indolently along the glass. A man and two children watch. He waves his hand next to the pane, taps it. The fish does not respond. At first it seems to be looking, pauses, but then swims on, clearly oblivious of the man and children.

At the crocodile sanctuary south of Madras, India, boys watch the immobile reptiles in the sun. Finally one boy, then others throw pebbles at the animals.

I tell a famous ornithologist at Crater Lake National Park where we both work as seasonal ranger-naturalists about my experience on a high slope, where two hawks played overhead with a wad of lichen—the kind that hangs in festoons from conifer branches in wet forests. One hawk, higher up, would drop the lichen, to be caught in its talons by the other, which would then climb above and drop the lichen to the first. After several rounds of this, the lower bird, having caught the lichen, sailed over my head "and," I say to the scientist, "*dropped the lichen to me.*" At this he snorts, turns abruptly, and leaves.

All of the foregoing scenes are glimpses of a widespread yearning for a sign from Others—those creatures with whom we share the planet—and of skepticism that it is possible. Usually we wait in vain and in frustration. We seem frantic to contact intelligences more assured than ourselves, to be blessed in their witness of our mutual presence, to be given their surety that life is real and purposeful, even if the purposes lie beyond our grasp. As human numbers increase and the Others recede, it becomes our last passionate desire and we feel like calling, as the birds fly away, "Come back! . . . Hear me! . . . Look!"

To pet is to touch. The desire to hold the wild as we do our pets is acute. In the past quarter-century of television, Marlin Perkins, Jacques Cousteau, and others, in the name of science, have captured manatees, lassoed gazelles, grappled with crocodiles, and anesthetized lions —osten-

Timeline

CIRCA 12,000 B.C.: The Asian wolf is domesticated for use in tracking game, creating the first known "dog," though it bears little resemblance to today's household dogs.

CIRCA 7,300—7,000 B.C.: The trend continues almost five thousand years later when tribes in the British Isles, and later the Greeks, begin to keep dogs.

CIRCA 3,500 B.C.: The domestication of animals, including goats, sheep, asses, cattle, pigs, horses, and dogs—combined with the invention of the wheel and the development of irrigation—has streamlined food production enough to allow a few people to engage in scholarly, spiritual, aesthetic, and economic pursuits.

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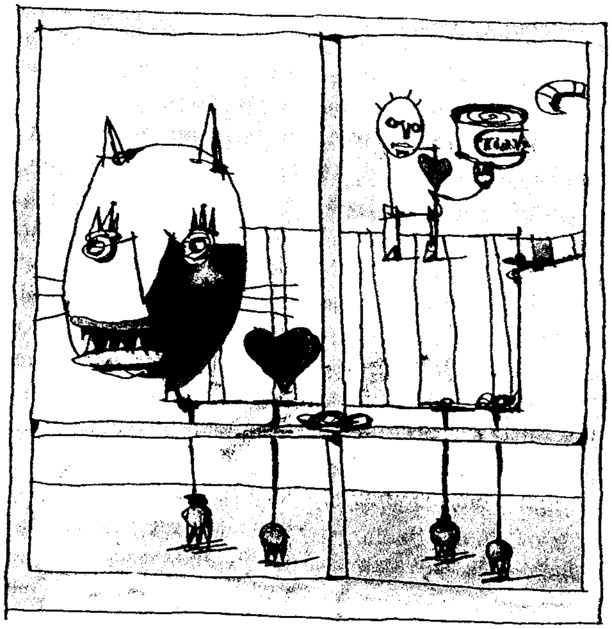

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sibly to treat a disease, restock an area, mark for further study, or rescue from rising waters or industrial development. In every sequence men clutched, held, or reached out and touched the animals. They fostered our yearning to recover a lost world, to be once again the trusted friend of all beings. They put the animals vicariously into our hands, and we wait for them to tell us something.

At home Rover is told to sit up and speak. Polly is asked if she wants a cracker. The news is full of the language of apes and dolphins, who, it is speculated, may be smarter than people. The scientists claim to be doing studies in communication, but the rest of us know what's afoot. We just want the whales and chimps to talk—not just about hunting shrimp or fruit but to speak to our mutual situation, claim our shared purposes, mend what Lévi-Strauss calls "the ultimate discontinuity of reality."

Against the indifference of the wild animals, the impetuous affection of our pets seems like an enormous boon. In a world so full of problems and suffering, only the worst curmudgeonly cynic would sneer at our indulgence, their simple pleasure in us and our joy in them. Something, however, is profoundly wrong with the human/animal pet relationship at its most basic level. Given the obvious benefits of that affiliation, one has to poke very carefully into its psychology and ecology before its fragile core can be exposed.

We believed ourselves until recent centuries to be continually in the proximity of a multitude of wise animal elders. These animals filled human life with excitement and strange associations for so long that our species continues to anticipate their reassurance. Wild animal life was a major focus of human attention, establishing the expectation of a rich, surprising, meaningful, and beautiful diversity of life around us. Some animals were sacred. All were conscious, unique, and different in spiritual power. During most of human history, people had easy access

CIRCA 3,000 B.C.: Following the invention of granaries in Egypt, wild cats are allowed indoors to hunt mice, beginning the evolution of the large, ferocious feline into our much smaller, yet ever willful, houseguests.

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CIRCA 2,850 B.C.: The Great Sphinx is created.

CIRCA 2,000 B.C.: Egyptian hieroglyphics depicting exotic menageries of birds—including doves, parrots, and ducks—chronicle the beginnings of birdkeeping.

CIRCA 0 A.D.: Jesus Christ is, reportedly, born in a manger, surrounded by humble animals.

[illegible] different countries have different expressions just as the people in different countries differ in expression." Gertrude Stein

to livestock and wild animals. Even after industrialization, towns and their margins were occupied by an abundance of small wild animals: birds, insects, fish, and amphibians. People were seldom more than walking distance from a still richer fauna in nearby streams, fields, and forests. Even in cities, until the 20th century, rabbits, chickens, ducks, and geese were still kept in backyards, local fairs and markets had large livestock sections, draft animals were still abundant, farmers drove pigs and cattle to market down the streets, and knackers butchered them in alleys. There were few laws against keeping birds and other wild captives. Dogs and cats ran freely in the streets. But now even the shambling domestic forms that pulled wagons, laid eggs, or turned our garbage into sausage have been removed from sight. The artifacts of industry and media, all the human mob and its distractions and therapies, do not make up for the loss. Only pets remain, a glimmer of that animal ambience, sacredness, otherness.

In 70 centuries of human cohabitation with animals, the sources of manure, milk, meat, and skins, as well as sacrificial offerings and symbolic and aesthetic objects, have not always been separated from their pet function. In the past a tiny bullock might be cared for with familial warmth and attachment in the household, exchanged as currency, kept as a fertilizer machine, admired for its strength and beauty, or sacrificed on an altar and then eaten, all the while talked to, touched, and loved as a member of the family. Domestic animals have gradually become surrogate companions, siblings, lovers, victims, workers, parents, competitors, deities, oracles, enemies, kinfolk, caretaker-guards, and so on.

Domestic animals have gradually become surrogate companions, siblings, lovers, victims, workers, parents, and competitors.

Now pets have become part of the pharmacology of medicine, ten thousand years after people first took in the dog, sheep, and goat. Indeed, pets have recently taken a new leap into institutional respectability, becoming "companion animals" as part of an integrated treatment. In the presence of pets, those who suffer from Alzheimer's disease and autism are inclined to speak. Incarcerated incompetents, handicapped outpatients, plain folks who are just getting old, impoverished or stressed executives and their lonely children—all are happier and live longer in the regular presence of friendly animals. There is also less suicide and aggression among the criminally insane, greater calming among the bereaved, quicker rehabilitation among alcoholics, improved self-esteem among the elderly, increased longevity among cardiac patients and cancer victims, improved emotional states among disturbed children, better morale among the blind and deaf, more cheer among the mentally and physically handicapped, faster learning among the retarded, solace for the terminally ill—and general facilitation of social relationships. Hearing dogs accompany the deaf, guide dogs lead the blind, hospice pets give unqualified cheer, animals help retarded children, monkeys have "hands" for the handicapped.

Professor Leo Bustad of Western Washington University's Department of Veterinary Medicine wants aquariums in all dental and medical offices and in waiting rooms, conference rooms, classrooms, lunchrooms. He thinks there should be wards in all hospitals where patients may keep pets, animal refuges from which the terminally ill may get animals on loan, professional referral systems, animal visitors in nursing homes, and provision for them in government housing, penal institutions, and community service agencies. "We believe," Bustad says, "that the health of our society is dependent on the nature and the extent of the association between people and other animals and their environment."

This view would no doubt be endorsed (for other reasons) by Eskimos with their dog teams, by 18th-century furriers and fur trappers, the butchers and meatpackers of the world, all the pastoralists since the horse was domesticated, circus personnel, the guilds of leatherworkers and shoemakers, and so on. Of course that is not what Bustad means, but underneath there remains the shadow of utility: the animal commodity dressed out as medical treatment instead of pulling sleds or growing

CIRCA A.D. 500—A.D. 1800: Pets are not uncommon in Europe during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, but they are kept for the most part by courtiers, members of privileged religious orders, and the upper classes.

CIRCA 1500 A.D.: The word *pet*, which is probably related to *petty* (small), is introduced into English as a reference to "an animal kept as a favorite."

19TH CENTURY: As human dependence on animals decreases, Victorians become increasingly sentimental about horses and dogs. Intelligence, character, and even human forms of morality are attributed to them.

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"Animals have these advantages over man: They have no theologians to instruct them, their funerals cost them nothing, and no one starts lawsuits over their wills." Voltaire

furs. In return for the work of a well-kept slave the animals in this bond get "friendship."

"Pet-facilitated therapy," casual or institutionalized, reduces human suffering. It is truly an astonishing solace. The "companion animal" is a medical miracle to which we should be kind and grateful. It cheers, modulates pain, and helps the patient to cope. But like all psychotherapy, it is not a true healing. We falsify our relationship to wild animals with our husbandman's eye, social worker's agendas, veterinary tools, and breeder's books. Animals were present at the center of human life for thousands of centuries before anyone thought of taking them captive, making them companions, forming the "friendship loops" of which animal-facilitation therapists and ethicists speak.

However, the domestication of animals has never ensured their tender care. In recent Anglo-American tradition the dog is "man's best friend," but it is abhorred in the Bible. In Muslim tradition the dog's saliva is noxious, and contact between people and dogs requires ritual cleansing. Over most of the planet the dog is a cur and a mongrel scavenger, feral, half-starved, the target of the kick and thrown rock, often cruelly exploited as a slave. Although they're looked upon with affection, even modern pets are property that is bought, sold, "put down," and neutered. Pets are deliberately abandoned by the millions and necessitate city-run slaughterhouses, shelters, and "placement" services. This paradox of frenetic emotion and casual dismissal reveals our deep disappointment in the pet's ability to do something, be something, that we cannot quite identify.

What is wrong at the heart of the keeping of pets is that they are deficient animals engineered to conform to our wishes.

Domestic animals were "created" by humans by empirical genetic engineering over the past ten thousand years. They are vestiges and fragments from a time of deep human respect for animals, whose abundance dazzled us in their many renditions of life, helping us to know ourselves by showing all that we had not become. The pet cannot restore us to that wholeness any more than an artificial limb renews the original; nor can it do more than simulate the Others among whom our ancestors lived for so long, the Others that constituted for them a cosmos.

What is wrong at the heart of the keeping of pets is that they are deficient animals in whom we have invested the momentum of 2 million years of love of the Others. They are monsters of the order invented by Frankenstein except that they are engineered to conform to our wishes, biological slaves who cringe and fawn or perform or whatever we wish. As embodiments of trust, dependence, companionship, aesthetic beauty, vicarious power, innocence, or action by command, they are wholly unlike the wild world. In effect, they are organic machines conforming to our needs.

No one now doubts that pets can be therapeutic. But they are not a glorious bonus on life; rather, they are compensations for something desperately missing, minimal replacements for friendship in all of its meanings. Mass society isolates us in ways and degrees that seem to contradict our population density. Pets occupy by default an equally great human need for others who are not part of our personal lives. Pets are unacknowledged surrogates for human companionship or substitutes for the resolution of interpersonal social problems, and therefore impair normal human sociality by enabling people to avoid mending, maturing, or otherwise dealing with their personal relationships. Pets, being our own creations, do not replace that wild universe. But as living animals they confuse our perception and hide the lack of a wild, nonhuman comity of players on a grand scale—a spectacular drama of life to which our human natures commit our need and expectation.

Elder

Excerpted with permission from The Others: How Animals Made Us Human, *by Paul Shepard (Island Press/Shearwater Books, 1995). Paul Shepard is a leading thinker in human evolution and ecology. Sierra Club Books will publish an anthology of his work in the spring of 1996.*

1851: The word *doggone* first appears in print in the novel *Scalp Hunt*. It is generally taken as a deformation of the profanity "God damn," though its original form is thought to be "dog on it," to be used like "pox on it."

1865: Lewis Carroll publishes *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, and no one ever again looks at cats, mice, and rabbits without a touch of uneasiness.

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CIRCA 1870: Actress Sarah Bernhardt loses both her pet tortoise Chrysagère and its "servant," a smaller tortoise named Zerbinette, to a devastating fire in her Paris flat.