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Travel Is So . . .

by Robert C. Ryan

Mr. Albertson was interested in old cathedrals. Mrs. Albertson was interested in young men. They saved for two years to go to Europe to see the old cathedrals. Mr. Albertson made the very sensible suggestion of taking a student ship in order to be in the company of people who know more about old cathedrals. Mr. Albertson agreed that it was a good idea. Mr. Albertson told everyone how sensible his wife was.

They had a champagne farewell party on the ship with some of their New York friends—that is to say, some of Mrs. Albertson's New York friends. Mr. Albertson was from Wisconsin. He had met Mrs. Albertson five years before when he had come to New York on business. One of his business friends had introduced them and Mr. Albertson was immediately captivated. Mrs. Albertson had seen to that. She was a successful woman if not a successful model.

Champagne didn’t agree with Mr. Albertson so he retired to his own cabin immediately after the ship left the dock. Champagne agreed excellently with Mrs. Albertson and she retired to the Lido bar where there was much merriment and many young men. After the champagne ran out she sat at the bar and drank hot wine. She was joined shortly by a football player from Duke who had never seen a contrivance like that hot wine maker. This provided a topic of conversation. They found others.

They walked around the deck and admired the phosphorescent marine life splashing off the bow. They climbed up to the smokestacks and laughed about going up the ladder. They inspected the smokestacks and the football player held onto Mrs. Albertson's waist so that she could lean out and touch one of the suspended life-boats. She purposely let her feet slip out from under her and was so grateful for being caught that she invited the young man to her cabin to have a night-cap. The young man found it unnecessary to leave until just before dawn.

Mrs. Albertson was extremely discreet. She had proved that by talking her husband into taking separate cabins.

By day she accompanied her husband. They sat in their chairs on the sun deck near the swimming pool. Mr. Albertson read about
old cathedrals and studied his German conversation or his French conversation. Mrs. Albertson caught up on her sleep and studied the young men sunning themselves or the young men swimming or the young men playing shuffleboard.

By night Mr. Albertson usually retired to his cabin after the second sitting meal. Mr. Albertson believed in broadening himself culturally. Mrs. Albertson broadened herself otherwise.

After the football player there was a swimmer with fine flowing muscles, a VanDyked English professor with a highly developed aesthetic sense and a Canadian who spoke French also. Mr. Albertson enjoyed the crossing immensely.

They took the boat-train from LeHavre to Paris. Mrs. Albertson became ill on the second day and remained so for a week. This deeply distressed Mr. Albertson but he was prevailed upon by his wife not to miss the opportunity of seeing all the fine cathedrals in the city. So he went off to see Notre Dame, Sacre-Coeur, Madeleine and Sainte Chappelle. Mrs. Albertson planned how she could get her husband to leave Paris without her.

Mrs. Albertson’s frail condition, she decided, would not allow her to travel. She would stay in Paris and take some classes at the Sorbonne while Mr. Albertson went to look at all the old cathedrals. There was no sense having his vacation ruined because of her illness.

Mr. Albertson set out for the cathedral cities of Europe. Mrs Albertson set out to have a good time in the most romantic city in the world.

Mr. Albertson returned unexpectedly late one Sunday evening a month and a half later. He walked into his wife’s hotel just off Boulevard St. Germain with the intent of surprising her. He did. He also surprised the young man with whom she had retired for the night. Mr. Albertson had not heard the classic definition of savoir faire but he beat a hasty and confused retreat.

Mr. Albertson walked down to the Seine and jumped in.

The splash awakened one of the gentlemen who had just settled down for the night under a nearby bridge. The gentleman hastily put his shoes back on and grabbed up a gaff-pole which he used for purposes of snagging floating refuse and snagged Mr. Albertson’s coat before he could float away. Mr. Albertson was in no shape to argue so the gentleman relieved him of his watch, rings, and money and left him lying there on the concrete embankment.

The gendarmes found Mr. Albertson in the morning, still alive but suffering from exposure. They put him in a good hospital under
the direction of Mrs. Albertson. Everyone agreed that it was a terrible thing how American tourists were treated in Paris. Just think of it. One couldn't even walk out at night without being set upon by a bunch of footpads. Shocking.

Mr. Albertson regained his health quite rapidly. Mrs. Albertson related how she had also been attacked—by a fellow student with whom she had mistakenly been friendly. It saddened Mr. Albertson to know he had been so much in error. He apologized for all the trouble he had made. Mrs. Albertson cried a little and said she was so sorry.

Mrs. Albertson thought it best for Mr. Albertson’s health to have him stay in his cabin as much as possible on the return voyage. Mr. Albertson agreed. Mr. Albertson told everyone how sensible his wife was.

Delivery...

Stretched mercilessly
In Time’s antiseptic operating room
Between the sterile halls of Eternity
I lay in screaming labor
On my pain wracked bed of desire
And brought forth
From the throbbed womb of my heart
Hope, stillborn.

... Gloria Brocato