

Lydia Davis

The Coachman and the Worm

story from Flaubert

A former servant of ours, a pathetic fellow, is now the driver of a hackney cab—you'll probably remember how he married the daughter of that porter who was awarded a prestigious prize at the same time that his wife was being sentenced to penal servitude for theft, whereas he, the porter, was actually the thief. In any case, this unfortunate man, Tolet, our former servant, has, or thinks he has, a tapeworm inside him. He talks about it as though it were a living person who communicates with him and tells him what it wants, and when Tolet is talking to you, the word "he" always refers to this creature inside him. Sometimes Tolet has a sudden urge and attributes it to the tapeworm: "*He* wants it," he says—and right away Tolet obeys. Lately *he* wanted to eat some fresh white rolls; another time *he* had to have some white wine, but the next day *he* was outraged because he wasn't given red.

The poor man has by now lowered himself, in his own eyes, to the same level as the tapeworm; they are equals waging a fierce battle for dominance. He said to my sister-in-law recently, "That creature has it in for me; it's a battle of wills, you see; he's forcing me to do what he likes. But I'll have my revenge. Only one of us will be left alive." Well, the man is the one who will be left alive, or, rather, not for long, because, *in order to kill the worm and be rid of it*, he recently swallowed a

bottle of vitriol and is at this very moment dying. I wonder if you can see the true depths of this story.

What a strange thing it is—the human brain!

My
Story
- Meg U.