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June 24, 1987 marked the sixty-fifth anniversary of Kay's marriage to Richard Brault. He was a young French army officer whom she had met when they were both students at the Mechanics Institute in Cincinnati. She was smitten by him, so she recalled. Perhaps it was because of his "sharp uniform" she confessed.

"We were married on a Saturday afternoon in Manhattan. Oh god, I remember how terribly hot it was that day. Poor Richard, he was dripping with sweat! He was so nervous. Mother was there, and, let's see, oh Jo of course."

Jo was Mom's older sister, her only sibling. Her name was Joan but we always knew her as Jo.

Mom was cheerful that sunny Oakland morning, sitting at her kitchen table telling us, my good friend George and me, about that day when she became Madame Brault.

Then, she noticed a small tear on the back of George's sweater and insisted that he leave it with her, that she would mend it, and so he did.

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She continued about Richard and that hot June day, how youthful they were, bursting with excitement, and both so full of hope. Their plan was to remain in New York for a year or so, and put aside enough money for a voyage to France. They would go directly to the outskirts of Le Harve where Richard's family lived.

"It was going to be a vacation of sorts, our official honeymoon," she exclaimed with a chuckle, "and a time to visit, stay a month or so, maybe more. We both wanted to visit Paris too if there was time, and then return to New York!"

The following summer of 1923, they left New York aboard the SS Suffren, sailed past the iconic Statue of Liberty and cross the vast Atlantic bound for northern France.

Upon their arrival on the coast of Brittany, they were soon living in the Brault's rather provincial and very orthodox Catholic household.

"I hardly spoke any French at all, and I constantly sensed that during the entire time we were living there that Richard's

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mother scrutinized my every move, silently judging me constantly in what seemed like a disapproving manner which, of course, made me feel even more insecure than I already was," Mom recalled. She paused and smiled, thinking of that time so very long ago, and now, in her eighties, finding herself living in an airy Victorian in Oakland, California, a virtual lifetime away from those memories. And, she added with a smile, that she was now no longer the timid and uncertain woman she was then.

Richard's older sister, Charlotte, and Kay had developed a close friendship over the ensuing weeks.

Toward the end of August, knowing how much Mom and Richard wanted to visit Paris, she gave them enough funds to make the trip by train possible, and be able to stay there for perhaps a month or so.

They left for Paris in early September, and were there for barely a month when Richard was offered a full-time job back in Brittany, working as an electrical engineer. Soon, they returned to the sparse and

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confining existence in this port town, Le Havre, so vastly unlike the vibrant, metropolitan atmosphere that Paris had to offer.

Back now in Brittany, they found themselves living in a cold, shabby two-room flat in a damp and depressing coastal community with no running water, dirty windows, and a toilet out in the courtyard.

On the weekends, when Richard had the two days off from his new position, they would travel by train to visit Richard's brother Pierre, a physician in the nearby town of Rennes.

Pierre was extremely fastidious, Mom recounted, about everything. The house he shared with his wife was always impeccably neat and rather "bourgeoisie". At breakfast, he insisted on timing his two soft-boiled eggs with his elegant wristwatch for exactly three and a half minutes from the second he immersed them into the pot of boiling water. She glanced at her wrist, focusing on her silver bracelet as though she too was boiling these eggs as she related this story to us. If Pierre was momentarily

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distracted by a slice of baguette in danger of burning in the toaster, and subsequently his eggs boiled past the crucial allotted time, he became furious, scooped them from the scalding water and disdainfully tossed them into the garbage and then proceeded to start all over again!

Mom laughed softly, recalling this anecdote in Pierre's kitchen as though this had just occurred yesterday.

She told us how difficult those early years were, married to a young Frenchman who was gone from early morning to evening, when it was already dark outside, living in this foreign environment, teaching herself to speak and write in French while coping with their poverty-stricken and squalid life.

She spoke about her sister-in-law Charlotte, these two young women bonding so closely together in a male-dominated family.

"Charlotte was the richer side of Richard's nature, for she was always full of undimmed radiance, tenderness, and generosity," Mom said. Charlotte bore six children and was now carrying her seventh at the age of thirty-eight. But this

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child died in her womb during her seventh month of pregnancy, and lacking even the most minimal medical support that she so desperately needed, she died a short time later, hemorrhaging after losing her child which led to her untimely death.

That very evening that she had died, a fierce Atlantic winter storm, packing gale-force winds and drenching rain brought down a majestic acacia tree that had stood nearby her home, a tree that Charlotte so loved, its graceful branches just outside her bedroom window lending shade during the hot summer months. It had withstood many harsh Normandy winters, ever resiliant, a silent sentinel that now had fallen to earth in a tangle of shattered and split limbs, as though this great magnificent tree could no longer exist without Charlotte nearby.

Mom grew very subdued and reflective as she recounted this memory. She added how Charlotte, always the warm and supportive woman, had hoped that Mom and Richard could somehow be able to find their future in Paris and thrive there. But it was not

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to be within the frame of Charlotte's brief life.

"I'm Paris, when Richard and I were there during those early weeks of September, I wanted so very much to know what was taking place inside of me, so that I could put who and what I was, to some kind of purpose and use," Mom said softly.

It was in Le Harve during that bitter, long winter that Mom began to write her novel, "Plagued by the Nightingale." Charlotte was to live on as one of the key figures on the pages of this story, set in the darkness of Brittany.

We sat in silence, Mom, George, and I. We three, in our own private worlds — there in her kitchen, envisioning those faraway places and faces of that Lost Generation, feeling those fragments of her past in our minds. George and I relying on our projected imaginations, our imageries, and Mom and her lasting recollections from another time so long ago.