



A CRUEL CALM

By Patricia Daly Lipe



WINNER OF FLORIDA PEN WOMEN
Adult Fiction Letters

CHAPTER ONE

There is nothing stable in the world; uproar's your only music.

John Keats

Paris, 1928

"The War confirmed that the Western world is culturally bankrupt," claimed the gentleman sitting at the far end of the long rectangular table the restaurant had set up in the back of the dining area. "Certainly, Western civilization as we knew it before 1914 is lost forever."

The room was warm and stuffy. Smoke was puffed into the air from cigarettes by both men and women. I was certainly not one to take on this habit even though many physicians argue for the cigarette's pathophysiological innocence and psychological benefit. Nevertheless, despite the cigarette's supposed attributes, the mood was grim.

"Was it the War that destroyed the romance we knew before or was all that an illusion?" I had to lean across the table to see who was speaking. It came from a lady with the look of stoic dignity. "Did that catastrophe then destroy illusion and put truth back in its place?" Silence prevailed as everyone around the table seemed to be contemplating her somewhat caustic comment. After taking a sip of wine, she continued. "Yes indeed, which was truth and which illusion?" The lady's name was Virginia Woolf, an elegant woman in her mid-forties, her voice very clipped and so refinedly British, it was a bit difficult to understand. Again, her question appeared to be rhetorical since she continued, this time without a pause. "For my belief is that if we live another century or so; if we have the habit of freedom and the courage to write exactly what we think, then perhaps our relation, not to each other, but to the world of reality will . . ."

A dark haired, fair skinned lady with piercing blue eyes on her right finished the sentence with embellishment, "allow us to grow and know the truth." Clearly, this was not a timid group. The evening meal had been taken away and only liquid refreshments remained on the table. This was the time for talk.

The theme for this evening's discussion was the aftermath of the Great War. I was honored to be included in such a prestigious group of writers despite being not only too young to have shared their experiences, but having been, until recently, living on the other side of the Atlantic where vestiges of war were unknown. However, I did have one relative who had crossed the ocean and had courageously participated. Before we left Washington for France, my mother gave me a copy of a letter my Uncle William had written from the trenches. I had placed the envelope

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with the missive in my pocket before leaving our apartment in anticipation of possibly sharing it with this eminent group. Soft sounds of sotto voce chattering surrounded the table until another lady clicked her glass so the rest of us would listen. During the war she had driven an ambulance. "I saw it on their faces," she said somberly, "the wounded and the dying. They had sacrificed their lives for an ideal." Heads nodded. "And why? Did they hate the Germans that much? No. For the French, it was '*La Gloire*' that was France. For the Americans, it was 'for democracy'. And for me nursing and driving the wounded was 'the right thing to do'. But that was in the beginning. Soon, it became my life. For years I knew little sleep, few baths, constant exhaustion, bombs, gas, filth, dirt and blood. I stopped questioning. I think that my emotions overtook my intellect. Maybe I became less civilized but maybe, just maybe, I am more civilized now." I discovered later that she was an American who had spent most of her adult life in France. No wonder she had such an objective perception of the war.

Sitting adjacent to the American was a middle aged lady dressed in black. Wishing to add her point of view, she said, "When you have been through a war like the last one, you come to believe in the supernatural. I saw boys lying on their stretchers just before they died. I listened as they talked to their sweethearts back home. It was just as if they could see them standing next to their cots. Yes, anything is possible when you have experienced that war."

Timidly, I took out the document my mother had given me. It seemed appropriate to the present atmosphere. I asked if I might read what my uncle had written. Miss Woolf nodded her head.

"Thank you. My mother told me that my Uncle William, her brother, was under gun fire almost constantly as he administered to the sick and dying on the American and French fronts during the Great War. He is a priest. Mother gave me a copy of a letter he sent home. It is dated April 29, 1918. Uncle William was with the American troops under Foch."

I paused, taking a deep breath. The room was silent, faces around the table staring at me blindly, their expressions belying inner thoughts. Unfolding the paper, I cleared my throat and gathering courage, began to read. "It seems as if hell itself were let loose; the roar of the battle is so terrific. I am scrawling this in a cave right near our front lines.

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Several officers share it with me and we sleep on straw and live the lives of moles . . . Never in all my life have I seen such days of horror. We are constantly under shell fire day and night . . . The strain is something terrible. At midnight the food wagons come by and we get a hot stew and coffee as most of the men's work is done by night and we sleep during the day when we can. Then at dusk I crawl out and bury the dead in a deserted garden by a ruined house. There are no coffins even, but just a big trench and there the poor mangled bodies of our men are laid, and I hurriedly read the funeral service over them and sprinkle them with Holy water. I seem to be sort of numb with horror and the tragedy of it, but manage to get through it somehow. The battle is raging all about of us and it sounds like the crack of doom. God knows what the outcome will be. Our men are splendid, courageous and enduring and are putting up a splendid fight and I am glad to have a chance to be with them and help them . . . The ruin and desolation all about are beyond words as a perfect hail storm of shells is falling. The tragic prevails, of course, as they bring the dead and wounded by stretchers . . . I was also quartered in the same town on the second line, where Lt. Col. Griffiths was killed, and whom I buried."

For several minutes, no one spoke. Carefully, I folded the document and returned it to my pocket.

Finally, Sylvia Beach, whom I had not noticed before, broke the silence. First thanking me, Miss Beach proceeded to tell how she had delivered pajamas to Serbian troops traveling between Paris and Belgrade. "I too observed the death and dying your uncle described." In Paris, she witnessed the death of ninety-one worshipers when the Church of Saint-Gervais received a direct hit from *Grosse Berthe*. Everyone present knew about Big Bertha, the largest gun ever made. It was named after the daughter of Krupps of the German armament manufacturing family. Again there was silence. Some took sips of wine. Some took a drag on their cigarette while others took to methodically stirring their coffee, as if the solution could be found in a cup.

A young student-writer at the other end of the table finally broke the silence with a brash statement: "The WORD. We need to concentrate on the word," he cried out. I heard a giggle and rejoiced in the change in atmosphere. "We writers have an obligation to humanity," he continued. "This obligation can be defined by the written word." Smiles returned to the somber faces. "After all," he upheld, basking in his new celebrity, "doesn't language define human experience? Think about it. Its power to shape and remake the world could be said to invoke even the power of God." Looking around for approval and receiving enough for confidence, he finished with a flourish. Raising his wine glass, he announced, "I am speaking about the written word. Use it, engage in it and let it take over."

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“Hear, hear!” they teased the young enthusiast, but toasted him nevertheless.

A gentleman named William Carlos Williams had just joined the group. His mood was not so gay. Somberly, using the literary reference, he brought the gathering back to the prior discussion. “It is difficult to get the news from poems. Yet men die miserably every day for lack of what is found there.”

An older poet, his solemn yet earnest voice rising two octaves as he spoke, his words coming slowly but distinctly, declared, “We cannot allow another desecration to take place. Do you all realize that nearly nine million soldiers were killed between 1914 and 1918? That’s an average of 5,600 each day. I feel the Germans are plotting. Yes, plotting, despite the fact that they were required to surrender their military fleet. I know the Treaty of Versailles forbade them from manufacturing military aircraft or tanks. But we would be naïve to think that there will be no more battles, no more wars. Look at old Field Marshal von Hindenburg; he won’t last another two years. The German Republic will fall and, God forbid, I feel something tyrannical will take its place.”

“Old man, you are wrong,” gasped another octogenarian. “We have seen the war to end all wars. It will never happen again. I too remember this war vividly. I was there. I saw trees as round as a man’s thigh literally cut down by the stream of lead.”

“He is describing the effects of a machine gun,” a British lady seated to my right explained. “The machine gun could fire five hundred bullets a minute.”

“We must work hard, write, let the Word take over,” piped in the same enthusiastic young writer at the other end.

“Enough! Words are like sweets. Too many of them make you sick.” This came from Cecil Lewis who, I was told, had been a pilot in the war. Too bad Michael hadn’t stayed.

“Right. We can’t go back to pre-1914, but we can learn our lesson and move on. Have faith in mankind, my friend. Remember, man is blessed with a soul. He is capable of compassion, of sacrifice, and of endurance. And it is the writer’s duty, nay his obligation in these times, to write about this war and its horror, but it is also his duty to write about the courage and the honor of the men who fought. It is the writer’s privilege to help his fellow man endure by not only recording events of the past but by providing a pillar of words to help him endure and prevail over whatever odds befall his and our future.”

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I could not help but clap at this enthusiastic and positive presentation. And several at the table did also. However, several beside Mr. Lewis disagreed. Nevertheless, one thing was clear, at least to me. This discussion was beneficial both to understand the past and to learn about options for the future.

Most members of the group were English speaking; only one appeared to be French. I wondered what he was thinking. Turning back to my British neighbor, I whispered, "After all, their land has been desecrated, their young men slaughtered, their homes, farms and countryside reduced to rubble. I wonder how they," as I nodded toward the Frenchman, "feel listening to us, Brits and Americans?"

"Young lady," said a middle-aged British gentleman sitting directly across from me, "you may not know it, but it is a matter of record that in 1917 there was a mutiny among French and British soldiers. They had walked out of the battle. The Germans, however, did nothing. Perhaps they too were worn out."

"I remember the end of the summer in 1914 when the Germans were coming down to take Paris," interjected the other octogenarian. "It was the Battle of the Marne. A horrible day for both sides and that included the British forces who were helping the French. Thousands were killed. The French and British army came close to defeat and was only saved by the use of Paris taxis who rushed 6,000 reserve troops to the front lines. The German commander, General Helmuth von Moltke, proved to be indecisive during the invasion and his failure to give clear orders resulted in field commanders ordering a retreat. What is truly frightening, my young American friend, is what the general said about war."

The atmosphere was almost palatable. It was as if I were living in the midst of the battle itself. These gentlemen had experienced such horrors in their lifetime.

Without waiting for a request, the old man explained that the German General had said that in his opinion, "perpetual peace was a dream."

"A dream?" We couldn't believe such a statement.

"A dream indeed and not a beautiful dream either. He said that war was 'an integral part of God's ordering of the universe'."

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Now we were truly shocked.

“Yes, the General believed the courage and fidelity to duty and a readiness to sacrifice troops exhibited in war are the noblest virtues man can have. Therefore, for him, war was indispensable. Without war, the world would become ‘swamped in materialism’. I am quoting what he said.”

I was receiving more education than any school or university could have taught me. How privileged we had been in the United States.

The sole Frenchman overheard what we were discussing and switched seats to come next to me to explain the facts. “Libby, if I may call you by your first name (I nodded), what I overheard you discussing earlier was a conspiracy. It was Caillaux, the banker and our ex-premier, who plotted with the Germans and caused the mutinies in the French army. What you were talking about, I think, was the breakdown of one of our offenses against German trenches north of the Aisne River. You see, Caillaux had instigated a movement called ‘defeatism’ and it worked, especially in Russia, because after years of fighting, the morale was very low. We desperately needed the American soldiers and are forever grateful for their help.”

I was humbled and grateful that my nation had come to the assistance of the French. I had not known the war nor did I have friends killed or maimed.

“Almost nine million men lost their lives and almost twenty million were wounded, Libby. Don’t forget that the soldiers killed were mostly young and able, the strongest, most spirited, and most promising members of the human family.”

“Yes, and don’t forget the millions of private citizens who perished from starvation and violence,” added Sylvia Beach who had moved over to our side of the table.

“Libby,” the Frenchman continued, “you must go to the *Arc de Triomphe* and pay your respects to the burial spot of the Unknown Soldier. He was buried there in 1919 to symbolize all the Frenchmen who lost their lives in assuring their country military triumph in the Great War.”

I wished my husband had stayed to hear these facts about the war. But Michael had left. An aviator not a writer, at least he could have discussed the aspect of the fast development of aviation which resulted from the war with the pilot Cecil Lewis. A kindred spirit, I gathered, since both men chose to live dangerously. “Safety last,” Mr. Lewis had said.

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Glancing to the other side of the café, I searched for the table where Philippe and his mother had been eating when we first arrived. It was empty.

“War or fighting is like a dance because it is all going forward and back, and that forward and back movement, that is the reason that revolutions and Utopias are discouraging. They are up and down and not forward and back.” That came from Gertrude Stein who was at the far end. I was surprised how quiet she had been up until then. Miss Stein was not a lady known to be silent. I listened as she recounted a time toward the end of the war when she and Alice were in Nimes helping to care for both French and American soldiers. “The Armistice had just been declared and I remember a remark a wounded French soldier made when I told him, ‘Well here is peace.’ The soldier replied, ‘At least for twenty years.’ War is a dance going forward and back.”

“What do you think, Libby?” asked Francis, a young man whom I had met at Natalie Barney’s soiree. He and I were the youngest members of this exclusive circle.

“Excuse me? I mean, what are you asking?” I was still thinking about ‘the dance’.

“Do you think our generation is culturally deprived? Just because we didn’t go through the war, does that mean we can’t sympathize?”

I considered the question in light of the horrific realities we had heard about earlier. “Francis, you use the word ‘deprived’ but I may have a different understanding. My father has a fine library. Some of his books are in Greek; some Latin. I never learned Greek. The only Latin I know I learned in Catechism classes. Perhaps I wasn’t exposed to the classics because I am a woman. But maybe if I had an opportunity to read the great thinkers of the past, I would be better equipped to put in perspective some of the life changing events these people have been discussing.” I looked over at Miss Stein and wondered if she had studied the classics. She was always wearing loose clothes reminiscent of Greek tunics and had sandals on her feet like the philosopher Socrates probably wore.

While Francis, the Frenchman and I were talking, several serious female writers at the table were moving onto a different topic. We stopped speaking to listen.

“The artist,” Miss Stein was saying, “is not someone apart from the rest of the world.” She was describing the artist as being more sensitive, more receptive to the wave of the future, someone who would ultimately “inundate” the rest of the public. “No one is ahead of his time; it is only that the particular variety of creating his time is the one that his contemporaries who also are creating their own time refuse to accept. And they refuse to accept it for a very good reason and that is that they do not have to accept it for any reason.”

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I shook my head. This was impossible for me to understand. And, I wondered and vocalized, as an American citizen, why did Miss Stein choose to live and write in France? Another gentleman sitting next to me seemed receptive to my question. He was the publisher of a literary magazine called *transition* and, I discovered, he too was born an American but had chosen to live in France. His name was Eugene Jolas.

“I asked Miss Stein the same question,” he said, “and this was her reply. Using her typically paradoxical choice of words, she told me that, in her opinion, the United States is ‘just now the oldest country in the world.’ I didn’t understand until she continued, saying that ‘there is always an oldest country and she is it; it is she who is the mother of the twentieth century civilization.’”

I looked at Mr. Jolas with question marks in my eyes which he clearly recognized. We both chuckled. Then he continued saying that Miss Stein considered the United States ‘a country the right age to have been born in and the wrong age to live in.’ You understand now, don’t you?” We shared another laugh. “Yes, her words are poetic and thus more suggestive than a simple means of communication. I admit I find her a bit difficult to get along with as a person, but I do recognize her words as being superior. And I agree that in this modern age with all its inventions, the life of the individual is being de-spiritualized. Against this, shall we call it the ‘mechanization of the human spirit,’—especially in our home country—I posit the catalytic powers of poetry and art.”

I still believed in my country, but I too was more comfortable in this artistic climate. Meanwhile, the chatter continued at the other end of the table.

“That brings us to another point, doesn’t it?” piped in an energetic feminine writer.

“That’s Djuna Barnes,” whispered the Frenchman as he stood up ready to leave at any moment. Clearly, this was not a discussion he wanted to follow. The debate that ensued related to women’s rights, equality on many issues and woman’s uniqueness.

“Just now is such an exciting time for women. We are finally being enfranchised. But among the younger people, there is complacency.”

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“The battle has been won,” a younger woman reasoned, “so why is there a need for public action?” The older lady seated next to the speaker wrung her hands.

“Literary effort is the same as love. It is inseparable from the occasion that provides its impetus,” Djuna Barnes continued, ignoring the young authoress. “Listen to my friend Natalie Barney. She says you can’t separate art from life. Now, can you? What’s more, I believe that art belongs to women.” Miss Barnes was not about to give in. To me, her extreme feminism was annoying.

“You know what they say about the English language? While it has profundity; it lacks any sense of depth. *La langue française se parle, l’italienne se chante, et l’anglais se crache.*” This was the Frenchman’s attempt to alleviate the tension and turn the conversation around. Although a few laughed, the serious feminist debate continued. He shrugged his shoulders and, as he was about to leave, murmured, “*La Belle Époque est définitivement terminée.*”

It was getting late and I was getting tired. Besides, I was starting to feel guilty about being out so long while Michael was at home alone. It was time to leave. I was also too exhausted to follow the logic of the discussion any longer. I had not slept well in the past few days. Excusing myself, I found my hosts, Miss Stein and Miss Woolf and thanked them for including me. Graciously, they asked if I needed an escort. Assuring them that we lived very close by and I would be quite safe. Actually, I was glad to have the short stroll home to be by myself.

It was a cool spring evening. The air was fresh and I could smell the blossoms, the dampness of the dewy grass, and feel the dry bark scaling off the trees though I could barely distinguish their forms in the pale street lamplight. Crickets chirped defying the silence of the night; the sound was comforting and familiar. The Seine continued her voyage downstream, her small rivulets lapping at the stone embellishments which held the *Île St. Louis* together. This island in the Seine, a jewel in the heart of Paris, was now my home. Although we had been here only two months, Washington seemed like a lifetime away and I was not unhappy about that. I loved the island and I loved Paris, but tonight I was tired and a bit confused.

When we arrived at the restaurant, Philippe and his mother were having a quiet dinner at a table near the window. I was sorry not to be able to spend time with them, but we had been invited to participate in a writers’ dinner party and regretfully had to pay swift compliments and move on to the group in the back room. Something about the two of them, however, seemed so familiar, so comfortable. Now as I walked home, it was not the fascinating conversations of the writers’ table that filled my mind; it was the consideration of a feeling I had, a feeling toward Philippe. This was a new emotion and I was not at all sure it was appropriate.

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With these thoughts and feelings running rampant in my mind, I reached the *portière* of our building. Madame Metz, our dear, most observant *concierge* was leaning against the great door. “*Bonsoir, Madame Whitacker.*”

“*Bonsoir, Madame Metz.*”

“*Madame, votre mari est déjà chez vous.* Your husband is already home.”

This seemed like a perfect opening on her part for me to give an explanation of my coming home alone. To satisfy her insatiable appetite for news which could be too easily translated into gossip, I explained that we, my husband and I, had been with friends at *Le Rendezvous des Mariniers*, a hotel-restaurant further up on the *Quai d’Anjou*, not far from our apartment. However, Michael had been bored by the conversations. He understood aeroplanes, not books, and had only escorted me to the dinner because he had been invited for my sake. I understood his leaving early and was perfectly comfortable walking home unattended, though probably not the most appropriate thing to do.

“*Oui, Madame, je sais, I know,*” our caretaker replied before I had completed my account. She attempted a smile but was somewhat despondent.

Despite her demeanor, I smiled back ready to pass through the entry and up the stairs. But it was the way Madame Metz shrugged her shoulders and looked at me with probing eyes that made me hesitate. Just before closing the doors, she whispered, “*Mais il n’est pas seul.* But he is not alone.” Then, having delivered the message she originally intended, *la concierge* caused the heavy wooden *porte cochère* to bang shut, dropped the wrought iron latch into place, and disappeared into her dark apartment on the ground floor.

I let her words pass over me as I ascended the stairs to our apartment on the second floor. Aware of the late hour, I quietly turned the key, gently pushed open the door and entered.

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It was silent and dark inside with only flickering strands of light coming from candles in the hallway. I removed my coat and as my eyes adjusted to the dimness, tiptoed from the foyer to peek into the salon. The room was dark except for a glow from the fireplace. My eyes followed the sound of the crackling flames and I saw him. My husband was standing in front of the fire, his back to me, his body silhouetted against the orange blaze. Silent and still, not sure of what I was truly seeing, perhaps not wanting to give in to the sight, I gave my eyes more time to focus. Michael was naked. His tight buttocks and his tall slim torso teased my sensibilities. Although he was my husband, I had never seen his body like this before. How handsome. Would he take me now? I had waited so long. I was ready. I had completely forgotten *Madame la concierge's* message.

Then, about to move closer, I saw it. Michael was not alone. It had been difficult to adapt to the dark in front of the firelight, but slowly I became aware. There was a hand around Michael's thigh. Long, thick fingers were stroking Michael's skin. A man's hand. *He's with a man! A man is on his knees in front of Michael. Oh, how could this be? Michael, you're a degenerate, you're . . .* But none of these words reached my mouth. Stunned, I fell back against the wall and slowly slid to the floor. With my arms pressed across my chest, my head dropped and my body shook uncontrollably. When I finally looked up, Michael was standing over me. This time he had trousers on.

"Stay away from me." Tears streamed down my cheeks. Michael leaned over to help me up. He was murmuring something I could not understand. This was like a dream . . . a nightmare. "Leave me alone; don't touch me!" Warily, I sat on my haunches, braced myself against the wall and slowly drew myself up. "I must leave," I whispered clinging to the stair rail for support.

"No, no," pleaded Michael, "I, please, I, I can explain" as he came toward me.

"No, don't. Don't!" I put my hand out to keep him away. Michael stepped back, his face betraying his anxiety and, I hoped, guilt. Blindly, I made my way to the kitchen. The telephone was hanging on the wall next to the sink. In the dark, I groped for the receiver. When the operator came on the line, I gave Pamela's number.

"Pleeease," he begged, standing at the doorway.

"Pamela. This is Libby."

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“Hello, Libby dear. I assume you are calling about the writers’ party. Did you enjoy yourself, dear?”

“I, Pamela, I can, can’t talk about that right, right now.” I was having trouble getting the words out.

“Libby, are you all right?”

“I, I, I need to see you, Pamela,” I said, tears now gushing uncontrollably. “May I come to your home? Please excuse . . . I mean I need, I need to stay for the night.” I realized that this was bold, but what could I do? I had to get out of the apartment. I could barely breathe; trying to choke down the sobs at least long enough to speak with my friend, my new friend, the only person I could turn to at this moment.

“Of course,” replied Pamela. “I will send Frederick over right away. Libby, what is wrong? Are you . . .”

“Yes, no, I mean, oh I don’t know what I mean.” At that point, I was shaking so badly that I could hardly hold the phone. All I knew was that I had to get away from Michael quickly.

“Can you be ready in half an hour?”

“Oh, yes, yes, thank you,” I gasped replacing the receiver. Michael was watching me from the doorway.

“How could you? You brute. I hate you,” I said, shocking myself. I had never used those words before. He made a step forward. “Stay away from me.” I swung out as if trying to slap him, but he was quick to duck. Then fearing he might retaliate and strike me back, I ran blindly down the hall to my bedroom and locked the door. Turning around, I faced the room. This was a room we had shared. Heaving with silent screams, I fell on my bed and sobbed.

By the time Frederick arrived, I had packed a small suitcase. Without speaking to Michael, I left. In the salon it was dark except for the remaining embers which glowed softly in the hearth.

CHAPTER TWO

"Though we travel the world over to find the beautiful, we must carry it with us or we find it not."

Ralph Waldo Emerson

It was a social whirlwind that blew me into my new life. The winter season was my time to be *presented* to Washington society. The year was 1925.

I not only survived the debutante parties in Washington, but flourished in the fun of being on my own, away from family supervision. Furthermore, even my old governess Mademoiselle who still supervised my activities, encouraged me to do so. The dinners were a bit tedious, but afterwards we had dances and I loved the music. *Every mornin', every evenin' ain't we got fun? Not much money, oh but honey' ain't we got fun? There's nothing surer; the rich get rich and the poor get poorer.*

This was considered the credo of the roaring 20s and we were on the right side of society, flaunting our wealth and not in the least embarrassed about it. All the sadness I had seen in France just the summer before when I had accompanied my parents to Paris, seemed so far away and for a short time, I cleared my mind of those memories. I was having fun. *Yes, we have no bananas* made sense. We were literally *Puttin' on the Ritz*. The music transported me to another world.

Although I danced with several young men, I was often sitting alone. When a handsome fellow named Michael Whitacker saw me by myself, he would come over and ask to put his name on my card as if he had to fight for a place in line. When we danced, the music and the atmosphere carried me beyond fear and timidity as we glided across the floor keeping time to the rhythm. Unfortunately, usually toward the end of the evening, the orchestra began playing the fast new, hot jazz. I preferred sitting those out. Michael respected my point of view.

There is nothing graceful about that kind of music and to be honest, it offended me. I saw girls doing things I really did not think were decent, things like the *shimmy*. I saw how they allowed boys to hold them in a way that made me blush. Some even permitted the boys to kiss them in public. My parents called those girls *flappers*. In a way, I was almost jealous. They looked so happy. What I envied was their ability to be completely carefree, easygoing, almost indulgent in their immodesty. Definitely not brave enough to allow even the slightest impropriety, I would never have dared having a *sweetie* or even discussing such things with my girl friends.

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Although I had attended plays performed at the foot of the Washington Monument, I was never allowed to go to a nickelodeon. Shakespeare had taught me little about romance or flirtation, so I couldn't put a name to the feelings I had when a boy held me a little too tight. My body enjoyed what better judgment forbade. I was troubled by this conflict, emotions seizing what thoughts banned, and I had no one to talk to about it. Mademoiselle always supervised when my friends came over and I surely could not share these feelings with her.

Nevertheless, I survived the entire debutante season intact. I met the *proper* young people, precisely what my mother and father wanted for me and, in the end, they were rewarded with the result I believe they anticipated. Michael Whitacker, the most eligible bachelor of all the brilliant, slick-haired young men, proposed. My parents were thrilled. I was in shock.

Like my father, Michael had attended Georgetown University. Unlike my father, he never completed his studies. "Those Jesuits are tough, brilliant, good teachers, but strict," he said. Like many young men of unlimited means, he was filled with wanderlust and decided to leave the University and travel. He went backpacking in the mountains of Peru and rafting down the Amazon River in Brazil. He seemed to crave excitement and challenge, always looking for adventures demanding stamina, strength of character, and danger. Apparently, he believed overcoming fear was the key to being strong. His latest quest for adventure was learning to fly. "With an aeroplane," Michael propounded "I can combine all my passions." Passions? I would never have used that cherished word to describe a sport activity. "Besides," he continued, ignoring my look of astonishment, "didn't aeroplanes prove their worth during the Great War?" I admitted that I was not well informed about the 'war to end all wars' even though I had recently traveled to Europe with my parents. It just didn't seem like a good idea to recount my experience last summer so I simply said, "I have heard a few horror stories."

Last summer, my parents included me in their annual trip abroad. Mr. Myron T. Herrick was the United States Ambassador to France. Soon after our arrival, they were invited to an intimate cocktail reception at the Embassy. To my surprise, I was included. No wonder my mother had a new Chanel dress tailored for me the first week we were in Paris.

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When we were together, my mother and I spoke French, but not in front of Father who barely understood the language. At the embassy, I was delighted to be introduced as the young lady with a perfect accent and fluent in both languages. Mr. Herrick shook my hand and then decided to test me. I passed with flying colors and was presented to an attractive older French couple who graciously helped me understand the appreciation the French had for American soldiers. "They came and risked their lives to help us defeat the Germans." Acknowledging my age, they were careful not to be too graphic. I could sense, however, just looking at the furrows in their faces and the way they clenched their hands, they had been subjected to such nightmarish things as I could not begin to understand.

Meanwhile, Mr. Herrick was describing an event that had made a lasting impression on him. His audience was in rapt silence, so we walked over to listen.

"A great harvest moon was rising over the city near the Cathedral of Notre Dame. It seemed to rest on the corner of the front wall from which the French flag was hung. To the people watching, it seemed that the flag was blowing steadily across the face of the moon. In the fleeting moments while this spectacle lasted, the people knelt on the quay in prayer."

"An extremely powerful image," my father said. He paused, and then asked, "Why were the people praying?"

"I was wondering myself," the Ambassador replied. "There is an ancient prophecy that says the fate of France will finally be settled upon the fields where Attila's horde was halted and driven back and where many battles in defense of France have been won. It was explained to me that the people were pointing to the French flag outlined across the moon because it was *the sign in heaven*. It meant the victory of French arms. The prophecy of old, they believed, had come true and France would once again be saved on those chalky fields."

I could feel chills run down my spine and, looking at others in the room, I was not the only one to experience such a reaction. As Mr. Herrick walked away to welcome new guests, the gentle old Frenchman I had been conversing with whispered, "Who would live, my child, if the future were revealed to him? When a single anticipated misfortune would give us so much uneasiness? When the foreknowledge of one certain calamity would be enough to embitter every day that precedes it? I think," he continued wistfully, "it is better not to pry, even into the things which surround us. Heaven, which has given us the power to foresee our necessities, has also given us those very necessities to set limits to exercise that power." His words were confusing and it took me awhile after we returned home to understand, at least to some extent, just what he meant. But the way he spoke at that moment clearly belied pain and anguish.

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His wife put her arm around the dear man. A tear fell down her cheek. “Libby, my child, I don’t think you know. We lost our son in the war. He would have been your age when he died.”

These people had been through such misery. Listening to their stories brought to mind the images of war I had seen while walking the streets of Paris. Sights like the remnants of buildings, once private homes, now reduced to pieces and parts. Or the holes from bullets wedged into cement walls that lined the boulevards.

I began to recognize that my life in Washington was almost too perfect. We had never run from bombs flying through the air or listened to breaking glass as bullets riddled holes in windows just above our heads. No one in our family had been lost or injured in battle. Exposure to these calamities and their influence on people’s lives made me realize how much I needed to learn about life.

But all this was too much to share with Michael. While my thoughts had lingered on last year’s experiences, he was expounding upon the merits of air travel.

“Yes, perhaps the only good thing to come out of the war was aviation. Just think about it. Before the war, the highest speed achieved by an aeroplane was about 60 miles per hour.” *That seems pretty fast to me*, I thought. “But, amazingly, by the end of the war, planes could fly at speeds surpassing 130 miles per hour. And that’s only in the space of four years.” He was so engrossed in his subject, I don’t think he cared whether I was impressed or not. Despite my lackluster interest in his obsession, I loved watching him get excited, his hand squeezing mine tightly as he made a point.

“If there is a silver lining to the conflict, it will be found across the Atlantic in France,” he added with a flourish. But I didn’t understand and wasn’t afraid to admit it.

“France was devastated by the war, Libby. Her only chance of recovery from her economic slump, in my opinion, will come from building aeroplanes. Her government is becoming heavily involved with aviation and I have learned that they are giving financial priority to testing and developing aeroplanes.” Clearly fervent, Michael took hold of both my hands and, looking straight into my eyes, proclaimed, “Libby, that’s why I want to live in Paris.”

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At this, he let me go with one hand and swung me around with the other. The world traveler had decided to have his next adventure as well as make his fortune in France and I was dizzy. In fact, he could have said nothing more enticing to me even without the twirl. I envied Michael. The idea of living in Paris sounded wonderful to me. Wistfully, I thought how easy it would be to leave the restricted routine my parents imposed. The French lifestyle would suit me perfectly. Perhaps it was naïve, but that's what I thought.

Many nights after coming home from the dances, I'd curl up with Mr. Ted, my stuffed bear, and fantasize about being held in the embrace of a handsome young man, his arms around my waist and his mouth coming close to mine. Before the kiss, I would wake up embarrassed by my own thoughts.

Although the young man in my dream was too vague to identify, by the next evening or afternoon party, I would be excited to see Michael again. Sometimes instead of dancing, we held hands and I listened to him talk about flying. When he escorted me home after a party, he would kiss me on the forehead before letting me in the door. At that time in my life, being kissed on the forehead was romantic. But Michael never said he loved me. This should have been a clue.

I understood his love of aeroplanes and I understood his wanting to go to Paris, but when he told me he wanted to speak to my father about our future, I didn't understand.

"You want to marry me?" I asked incredulously. Although the parties lasted the entire winter, our time together had been relatively brief.

Despite what I was feeling or thinking, especially since I never dared to express any private thoughts to my parents, the proposal was accepted by my father. Immediately, my mother changed like a chameleon. The once strict, domineering and distanced mother, who gave me instructions but never hugs, chameleoned into a loving and caring parent, making me into her treasured pet. Caring or not, it was back to the Chanel standard.

Last summer, no sooner had we arrived in Paris than my mother arranged for a car and driver. While father took care of business concerns, mother and I were driven to *29 rue de Faubourg St. Honoré*, the salon of Gabrielle 'Coco' Chanel.

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“My dear child,” mother explained patiently, “Mademoiselle Chanel is all the rage among the Parisian *couturiers*.” I had never heard of her. When we entered the small dress shop, I was introduced to a petite lady in her mid-forties. She was not fair like us, but gallically dark with well defined features. I thought her face severe, but not mean. She was skinny and talked with a cigarette dangling from her lips. Her hands were forever busy adjusting, pulling and pinning material on customers as they stood patiently. It was clear that Mlle Chanel was a very serious woman when it came to her trade, but she could be droll and witty as well. After Mother told me about the dressmaker’s past, I realized why Mlle Chanel needed to be both sharp and amusing.

Gabrielle Chanel was born out of wedlock. At the age of twelve, she was placed in an orphanage and it was from the nuns that she learned how to sew.

“How did she come by the name ‘Coco’?” I asked taking tentative first steps toward developing a new rapport with my mother.

“Happy to oblige you with a bit of background,” she responded. “After leaving the orphanage, Coco received her nickname at a café when, as a young woman, she responded to a challenge. Standing up before all the customers, she sang about a girl who had lost her dog. The dog’s name was Coco.”

I laughed, my admiration mounting for the lady, amazed how definitive Mlle Coco could be about her opinions. While we watched, she never seemed to relax, continuously adjusting, fastening, sewing and clipping her client’s dress while at the same time pontificating.

“Fashion is not simply a matter of clothes,” she pronounced while pinning up a hemline. “Fashion is in the air, born upon the wind. One intuits it. It is in the sky and on the road.” Mother and I were spellbound. Going to her salon was equivalent to attending a literary soirée, a social event, and a dress performance all at the same time. I was overwhelmed and delighted. My mother, on the other hand, simply approved the work Coco designed. “Any lady who prides herself as being part of fashionable society is a regular patron of Chanel,” was my mother’s pronouncement.

“What counts,” said Mlle Chanel, referring to the material, the buttons, even the thread, “is that all the elements be beautiful.”

We returned many times, often for just a few minutes simply to have a fitting.

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Now here we were in Washington living the fashion statement all over again. This time, however, it was not a reception, but my wedding we were preparing for. I was to have the perfect wardrobe, the perfect hairstyle, the perfect manicure. I was driven to Elizabeth Arden's Beauty Salon, the Red Door on Connecticut Avenue, then off to dress salons, seamstresses and boutiques. I also had to attend the obligatory 'pre-Cana' conferences with Michael at the office of our parish priest, but I have no memory of what was said.

One afternoon, my father took me to the State Department where we went through the formalities of my obtaining a new passport. Libby is not my real name. When I filled out the form and wrote my baptismal name, Elisabeth, it seemed like an omen. My Christian name is spelled the French way with an 's'. If it was destiny that I should live in France, I had every reason to feel positive about what I was doing. But an inner voice kept chastising me. I couldn't understand and chose not to listen.

Meanwhile, family friends were giving parties in my honor. The parties were more for my parents than for me. Weeks went by. I was in a daze. When I went to bed at night, I cuddled with Mr. Ted. As a young child, Mademoiselle gave me hugs when I needed them, but it was her job. I desperately wanted the warmth of another human being who really cared about me. For the moment, I only had my teddy bear and the poor fellow was getting more than his share of kisses.

The big day finally arrived. The gown of white satin which my mother had chosen was quite long and slightly draped to one side with a square yoke of antique rose point lace reaching to the waistline. Along court train fell from my shoulders and a tulle veil, which was held close to my head in a cap of orange blossoms, fell over the train. The satin sleeves covered my arms tightly and stretched to a point at my index finger with tiny white pearl buttons running underside from my wrist up to my elbow.

When I was all laced, buttoned and tied up, my father came into the room. He took a good long look at me. Although he said nothing, he couldn't conceal a big grin. My aunt handed me a bouquet of white orchids and lilies of the valley to carry in one hand, while my father took my other hand and gave it a squeeze before placing my arm through his. Slowly, because the gown was not designed for easy maneuverability, he walked me down the stairs to the foyer. At the foot of the stairs, we paused and I had a chance to look at my reflection in the hall mirror. The gown was stunning. The bouquet was beautiful. I was the picture of what a bride should be except for my complexion. It was almost as white as my gown. Hopefully no one else would notice. If only the feeling matched the picture of beauty and composure. But what I was feeling inside did not match. This was a performance, a charade, like

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the ones I used to play with my little girlfriends. I glanced at my father. This man, whom I had put on a pedestal, was proud of me. I flushed with new-found confidence. It was just enough to keep me going.

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We turned to the right and slowly passed through the dark mahogany double doorway into the drawing room. Someone began playing Mendelssohn. Our baby grand mahogany piano had been moved to the back near the entrance to the dining room. While I was upstairs being dressed, the house had been decorated with spring flowers, yellow roses and purple orchids in the drawing room, with yellow forsythia and jonquils in the dining room. Chairs were set up in rows facing the window from the piano to the front. Now, as we walked slowly down the side aisle created beside the chairs, all I could see was a blur of faces, all staring at me. The music changed and with the invigorated tempo, we walked down a center aisle to the front window where there were huge garlands and vases laden with flowers.

I didn't notice Michael until my hand was placed in his. My friend, Mary Louise, whom I had chosen as my maid of honor, took the bouquet from my other hand. Until then, I had been completely unaware of her or the best man's presence. The perspiration was profusely working its way around my body as I grit my teeth and grimly subjected myself to the ritual.

We faced the priest. All I could see of him was a black silhouette against the brilliance of the afternoon sun which came flooding through the front windows behind the make shift altar. I don't remember any of the words, but I must have repeated the proper lines because all of a sudden, the priest said, "And now you may kiss the bride." My first kiss! Michael's touch was soft, tentative and quick. The piano began playing again. Michael was pulling me away from the priest and walking me through the assemblage of guests. From the corner of my eye, I could see people blowing kisses and hear them calling out congratulations. We walked down the aisle, past the double doors and into the dining room. The chairs had been removed, leaving only the dining table in the middle of the room. China plates and silver trays laden with finger food surrounded the centerpiece, a huge five layered white cake with a tiny bouquet of pink and blue flowers adorning the top.

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The guests came swarming around us and between nibbles of watercress sandwiches and sips of champagne, congratulated Michael. People I barely knew hugged me and wished me luck and happiness. I would need more than luck, but said nothing. Someone had placed a plate of food in my hand, but I could not eat one bite. My mother appeared at my side. She wore a gown of beige georgette crepe draped to one side and a large straw hat of a darker shade of brown. "It is time for you to cut the cake," she coaxed. At last, the final ritual. Michael's hand guided mine as we cut the first slice from our wedding cake. His hand was cold.

And then it was over. My friends escorted me back upstairs. It took two of them to get the wedding dress off. We were so worried about tearing the lovely lace. My traveling dress, again chosen by mother, was tan and brown crepe. To match, I put on a small brown hat, brown shoes and a black coat trimmed with brown caracul. As a final touch, the double strand of pearls my father had given me was placed around my neck. In the little dressing table mirror, I saw something sparkle and looked down. It was the sun refracting light off the ring so recently placed on my finger. Oh, how beautiful it was! I rubbed my other hand over the smooth surface of a blue sapphire and rough points of the baby miners' cut diamonds encircling it on the platinum band.

Each of my girlfriends insisted on holding my hand to stare at the ring. They could take my hand and admire the ring, but I wasn't about to take it off. The ring and the kiss, what was next? I couldn't help but shiver. The girls must have sensed my angst for soon they left me alone so I could compose myself. I needed to calm down. I also needed the time to say goodbye to my little room with all its mementos of childhood, including Mr. Ted. Wiping away a tear, I gave my bear a final hug, took a deep breath and descended to the foyer where Michael was waiting.

My parents and their guests waved and shouted as we walked down the front steps. Mademoiselle was there too, waving and crying before she turned and went back inside the house. Arm in arm, Michael and I walked down the first set of steps. I stopped for a moment at the landing, turned around and took one last look at the only real home I had ever known. I loved that house.

Michael pulled my arm. Slowly we descended the second set of steps, passed through the gate, crossed the sidewalk and were ushered into the limousine parked on Massachusetts Avenue. Hans opened the rear door for us. From the solemn look on his face, his eyes gazing solidly into mine, I think this man who had known me since I was a small child, was the only one who understood how I was feeling at that moment. Closing us inside, he skirted around the big car, entered his side in front and drove us to the station to catch the late afternoon train to New York

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Michael and I didn't say much to each other on the train. We exchanged trite comments like: "Did you enjoy the wedding?" *Wasn't this the biggest day in my life? Wasn't I supposed to feel elated?* Instead, my stomach was upside down. It sounds silly, but what I really wished I was doing was not sitting in this train with Michael, but rather lying in bed clutching Mr. Ted. I wasn't like the other girls, giggly and fawning over boys, and yet I was one of the first among my girlfriends to get married. "Yes," he had replied, "Very nice. Thank you." *Why is he thanking me? Aren't we supposed to get beyond this level of conversation? Why isn't there someone here to help me understand?* I was ready to cry, but smiled weakly instead. Michael did take my hand in his and, for a brief moment, held it tightly. I couldn't tell if he cared or if he needed reassurance. We were both ill at ease. I comforted myself with the thought that perhaps all newlyweds behaved this way in the beginning.

Once in New York, Michael made all the arrangements. We had to secure transportation to the ship. Although we weren't scheduled to sail until the next morning, all booked passengers were allowed to spend the first night on board the beautiful *SS Berengaria*. It seemed safer than going to a hotel and then having to get a cab to the ship in time for an early morning departure. Besides, I thought it would be romantic to spend our first night together listening to the quiet lap of the surf, looking at the stars and then settling down to the calm of our cabin with its porthole and view of the city lights.

Unfortunately, the luxury was wasted on both of us. That first night we drank quite a bit of wine. I don't remember what we said to each other or what we did, but I do remember we slept in separate bunks. The next morning, no sooner had we left the port of New York and watched the skyline fade from view than the sea became extremely rough. The ocean was covered with white caps as far as I could see and the swells mounted as we began our voyage across the Atlantic.

"It isn't dangerous, is it Michael?" I asked as we stood at the rail waving goodbye to America.

"Certainly not," he replied stoically. "Not if the Captain has chosen to continue."

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Rolling seas, small chops, rain, gloom . . . three hours of undulating and rough movement, and I was the first. Holding back as long as I could, I finally abandoned ladylike demeanor and vomited over the side of the ship. My relief was short lived.

“Who would separate waves from sea and say, ‘These are waves but this is the sea.’ Yet thoughts of waves forget thoughts of sea.”

Never before had I suffered like this. Perhaps it wasn’t only the movement of the ship that had made me so sick. My nerves were frayed. I had eaten little and had drunk more than ever before. At home, we only sipped a small glass of wine with dinner. But I wasn’t alone in my distress. As the voyage progressed, the situation on the ship worsened and many passengers came outside hoping the fresh sea air would relieve their nausea. Days later, the seas calmed, but by then Michael and I were in no mood to enjoy the voyage. The severe bouts of *mal de mer* left us physically drained.

There was really nothing the stewards could do to make our voyage enjoyable, although they tried by bringing us chamomile tea, dry bread, Dramamine pills, and encouragement. After a quick stop near the cliffs of Dover, we crossed the Channel and arrived at our destination, the French coast. With shaky legs, we disembarked.

From Le Havre, still queasy, we took a train to Paris.

Initially, we stayed with Michael’s mother whose apartment was in the fourth *arrondissement*. Often she spent the spring and summer months in Paris, leaving Michael’s father alone with his business in West Virginia. She had also opted to stay in Paris and had not attended our wedding. Opinionated and a social snob, always attempting to be better than she was, his mother was difficult and hard to please. Fortunately, it wasn’t long before we found a charming little apartment. Both of us were grateful that our stay was brief. Besides, with his mother sleeping in the next room, romance was still on hold. It remained that way even after we moved to the *Île St. Louis*. Now I knew why.

Innocence is not bliss. It is a driving force that can send some of us headlong into situations we don’t take time to consider.

CHAPTER THREE

Where there is marriage without love, there will be love without marriage. Benjamin Franklin

Paris, 1928

What I had just witnessed with Michael and another man was shocking. As I waited for Pamela's chauffeur, Frederick, to pick me up, my mind was a whirlwind of memories, concerns and apprehensions. *If I'd been truthful with myself, I knew something was strange about Michael from the beginning. But in the short time since our wedding in Washington, the trip across the Atlantic, and settling into our apartment, what I knew instinctively was blocked as my rational mind took over. Blocked that is, until I met Philippe.*

Images of my parents, of my Washington friends, and my new friends in Paris came to mind. I couldn't tell them. And what about Philippe? Did he know about Michael? Perhaps. If he did know, then that would explain why he seemed to be flirting with me. But what about his mother? What would she think, especially since she had just been introduced to us as a couple at the restaurant? Could she, with the discerning eye of a caring mother, see her son's interest in me? *Where is my mind going?* My focus went back to what I had just witnessed. *I saw those hands, those big, hairy hands.*

Frederick had come up to the apartment to fetch my bags. "We will be there straight away. Don't you worry about a thing, Mrs. Whitacker," he said as we approached the car. Opening the rear door of the limousine, he must have seen how distraught I looked. Gingerly, I stepped inside still shaking. Once settled in the plush back seat with the warm wool blanket Frederick had placed over my knees, I mustered a murmur of thanks. He smiled knowingly and was about to close the door when I asked, "Frederick, could you please do me a favor? Could you, would you, please call me Miss Libby, not Mrs. Whitacker?"

"Of course, madam; I mean, Miss Libby. I will do whatever you wish."

The drive to Pamela's across town passed in silence. I sat back in the comfortable leather seat thinking about the day I met Pamela. It was the very same day I was introduced to Philippe, the day my life would change forever.

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April, 1927

We had only been in Paris a short time when Michael and I were invited to a reception by Philippe de Beau, an amateur pilot Michael had met at Le Bourget Airstrip. The party was to honor and christen Count de Beau's new aeroplane. Unusual in itself, for us, it was even more unusual and exciting since this was the first party we had been invited to since arriving in Paris. For the drive to the aerodrome, Michael borrowed a 1925 Alpha Romeo called a Tipo-6C-1500. Bright red with two bucket seats, a windshield that turned down flat, and wire wheels, it was a snappy little sports car. I didn't ask where he found it or who was lending it to us.

"This car is the prototype of the famous Alpha Romeo P2 Grand Prix car," Michael explained. I had no idea what he was talking about, but it was great fun setting out to the country in such style. The seats were deep and covered with pillowy hair cushions, upholstered in long-grain leather. A walnut-paneled tonneau cowl was rolled up behind.

The cool, refreshing wind tried to tease the scarf from my neck, but my blond hair, now bobbed short in the modern style was secure under a yellow cloche crammed well over my forehead. This was secured with one of mother's precious jeweled hairpins. She had given it to me in a moment of rare affection. Michael was also fashionably attired with his foulard flapping in the breeze as we drove out of the city of Paris and into the country. City streets became poplar-lined lanes and the fumes of Paris were replaced by fragrances of early spring. Flowers were in full bloom and the green grasses were swaying in a light breeze. Shadows cast by stately old trees with alternating patterns of light, dark, light, dark were almost hypnotic. The wind created the only conversation as the comfy car rolled through the scenic countryside.

All too soon, we arrived at the big field that was Le Bourget Airstrip. Windsocks indicating the wind direction flew from each corner of the field. Michael explained that all planes land into the wind and the flag designation helped pilots determine their landing pattern. More fluttering flags representing different countries, Switzerland, Belgium, The Netherlands, Italy, Jugo-Slavia, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Spain and Portugal adorned the facades of various aeronautical clubs whose small lightweight aeroplanes lined up in rows at the other side of the field. Michael drove toward an area where a smartly dressed group had gathered. I could see heads turn as he pulled the dashing little Alpha next to a low slung Cadillac Phaeton. Unlike our little sports car, this automobile had a rumble seat in the rear, classic chrome bumpers, and twin mounted

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head lamps jutting out below the winged hood ornament. “Why would anyone want such a monster car?” I asked recognizing only size and opulence.

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“Some people prefer those heavy giants because of their powerful V8 engines,” he replied crisply.

“To me, they are simply big, noisy, and flashy.”

Michael maneuvered the little roadster carefully avoiding the protruding running boards of the *pleasure mobile*.

“Why are you parking here, Michael?”

“So I can keep this car blocked from the dust that is blowing across the field.” So the big Cadillac would serve another purpose, securing us from the dirt.

As I slid out of my seat, my high heels sank onto the soft soil. I realized how difficult it was going to be to walk. Perhaps I had not dressed appropriately after all. To make maneuvering even worse, the wind had picked up, determined to whisk off my hat. Michael was eager to go ahead and mingle and was less than gracious about having to wait for me to hobble across the dirt field.

Approaching the gathering, we were greeted with a loud din punctuated by an occasional high-pitched twitter. It sounded as if everyone was talking at once whether anyone else listened or not. Michael was visibly thrilled to be around people who loved the sport of flight, but I was excited just to be out and about socially. Apparently, the big news was that the Brevoort and Lafayette Hotel Group in New York was offering a \$25,000 prize for the first pilot to cross the Atlantic Ocean nonstop. The conversation was in French and I had no problem understanding what was being said. The hope, of course, was that a French pilot would win the coveted prize. There was some misgiving that an American group was coming up with the funds, but the French sought the prospect of enhancing their aeronautical industry. Winning would be most helpful.

Michael could not understand what was being said, nor was he tuned into the tension that existed between the French and Americans. I was torn, sympathizing with the French, recognizing their need for recognition after the horrors they had been subjected to during the war. However, I was an American. Besides, since I was invited to this gathering only because I was Michael’s wife, I decided to voice my opinion.