

## A Beautiful Mess: Paris, 1945

Marilyn Moriarty

**B**y the time he got to Paris in August, 1945, twenty-eight year old Major Veale F. Moriarty was ready to be in the City of Light. He had shipped to Britain in September, 1943, and crossed the Channel right after D-Day. Traveling with a British unit, he was a liaison officer. When the British liberated Brussels, Belgium, he was recognized as the first American to liberate Brussels, an irony he appreciated, especially as he was awarded the Croix de Guerre around that time. (A 1946 church bulletin links the medal and the liberation of Brussels.) A month after Brussels, he returned to his American unit and fought across France, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Germany. When he finally arrived in Paris, he had little time to see the monuments even though the war was over with Germany's surrender on May 8. No longer in a fighting army, his new job was to assist a major in the "special projects" branch, an assistant job that lasted only two days.

The American Army had taken over the largest Paris department store (a multistore), the Magasins Dufayel, which was composed of smaller ones. It opened in 1856 on the Boulevard Barbés under that name and was famous for the latest in merchandizing: ordering by catalog, taking returns. The eponymous developer Dufayel (1855 -1916) either invented or popularized the practice of buying on the installment plan and as well as buying from a catalog and using coupons. Chandeliers and mirrors made the interior magnificent as a palace. The theater inside could seat 3, 000; one of Veale's jobs would be to convert the theater into a mess hall.

The Wehrmacht (German Army) had formerly used Dufayel as a warehouse. Veale's job would be to repurpose the building and use it for "billeting for 6,000 men, both transient and

permanent; operating a gym, PX, library, barber shop and dispensary." Magasins Dufayel would also function as a processing station for troops being flown home to the United States from Paris. Veale worked with a labor pool of 500 French workers who were being used by the Army all over Paris. There were 5,000 troops in the building and 400 Frenchman aiding in the reconstruction. Even before he came to Paris, he supervised the return of Russian prisoners of war held by the Germans, the disposition of horses, and the sifting of German soldiers with an eye to Nazi perpetrators.

Two days after he was given the job, the major in charge of Dufayel turned the entire project over to Veale, September 1, 1945. The assignment became his: transform the department store, the Magasins Dufayel, into the equivalent of a hotel, where troops could be lodged, fed and showered. Making the place habitable posed a genuine challenge due to the thieves, fights, and prostitution going on in the area of Montmartre

The butte Montmartre is the gently curved hill that stands out on the northern skyline inside the Periphérique in the 18<sup>th</sup> arrondissement. The Basilica of Sacré Coeur, a white cathedral whose spires spike the sky, crowns the butte.<sup>1</sup> It stands out on the mountain in almost every photo you might see. In modern times a funicular rides people up the side of the hill for the cost of a metro ticket.

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<sup>1</sup> When France lost to Prussia in 1871, people of France thought God was against them. To win God's favor by showing that France was truly penitent and faithful, the basilica, dedicated to the Sacred Heart, went up, funded entirely by donations from its citizens. The foundation was laid in 1884 but it was not dedicated until 1914, owing to the start of World War I.

At the top of the hill, the basilica; at the bottom, Pig Alley, the G.I.'s term for the red light district.<sup>2</sup> With Veale's operation set in the middle of this active district, he would find many problems in refurbishing the old department store the Nazis used as a warehouse.

Hookers in Montmartre, crime, bars, and the chaos there led to complaining letters about the Dufayel project in *Stars and Stripes*. The complaints prompted his written reply. Objections mention noise, prostitutes, black market activities and "non-drunken noises made by M.P.s". When Veale replies to the criticisms, he maintains the disturbances are sporadic rather than ongoing, created by French civilians rather than billeted soldiers. Nevertheless, some places were designated "Off Limits" to military personnel, and the 787<sup>th</sup> M.P. Battalion maintained a nightly walking patrol. A French Vice Squad was called in to investigate the alleged houses of prostitution and cafes. Rumors maintained rats overran Dufayel.



*Une visite aux Grands Magasins Dufayel, Paris, Devambe, ca. 1905*

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<sup>2</sup> While St. Denis, patron saint of France, may have been the namesake martyr of the mount of martyrs (Montmartre), beheaded by local pagans whose gods feared competition, a less saintly spirit inhabits Montmartre, for there one finds the Moulin Rouge (Red Windmill), the night club/strip club, and Place Pigalle, the red light district.

Quartered in a hotel across from the Louvre, Veale had a bathtub as well as a view of the Eiffel Tower. A twenty-minute walk took him to the mess hall. As the first September sun rose over this liberated but broken city in 1945, the American would have awakened with his work day ahead of him, a day that started something like this:

At seven a.m. he hops out of bed and gets dressed. Standing in front of the mirror, brushing his hair, he notices some long black hair in his nylon brush. Just like the maid's hair. No doubt she touched up her own coif. His own short brown hair requires no more than a few passes with the brush. He drops his room key off at the front desk, greeting the hotel director in a swallow tail coat with "Good morning," before he walks out of the hotel to his metro stop, Palais Royale. He always takes one last deep breath of air before he enters the subway system, the last fresh air he will breathe for twenty minutes until he exits.

Following Veale on the Metro, a pedestrian could hop on Line 1 toward Villejuif, a short ride with only two stops before changing at Chatelet for Line 4, direction of Clignancourt, a longer ride with about 6 stops, traveling toward the hilly outcrop to the north. On the train, he stands the whole way. The nearby Frenchmen have garlic on their breaths.

Exiting at the Barbés station, he breathes clean air once more. This station was famous for the assassination of a German officer, Cadet Moser, a resistance act escalating the already tense standoff between occupier and occupied citizens in 1944. From that station he walks a block to his workplace in Montmartre on the Avenue Clignancourt.

Veale was probably the only one to actually show his pass to the M.Ps. He told Mr. Gold, the Frenchman at the information desk, to scatter the shoe shine boys away from the front door. Although Mr. Gold did as bidden, the boys showed up the next day. And the next.

Veale spends a minute talking to a French man, who sounded like a Londoner, about buying tickets for a Red Cross tour of Paris.

He checks the trash where Frenchmen worked loading refuse on trucks. He had placed an M.P. there previously because too much U.S. Government *materiel* had been leaving the building as trash. Then he walks by the chaplain's office and chapel, noticing that the French stove men had their usual gasoline fires burning all over the floor. They must empty the contents of one fire extinguisher every day. At the library, Veale checks in on the little gnome who cleans the place, and then he crosses the basketball court to go into the theater and climbs the stairs to the casual section, which can house about a thousand G.I. casualties each night. This was the place where all the A.W.O.L.s in Paris either slept or stole blankets for the purpose of selling them to the French black market. Arriving at his office, he takes a moment to study the city through large glass windows, offering a spectacular view.

Below, people walk in and out of the bakery across the street with yard-long baguettes under their arms or in a shopping bag. Some broke their bread in half and stuffed the two halves under their arms. Homeless men hang around the outside as well, trying to bum a cigarette or pick up a butt from any G.I. that tossed one away.

It's a Sunday, September 17, 1945, as he writes a letter home. Dark day, cloudy, rain expected. He likes the quiet in the office when everyone else is sleeping off their Saturday night revels. Despite his lovely view from the high place, this desolate city can't compare with his home in Jacksonville, Florida. The beauty of the monuments and parks fails to hide that buildings are old, their walls dirty and discolored. Buildings jammed together wall-to-wall bracket narrow streets. Shops are scattered everywhere with people living upstairs. He hasn't

noticed a building taller than seven stories, and no skyscrapers at all, not even on a modest scale of Jacksonville-sized buildings.

Parisians were engaged in a struggle for existence. Few women wear or had stockings. Many wear wedge-shaped shoes made of wood. No doubt the current hair style of piling hair on the head cuts the expense of hats. There's traffic on the street, but cops on the corner control the lights, which civilians ignore. Driving through town makes him a nervous wreck because his driver relies too much on the horn. Horse taxis offered another means of transportation, as did the velo taxis, two wheeled carts towed by a person pedaling a bike. His current girlfriend won't take a velo taxi because the operator reminds her of a slave.

Annette, a second lieutenant in the French army, works in charge of making arrangements for all the G.I.s in Paris who want to marry French girls. She is "as cute as a five-week old scotty and speaks English so rapidly that sometimes I can't even follow her." He took Annette and her mother to lunch at the mess, where they served French cooking but sadly not on par with the chow he enjoyed in Bad Nauheim, Germany, despite the cognac that tastes like nectar.

In the same September letter, Veale finally mentions the spirit of *l'amour* for which Paris was so famous. You can't walk down a street without seeing some guy with his arm around a girl; you can't ride the Metro without observing "a Frenchman pecking at the forehead for the bleached blonde who gazes at him dreamily thru mascara laden lids. How can she stand the garlic?"

Eleven days later, Annette no longer inspires his soul to look for lovers on the street. He sends home a detailed request: dark blue pin stripe material for a suit, white rayon for a couple

of blouses, some good woolen material to make a dress. It's entirely his idea. Veale explains, "You might expect. Another blonde."

The Blond.

She's a Goddess. She's a queen. She wears hundred-dollar shoes.

She asked him to look after her dog, a brown puppy named Trouble.

She gave it to him because it was causing trouble for her too. He brought the dog to work. The janitors at Dufayel hated the dog because it hadn't been house broken. Soldiers who watched the dog at night complained of its howling. It chewed their shoes and socks.

"You don't know how to make puppies eat, do you?" he asks his mother in his next letter home. "I certainly don't."

After he gave Trouble his worm pills, the dog wouldn't eat, so he went to the mess hall to create a puppy formula to tempt the dog. Trouble turned its nose up at the treat. Maybe the dog needed more exercise? To Muno: "Why, oh why, did I volunteer to accept the pooch?" Despite buyer's remorse, when he next requested a package from home, dog biscuits joined the list of eyeglass cleaner, toothpaste and dental floss.

The "Goddess" has three sisters, he writes home. Her father was Norwegian; she was born in Oslo but won't go back. "This girl is a blue-eyed Norwegian with a head of honey colored hair (and I know natural hair when I see it) that would be the envy of Venus de Milo (the statue is across the street from my hotel)."

The Norwegian gave him a photograph of herself. A traffic light and a string of parked cars against a wall form the background. A mustachioed man, umbrella hooked over his arm, looks into the lens. The shadow of the photographer falls into the picture. The Norwegian turns

three-quarters, her eyes crinkled in a smile. Her love for him will last forever, she writes, and signs *Liliane. October, 1945.*

She had returned from Germany a few months before, having been a forced laborer for about three years in factories and prisons. Her labor was not voluntary or conscripted. Her sentence was punitive. Andrée was a *résistante*.

Veale continues to deliberate his future with the Army. Where else could he save money like this? And where in Jacksonville could he find a job that would allow him to save \$125 a month? A soldier can't even buy a decent suit without spending a fortune. With all the strikes stateside, returning servicemen wonder if they can even *find* a job. Following three American papers, Veale decides that the economic situation makes it sensible for him to stay in the Army and in France. Problems abound on both sides of the Atlantic, with strikes and shortages back home, but people in France have their own problems. Although he has enough points to go home, he wants to stay there, and so he has signed up for an extension with the Army. Immersed in his own love life, he apologizes for not responding to his sister's engagement to Roy Askew, whose brother Rubin would become 37<sup>th</sup> governor of Florida in 1970.

Coming out of a meeting with various unit commanders and an officer from the Inspector General's department, he tells Muno about what he's doing. Another complaint letter about Dufayel has been written to the B-Bag in the Army newspaper, *Stars and Stripes*. Veale's formal reply responds to those complaints: there are not really so many disturbances as reported. Black market activities have been high in the area and form a large part of the problems with violence. While it is true that Group X mattresses are cotton filled with straw, both straw and mattresses covers are replaced bi-weekly, and the wooden component of the bunks

are scrubbed with soap and water and sprayed with DDT powder once a week. A few cases of lice have been reported, but the delousing procedure has been followed, which includes dismantling the bunks.

It's really not been a calm week: friends from the XIX showed up Saturday afternoon for the weekend stay, raiding Veale's liquor supply and leaving bathtub rings.

He got in trouble with the blond when he started drinking early. "So dat's why you're so nice to me. You're drunk."

"Would you look for a bathrobe?" he asks his mother. "Wool." Wind and rain chill the beginning of November, 1945. With this weather, it will be cold even in the hotel. Shortages are felt in his workplace. He's in charge of the Seine Section Separation Center, a discharge center for Paris It will process local soldiers, converting them into civilians for the purpose of accepting civilian employment with the Army. One day a private is driving a jeep; the next day, he turns up wearing an officer's blouse and pants, and driving the same jeep for more money and the freedom to tell anyone to go to hell.

The Goddess chose the wedding gift for his sister Patricia; it came at a pretty penny. His mother has not yet been able to find material for suits. Veale hears that it's difficult to obtain back in the states. Fortunately, his younger brother Danny, now out of the army, was able to buy some clothes.

Learning that shoe rationing has ended in the States, Veale asks Muno to buy some shoes for him. For the Blond. One pair of brown, sturdy, low-heeled walking shoes with thick soles. The other pair should be brown oxfords, medium high heel, probably laced, something

dressy. While he may not be sure of the girlfriend's shoe size, he has a solution. "Just have the guy at the shoe store, get out his ruler and measure the enclosed footprint."

"This girl is a queen," he adds.

Other updates: The weather was cold, and it was hard to get a coal allowance. The discharge center was opened the day before.

Trouble has gone.

"Don't worry. I'll eat the dog biscuits."

The dog disappeared when Veale took him for a walk in the building and the dog got away from him. One Frenchman was reported to have given him away to some women walking by on the street. No evidence for it, but the janitor with the dustpan seemed an obvious suspect.

Veale has a process in place for discharging soldiers, averaging about 15 men a day. The fun continues to be had with all the French laborers, the stealing that goes on, and letters to the *Stars and Stripes* about Dufayel.

With Thanksgiving (1945) rolling around in the States, turkey might have been served in the mess (*dindon* is the French word). Veale and the Blonde take the train to Isigny. It was a bit late for the vendange, or harvest, but a fair was being held in this town to raise money for reconstruction after all the bombing. At a raffle they won two pounds of butter, a bottle of cream, and a box of camembert cheese.

Later that day they met friends for dinner in Versailles. Sitting down at 7:00 pm they had to rush their meal to make the 9:00 pm train— "Lord, these French eat," Veale says. But he's been enjoying the best the county has to offer at the fair. Normandy was the heart of French dairy

country, famed for cheese and butter. Isigny cream is the best in the land, served as dessert with sugar.

Work piles up for Veale this fall of 1945. At the same time he writes about the Normandy trip, we learn that besides the Dufayel projects, he got another new job: as president of the summary court, he is basically a police judge who makes decisions more or less by his own conscience. He also has been made the C.O. of Group X of this headquarters in command of about 500 men who work in the various sections of Paris. Later in December, still on the two courts, he became added to the General Court. After spending the day at a murder trial, he returned to the office late at night to write home. Happily, he reports to his mother, Liliane has received the woolen bathrobe he requested. The guy on trial, if found guilty, is sure to hang.

A wry irony pervades almost every letter. No letter contains unqualified emotion. Good and bad news seem calibrated in response to news received from home: shortages and his father's chronic employment problems. He has become a man with a foot in two worlds—one symbolized by his home, mother's house and kitchen, and the other, a kaleidoscopic world that shifts from tents to hotels in a whirlwind gallop across Europe for the last year and a half. He knows they get the newsreels showing the black and white beaches of Normandy, bombed cities like Roman ruins, triumphal cavalcades through liberated capitals. Veale's letter-writing forces him to portray his own actions through an external point of view, which has been mediated by literature, movies and a heroic tradition and tempered of by humility; his war experiences metamorphose into adventure tales, touched by a self-conscious irony as if he sees himself in a movie. No doubt he is good at what he does, and a natural leader, he gets along with other men. The letters seem to maintain an equivalence that what he is doing *here*

safeguards what they are doing *there* as he tries to normalize his experience, talking about his living quarters and the animals he takes in.

Now that he was out of the fighting army and concentrating on managing troops and manpower to clear the city—they are expecting to go home in December—he became aware how the European theater has changed home. Home, America, had been bedrock. If one foot slipped in the mud of a half-track print, the other had been planted on the concrete streets and buildings of a familiar hometown. Now, neither old nor new world feels stable, but at least he has a job, a purpose, in France. Dufayel posed an exciting challenge with its opportunity for the major to be creative, well-fed, and respected. This is a world where his sense of agency and empowerment is reflected back to him.

Muno's post-Thanksgiving letter arrived in early December. In reply: Veale has another job, commanding Group X, and a unit of about a thousand men who work in the Seine Section. He still works at the Magasins Dufayel but has moved into the office of the store's president. None of the packages he was expecting has arrived; he was looking forward to his overcoat. With a reminder to keep trying to get some material for his girlfriend, he added, "I might be bringing her home with me—and you'd want to see her well dressed, wouldn't you?"

Although Liliane was born in Oslo, she won't be going back to Norway.

By December 16, he had received all the packages—the bathrobe, his long winter overcoat, suiting material and the eats. Liliane liked the woolen bathrobe. This time, besides his usual request for crackers, cheese, sardines, the food package contained popcorn. Veale carried the kernels to Therese's (Andrée's mother) house on Avenue Verdun. He showed how it was done; pour oil on the bottom of a pot, add the kernels, cover. Wait for what happens next, he warned them. Andrée and her mother traded looks when the explosions began. What was this?

The lid of the pot rose with kernels expanding into white puffs. One hand on the handle, the other on the lid Veale shook the pot, coaxing one more salvo of explosion before he removed it from the heat. Andrée would have wanted to stick her hand in right away, but he made them wait as he poured the popcorn into a bowl, and salted it. Andrée took one kernel between thumb and forefinger, and, finding it delicious, dumped a handful in her mouth. Therese followed suit. Andrée and her mother were amazed; they had never seen anything like it.

Seventy years later, the young generations remember how much Grandmother Therese loved the popcorn. Of all the sons-in-law, his was the only photograph presented on the buffet, along with a helmet.

The franc changed value suddenly. The day after Christmas Veale was given the assignment of collecting all the money G.I.s had in hand to turn the cash in to the finance office; a few days later, the G.I. will receive twice as many francs as he turned in. The problem will come when a G.I. borrows a few thousand francs from French friends, turns the money in, has it doubled, and repays the friend while he pockets the profit. There's really nothing he can do about that. Before the change, a person could get 50 francs to the dollar; afterward it's 119. While the value of the franc was not significant in making purchases from U.S. Army sources, it made a difference at a Paris nightclub or bar.

The shoes arrived after Christmas. The Goddess loves them, "First time in over five years that I've had shoes like this," she tells him.

When the proverbial prince charming slid the requested loafer, measured by outline, on her foot, it does not fit.

She's more of a 7.

Change comes with the 1946 New Year as the Seine section begins the process of merging with the Oise Section to create a new U.S. Army Headquarters, which will be known as the Western Base Command. Word on the grapevine tells that someone else will take over Magasins Dufayel. Veale will either get another job in Paris or be sent to Germany with the other occupation forces. This change has created the greatest turmoil he has seen. With an imminent move in view, he gave away his office furniture, like large wall mirrors, chairs and tables, and glass on the desks over gray blankets. Really nice stuff.

Meanwhile some American forces in Paris have grown restless. The men want to go home. The war was over, wasn't it? Rallies and demonstrations are planned in protest. One January morning, Veale sees a big sign over one of the front doors to the building: "Wanna get home? Rally at the Étoile Sunday (tomorrow)." The rally won't happen, he tells Muno. An old old law says they can't hold rally without the permission of the French police, and since the soldiers aren't organized, they didn't get that permission, and won't be able to hold a rally. Veale has heard that a string of M.P.s "a mile long" will surround the Étoile, so many won't even be able to get near the place, though some will want to for that very reason because they are curious.

At least it's warm in Paris now, this January. He doesn't even need a coat.

Three days later it's cold again.

Veale's new office falls in a different part of town, on Avenue Kléber, two blocks from the Arc de Triomphe. It's a much more central location, near the Champs-Élysées. He wishes he had held on to his office furniture, he could have used it in the new place. This job looks like it would be a big one—he would be in charge of three-hundred units scattered within a two-hundred mile radius of Paris. Four officers and ten enlisted men will go with him.

The mayor of Montmartre invited him to a huge Christmas party. A group of the Free French (the FFI)—the Montmartre Maquisards—had approached him about doing something for the children in the neighborhood. Veale brought a delegation to the P.X. and arranged for a box to be set up requesting gifts of candy for the children. He must have collected a million PayDay bars. The party was held in an auditorium off Place Pigalle (“not ‘pig alley,’ please”). The president of the local FFI chapter introduced him to the many secretaries-general of the fraternity and the mayor of Montmartre. The auditorium was filled with children and their mothers. Whiskey scented the mayor’s breath at two p.m. Veale was presented with a watercolor painting of Sacre Coeur from the Place du Tertre.

Later that month, Veale goes to dinner at the Goddess’ house to celebrate the birthday of her younger sister, Josette. Eight guests sat at a table, where five bottles of champagne (brought by Veale) and four bottles of wine splashed a dinner featuring snails and ending with a rice cake served with a flaming rum sauce. Treated for tuberculosis, Josette had spent some of the war in a sanatorium. During the Occupation, she wrote letters to French soldiers stockaded in a stalag. After the war, she met and married her Pen-pal, a Frenchman with a heart of gold. Marcel Auvergne.

By the way, Veale writes his mother, he is sending her a photo of the girlfriend friend:  
“Same one I’ve always gone with. Name is Andrée, previously referred to as Liliane.”

The name change comes as casually as that.

Weather so bad, planes have been grounded.

It was cold that winter in Paris, except for the few warm days, and the extraordinary March weather brought wet heavy snow to cover everywhere. Veale captures black filigree architecture

against vast white blankets of snow with the camera he bought at the P.X. after he won the lottery for sales. The new set of shoes has arrived, and they fit perfectly. He thinks he may return to Dufayel in March. Having lived at the Savoy Hotel for the past eight months, he now moves to the Hotel Pierre. He and Andrée went to an Algerian restaurant in a narrow street in the heart of the Latin Quarter, where he ate *cush-cush* (couscous), something like a lamb stew with quantities of barley and turnips (served dry), and spiced with a hot sauce. He always said he would try anything once; *cush-cush* counts as exotic as the snails he ate a few weeks ago.

His sister Pat's wedding passed by, and she ended up happily married. Muno had sent him a check for the \$500 he requested. All his finances went through home. Veale attended a three-day conference in Frankfurt for educating soldiers, making the trip on a night train, where he had a berth and dinner in the dining car. Frankfurt looked the same as it had before, when it was reduced to rubble. Soldiers there were depressed.

When he came home, Andrée was waiting there for him at the station.

Back at the Magasins Dufayel, Veale is in charge of the most ambitious building project yet. They have begun to construct a new mess hall for four-thousand men at one sitting. The mess now occupies the old theater, so they are going to have to build a new theater. They will also construct a library, a lounge complete with beer bar, and a genuine nightclub. They are using German prisoners-of-war for labor for the job; the P.O.W.s are brought over from the nearby stockade and guarded by Polish M.P. guards. An architect, a draftsman and about 160 variously skilled men were employed in the work. A couple of decorators showed up and said they could remodel the P.X., making it super modernistic, like a big-time department store.

The real fun in this project is that the higher-ups know nothing about his plan. Veale was ordered to build a mess. He is going to make a beautiful mess.

A sergeant, an interior designer in civilian life who had done some night clubs in Hollywood, came up with the design. Still, problems arise at every turn. The mess moved into the building before it was ready, and complaints came in from all directions. At least when the Colonel inspected their progress—with the compressor going and two jack hammers tearing up the flooring—he had no unfavorable comment. Materials are hard to procure; supplies have been frozen. Veale laments that there are complaints on complaints, and he has to do everything himself. As the target of constant criticism, he blew up at his bosses. But the P.X. is finally finished and looks great. The mess hall continues.

He won't be able to sleep until it is over.

Late March, spring has finally arrived in Paris. Andrée took him to a fashion show sponsored by the Red Cross at a well-known studio. More women than men are there but he enjoyed going. They entered a large modernist room, took seats along an aisle and waited for the show. Tall women strutted down the aisle, but he found the show sad: the designers had to make do with inferior materials. No nylon, Palm Beach worsted, or sharkskin materials. A few corduroy jackets in different colors and all very expensive. The men seemed happy simply removing their coats. Afterward, they went to dinner where he consumed at least a pound of his favorite mushrooms.

At Easter, they went to the country in Sauvigny and met friends there. Andrée feeds goats that belong to a pleasantly-plump woman in a babushka. Veale and Andrée took turns holding a kid and taking each other's photographs. She wears a suit with a three-quarters length jacket and pocket square that matches her blouse, her blond hair side clipped off her face, falling into a tumble of curls; he wears his uniform.

It's Easter. The French do it big.

Andrée thought the cat, Charlie, had cancer, so she took it to the vet. The cat had a black eye and a large swollen area on the side of its head, like an egg.

Something hit it, the vet determined. Or kicked it.

"The wedding feast wasn't really a drunken brawl," Veale writes. But it involved much food and *vin*. A bottle of champagne and one bottle of wine per guest. Ten course dinner. A triple-decker ten-pound cake that was baked by the mess sergeant and the German prisoners at the PDB.

The cat was a casualty of the wedding. He would recover.

Andrée and Veale were married on Saturday, July 13, 1946, at 1500 in a French civil ceremony held at the court in the wife's region of residence. The wedding fell on a holiday weekend; Sunday was July 14, Bastille Day and French Independence Day.

Marcel Auvergne, Josette's husband, signed the register for Veale as did a friend of the family. Therese's friend, "Papa Eugenie," gave Andrée away. Marcel prompted Veale when to say "*Oui*" in the ceremony conducted in French. Normally in France, marriage takes place in the wife's home town and then the civil ceremony can be followed by a religious one. "Afraid that Andrée and I will have to skip the latter."

Afterward, the wedding party repaired to the mother's house in Issy-les-Moulineaux, where the crowd turned to their "penance," a four-hour dinner. The wedding feast turned into an all-night affair. Those who missed their transportation home slept on the floor or on the table. Veale and Andrée managed to sneak out to the Metro, sober, at eleven.

Andrée was pregnant.

**Marilyn Moriarty** is professor of English at Hollins University, Roanoke, Virginia. Andree and Veale were her adoptive parents. Based on letters her father wrote home during World War II, this chapter comes from her memoir in progress, *What a House Remembers, What a War Forgets*, shortlisted for the 2021 Faulkner-Wisdom prize for a nonfiction book. Moriarty's mother received a four-year prison sentence for hard labor after she was tried by the Wehrmacht for "aiding desertion," possibly referring to her distributing propaganda in Occupied Paris.