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Topics: Resilience, Questions Unasked, "What Happened on the way to...."

Lagrasse

It was cold and grey when I picked up the rental car in Toulouse, France. I checked how to use the lights and wipers, reread the map, turned the key and drove off, merging into the slow moving rush hour traffic. Once on the tollway I wondered how to pay when I exited: credit card or cash? A light drizzle was turning into rain. With my limited French, I noticed there were hospitality exits and decided to stop at one.

I was meeting a new friend in Lagrasse. Josephine is a Chicago food stylist who works with my son. My son had said we would "get along swimmingly". When a 30-something "child" says that, you listen, and sure enough, we clicked. She mentioned she rents a vacation house each year with friends and could use some "new blood". She invited me to join them in this small medieval French village in October.

While at the rest stop I checked to make sure the headlights and tail lights were on. All seemed in order so I continued on to my designated exit. I was now on narrow two lane country roads as the dark and the rain intensified. Every once in a while I would see the white wooden arrows directing me onward to Lagrasse. Suddenly, with no other cars in sight, a sports car sped up behind me, blasting their horn as they passed.

The road headed up into the foothills where the rain became heavier and the night darker with flashes of lightning. I kept adjusting the headlights as the road tightly wound up and down the mountains. I decided if I didn't come upon Lagrasse at the next sign of a village I would just stop and make my way in the daylight.

Village lights finally appeared far below. On the outskirts was a welcoming sign for Lagrasse. I pulled over, somewhat shakily, and texted my friend. No response. I had some landmarks she had sent. In spite of it being dark and devoid of people, I found one of them. I also had a street name and house number. I drove down the narrow street until I feared getting stuck so I worked my way back up the cobblestones to what appeared to be the main boulevard. My friend had said to look for her in the town square. No town square. No people. I decided to settle in and sleep in the car. Then I saw a lone figure appear from the street I had previously driven and even walked along. I rolled down my window: "Josephine! Josephine!" She sauntered up, totally blasé. We walked to a house I had unwittingly passed by more than once into a warm roomful of people enjoying wine and dinner. They were all astounded that I had made it there all by myself in the dark and the rain.

Later, I learned the headlights and tail lights were on separate switches and I only had my headlights on.

