
BONES TO ASHES
Kathy
REICHS
The No. 1 Bestselling Author

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About the Book

Dr Temperance Brennan takes on a case that uncovers horrors she could never have predicted.

It is the skeleton of a young girl, no more than fourteen years old – and forensic anthropologist Tempe Brennan is struggling to control her emotions.

The coroner is being evasive, insisting the bones are ancient and of no interest. But this doesn’t feel right, and Tempe is convinced that someone is hiding something.

Working on instinct, Tempe takes matters into her own hands. But her work uncovers horrors she could never have predicted, as what started in the lab quickly becomes her most harrowing, and personal, case yet.

About the Author

Kathy Reichs is vice president of the American Academy of Forensic Scientists; a member of the RCMP National Police Services Advisory Council; forensic anthropologist to the province of Quebec; and a professor of anthropology at the University of North Carolina-Charlotte.

Her first book, *Deja Dead,* catapulted her to fame when it became a *New York Times* bestseller and won the 1997 Ellis Award for Best First Novel. Her most recent novels are *Flash and Bones* and *Bones Are Forever*. All of her Temperance Brennan novels have been *Sunday Times* No. 1 bestsellers. For more information visit www.kathyreichs.com.

Also by Kathy Reichs

Déjà Dead
Death du Jour
Deadly Decisions
Fatal Voyage
Grave Secrets
Bare Bones
Monday Mourning
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Break No Bones
Devil Bones
Spider Bones (published as *Mortal Remains* in hardback in the UK)
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Bones are Forever

The Virals Series
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Virals
Seizure
Code

Kathy Reichs

bones to ashes

arrow books

For those buoyant, bighearted, bodacious *Acadiens*.

On ouaira quosse que d'main nous amèneras …

This is the forest primeval; but where are the hearts that beneath it
Leaped like the roe, when he hears in the woodland the voice of the huntsman?
Where is the thatch-roofed village, the home of Acadian farmers.

– from “Evangeline” by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

1

BABIES DIE. PEOPLE vanish. People die. Babies vanish.

I was hammered early by those truths. Sure, I had a kid's understanding that mortal life ends. At school, the nuns talked of heaven, purgatory, limbo, and hell. I knew my elders would "pass." That's how my family skirted the subject. People passed. Went to be with God. Rested in peace. So I accepted, in some ill-formed way, that earthly life was temporary. Nevertheless, the deaths of my father and baby brother slammed me hard.

And Évangéline Landry's disappearance simply had no explanation.

But I jump ahead.

It happened like this.

As a little girl, I lived on Chicago's South Side, in the less fashionable outer spiral of a neighborhood called Beverly. Developed as a country retreat for the city's elite following the Great Fire of 1871, the hood featured wide lawns and large elms, and Irish Catholic clans whose family trees had more branches than the elms. A bit down-at-the-heels then, Beverly would later be gentrified by boomers seeking greenery within proximity of the Loop.

A farmhouse by birth, our home predated all its neighbors. Green-shuttered white frame, it had a wraparound porch, an old pump in back, and a garage that once housed horses and cows.

My memories of that time and place are happy. In cold weather, neighborhood kids skated on a rink created with garden hoses on an empty lot. Daddy would steady me on my double blades, clean slush from my snowsuit when I took a header. In summer, we played kick ball, tag, or Red Rover in the street. My sister, Harry, and I trapped fireflies in jars with hole-punched lids.

During the endless Midwestern winters, countless Brennan aunts and uncles gathered for cards in our eclectically shabby parlor. The routine never varied. After supper, Mama would take small tables from the hall closet, dust the tops, and unfold the legs. Harry would drape the white linen cloths, and I would center the decks, napkins, and peanut bowls.

With the arrival of spring, card tables were abandoned for front porch rockers, and conversation replaced canasta and bridge. I didn't understand much of it. Warren Commission. Gulf of Tonkin. Khrushchev. Kosygin. I didn't care. The banding together of those bearing my own double helices assured me of well-being, like the rattle of coins in the Beverly Hillbillies bank on my bedroom dresser. The world was predictable, peopled with relatives, teachers, kids like me from households similar to mine. Life was St. Margaret's school, Brownie Scouts, Mass on Sunday, day camp in summer.

Then Kevin died, and my six-year-old universe fragmented into shards of doubt and uncertainty. In my sense of world order, death took the old, great-aunts with gnarled blue veins and translucent skin. Not baby boys with fat red cheeks.

I recall little of Kevin's illness. Less of his funeral. Harry fidgeting in the pew beside me. A spot on my black patent leather shoe. From what? It seemed important to know. I stared at the small gray splotch. Stared away from the reality unfolding around me.

The family gathered, of course, voices hushed, faces wooden. Mama's side came from North Carolina. Neighbors. Parishioners. Men from Daddy's law firm. Strangers. They stroked my head. Mumbled of heaven and angels.

The house overflowed with casseroles and bakery wrapped in tinfoil and plastic. Normally, I loved sandwiches with the crusts cut off. Not for the tuna or egg salad between the bread. For the sheer decadence of that frivolous waste. Not that day. Never since. Funny the things that affect you.

Kevin's death changed more than my view of sandwiches. It altered the whole stage on which I'd lived my life. My mother's eyes, always kind and often mirthful, were perpetually wrong. Dark-circled and deep in their sockets. My child's brain was unable to translate her look, other than to sense sadness. Years later I saw a photo of a Kosovo woman, her husband and son lying in makeshift coffins. I felt a spark of recollection. Could I know her? Impossible. Then realization. I was recognizing the same defeat and hopelessness I'd seen in Mama's gaze.

But it wasn't just Mama's appearance that changed. She and Daddy no longer shared a pre-supper cocktail, or lingered at the table talking over coffee. They no longer watched television when the dishes were cleared and Harry and I were in our PJs. They'd enjoyed the comedy shows, eyes meeting when Lucy or Gomer did something amusing. Daddy would take Mama's hand and they'd laugh.

All laughter fled when leukemia conquered Kevin.

My father also took flight. He didn't withdraw into quiet self-pity, as Mama eventually did. Michael Terrence Brennan, litigator, connoisseur, and irrepressible bon vivant, withdrew directly into a bottle of good Irish whiskey. Many bottles, actually.

I didn't notice Daddy's absences at first. Like a pain that builds so gradually you're unable to pinpoint its origin, I

realized one day that Daddy just wasn't around that much. Dinners without him grew more frequent. His arrival home grew later, until he seemed little more than a phantom presence in my life. Some nights I'd hear unsteady footfalls on the steps, a door banged too hard against a wall. A toilet flushed. Then silence. Or muffled voices from my parents' bedroom, the cadence conveying accusations and resentment.

To this day, a phone ringing after midnight makes me shiver. Perhaps I am an alarmist. Or merely a realist. In my experience, late-night calls never bring good news. There's been an accident. An arrest. A fight.

Mama's call came a long eighteen months after Kevin's death. Phones gave honest rings back then. Not polyphonic clips of "Grillz" or "Sukie in the Graveyard." I awoke at the first resonating peal. Heard a second. A fragment of a third. Then a soft sound, half scream, half moan, then the clunk of a receiver striking wood. Frightened, I pulled the covers up to my eyes. No one came to my bed.

There was an accident, Mama said the next day. Daddy's car was forced off the road. She never spoke of the police report, the blood alcohol level of 0.27. I overheard those details on my own. Eavesdropping is instinctual at age seven.

I remember Daddy's funeral even less than I remember Kevin's. A bronze coffin topped with a spray of white flowers. Endless eulogies. Muffled crying. Mama supported by two of the aunts. Psychotically green cemetery grass.

Mama's relatives made the trek in even larger numbers this time. Daessees. Lees. Cousins whose names I didn't remember. More covert listening revealed threads of their plan. Mama must move back home with her children.

The summer after Daddy died was one of the hottest in Illinois history, with temperatures holding in the nineties for weeks. Though weather forecasters talked of Lake Michigan's cooling effect, we were far from the water,

blocked by too many buildings and too much cement. No lacustrine breezes for us. In Beverly, we plugged in fans, opened windows, and sweated. Harry and I slept on cots on the screened porch.

Through June and into July, Grandma Lee maintained a “return to Dixie” phone campaign. Brennan relatives continued appearing at the house, but solo now, or in sets of two, men with sweat-looped armpits, women in cotton dresses limp on their bodies. Conversation was guarded, Mama nervous and always on the verge of tears. An aunt or uncle would pat her hand. Do what’s best for you and the girls, Daisy.

In some child’s way I sensed a new restlessness in these familial calls. A growing impatience that grieving end and life resume. The visits had become vigils, uncomfortable but obligatory because Michael Terrence had been one of their own, and the matter of the widow and the children needed to be settled in proper fashion.

Death also wrought change in my own social nexus. Kids I’d known all my life avoided me now. When chance brought us together they’d stare at their feet. Embarrassed? Confused? Fearful of contamination? Most found it easier to stay away.

Mama hadn’t enrolled us in day camp, so Harry and I spent the long, steamy days by ourselves. I read her stories. We played board games, choreographed puppet shows, or walked to the Woolworth’s on Ninety-fifth Street for comics and vanilla Cokes.

Throughout those weeks, a small pharmacy took shape on Mama’s bedside table. When she was downstairs I’d examine the little vials with their ridged white caps and neatly typed labels. Shake them. Peer through the yellow and brown plastic. The tiny capsules caused something to flutter in my chest.

Mama made her decision in mid-July. Or perhaps Grandma Lee made it for her. I listened as she told Daddy’s

brothers and sisters. They patted her hand. Perhaps it's best, they said, sounding, what? Relieved? What does a seven-year-old know of nuance?

Gran arrived the same day a sign went up in our yard. In the kaleidoscope of my memory I see her exiting the taxi, an old woman, scarecrow thin, hands knobby and lizard dry. She was fifty-six that summer.

Within a week we were packed into the Chrysler Newport that Daddy had purchased before Kevin's diagnosis. Gran drove. Mama rode shotgun. Harry and I were in back, a midline barrier of crayons and games demarcating territorial boundaries.

Two days later we arrived at Gran's house in Charlotte. Harry and I were given the upstairs bedroom with the green-striped wallpaper. The closet smelled of mothballs and lavender. Harry and I watched Mama hang our dresses on rods. Winter dresses for parties and church.

How long are we staying, Mama?

We'll see. The hangers clicked softly.

Will we go to school here?

We'll see.

At breakfast the next morning Gran asked if we'd like to spend the rest of the summer at the beach. Harry and I gazed at her over our Rice Krispies, shell-shocked by the thundering changes rolling over our lives.

'Course you would, she said.

How do you know what I would or wouldn't like? I thought. You're not me. She was right, of course. Gran usually was. But that wasn't the point. Another decision had been made and I was powerless to change it.

Two days after hitting Charlotte, our little party again settled itself in the Chrysler, Gran at the wheel. Mama slept, waking only when the whining of our tires announced we were crossing the causeway.

Mama's head rose from the seat back. She didn't turn to us. Didn't smile and sing out, "Pawleys Island, here we

come!” as she had in happier times. She merely slumped back.

Gran patted Mama’s hand, a carbon copy of the gesture employed by the Brennans. “We’re going to be fine,” she cooed, in a drawl identical to that of her daughter. “Trust me, Daisy darlin’. We’re going to be fine.”

And fine I was, once I met Évangéline Landry.

And for the next four years.

Until Évangéline vanished.

2

I WAS BORN in July. For a kid, that's good news and bad.

Since my summers were all spent at the Lee family beach house on Pawleys Island, my birthdays were celebrated with a picnic, then an excursion to Gay Dolphin Park on the Myrtle Beach boardwalk. I loved those amusement park outings, especially the Wild Mouse ride, white-knuckling up, down, and around narrow tracks, heart banging, cotton candy rising in my throat.

Good stuff. But I never got to bring cupcakes to school.

I turned eight that summer after Daddy died. Mama gave me a pink jewelry box with a music player and pop-up ballerina. Harry crayoned a family portrait, two big and two little stick figures, fingers spread and overlapping, no one smiling. Gran's gift was a copy *of Anne of Green Gables*.

Though Gran prepared the traditional picnic of red velvet cake, fried chicken, boiled shrimp, potato salad, deviled eggs, and biscuits, there was no postprandial roller-coaster jaunt that year. Harry got sunburned and Mama got a migraine, so I stayed alone on the beach, reading about Anne's adventures with Marilla and Matthew.

I didn't notice her at first. She blended with the white noise of surf and seabirds. When I looked up she was less than two yards from me, skinny arms spiking from palmed hips.

Wordlessly, we assessed each other. From her height I guessed she had a year or two on me, though her waist was

still child-thick, her faded swimsuit still flat on her chest.

She spoke first, jabbing a thumb at my book. “I’ve been there.”

“Have not,” I said.

“I’ve seen the Queen of England.” Wind danced the dark tangle on her head, lifting and dropping strands like shoppers deciding on ribbons.

“Have not,” I repeated, immediately felt stupid. “The queen lives in a palace in London.”

The girl dragged wind-forced curls from her eyes. “I was three. My *grand-père* held me up so I could see.”

Her English was accented, neither the flat, nasal twang of the Midwest, nor the vowel-bloating drawl of the Southeastern seaboard. I hesitated, uncertain.

“What did she look like?”

“She wore gloves and a lilac hat.”

“Where was this?” Skeptical.

“Tracadie.”

The guttural *r* sounded excitingly foreign to my eight-year-old ear.

“Where’s that?”

“*En* Acadie.”

“Never heard of it.”

“‘This is the forest primeval. The murmuring pines and the hemlocks.’”

I squinted up at her, unsure what to say.

“It’s a poem.”

“I’ve been to the Art Institute in Chicago,” I said, feeling the need to match poetry with an equally highbrow response. “They have lots of famous pictures, like the people in the park painted with dots.”

“I’m staying with my aunt and uncle,” the girl said.

“I’m visiting my grandmother.” I didn’t mention Harry or Mama. Or Kevin. Or Daddy.

A Frisbee arced to earth between the girl and the ocean. I watched a boy scoop it and send it sailing with a

backhanded toss.

"You can't really go to Green Gables," I said.

"Yes, you can."

"It's not real."

"It is." The girl worked one brown toe in the sand.

"Today is my birthday," I said, at a loss to come up with anything better.

"*Bonne fête*."

"That Italian?"

"French."

My school in Beverly had offered French, the pet project of a Francophile nun named Sister Mary Patrick. Though my exposure had gone little beyond *bonjour*, I knew this girl sounded nothing like the language teacher who'd come to my first-and second-grade classes.

Lonely? Curious? Willing to listen to anything that transported me from the gloom in Gran's big house? Who knows why? I bit.

"Was the prince with her?"

The girl nodded.

"What's this Tracadie place like?" It came out "Track-a-day."

The girl shrugged. "*Un beau petit village*. A small town."

"I'm Temperance Brennan. You can call me Tempe."

"Évangéline Landry."

"I'm eight."

"I'm ten."

"Wanna see my presents?"

"I like your book."

I settled back in my chair. Évangéline sat cross-legged in the sand beside me. For an hour we talked of Anne and that famous farm on Prince Edward Island.

Thus the friendship began.

The forty-eight hours following my birthday were stormy, the daytime sky alternating between pewter and sickly

gray-green. Rain came in windblown bursts, streaming salty wash across the windows of Gran's house.

Between downpours I begged to be allowed on the beach. Gran refused, fearing undertow in the swells breaking white on the sand. Frustrated, I watched from inside, but caught no sign of Évangéline Landry.

Finally, blue patches appeared and elbowed back the clouds. Shadows sharpened under the sea oats and the boardwalks traversing the dunes. Birds resumed discourse, temperatures rose, and the humidity announced that unlike the rain, it was not leaving.

Despite the sunshine, days passed with no sign of my friend.

I was biking when I spotted her walking along Myrtle Avenue, head tortoised forward, sucking a Popsicle. She wore flip-flops and a wash-faded Beach Boys T-shirt.

She stopped when I rolled up beside her.

"Hey," I said, one sneaker dropping from pedal to pavement.

"Hi," she said.

"Haven't seen you around."

"Had to work." Wiping sticky red fingers on her shorts.

"You have a job?" I was awed that a kid be permitted such a grown-up pursuit.

"My uncle fishes out of Murrell's Inlet. Sometimes I help out on the boat."

"Neat." Visions of Gilligan, Ginger, and the Skipper.

"Pfff." She puffed air through her lips. "I scrape fish guts."

We started walking, me pushing my bike.

"Sometimes I have to take care of my little sister," I said, seeking to establish parity. "She's five."

Évangéline turned to me. "Do you have a brother?"

"No." Face burning.

"Me neither. My sister, Obéline, is two."

“So you have to clean a few fish. It’s still cool to spend the summer at the beach. Is it really different where you come from?”

Something glinted in Évangéline’s eyes, was gone before I could read it.

“My mama’s there. She got laid off at the hospital, so now she works two jobs. She wants Obéline and me to learn good English, so she brings us here. *C’est bon*. My aunt Euphémie and my uncle Fidèle are nice.”

“Tell me about this forest primeval.” I steered from the topic of family.

Évangéline’s gaze drifted to a passing car, came back to me.

“L’Acadie is the most beautiful place on Earth.”

And so it seemed.

All that summer Évangéline spun tales of her New Brunswick home. I’d heard of Canada, of course, but my childish imaginings went little beyond Mounties and igloos. Or dogsleds mushing past caribou and polar bears, or seals perched on ice floes. Évangéline spoke of dense forests, coastal cliffs, and places with names like Miramichi, Kouchibouguac, and Bouctouche.

She also spoke of Acadian history, and the expulsion of her ancestors from their homeland. Again and again I listened, asked questions. Astonished. Outraged at the North American tragedy her people call le Grand Dérangement. The French Acadians driven into exile by a British deportation order, stripped of their lands and rights.

It was Évangéline who introduced me to poetry. That summer we stumbled through Longfellow’s epic work, the inspiration for her name. Her copy was in French, her native tongue. She translated as best she could.

Though I barely understood the verse, she turned the story to magic. Our childish minds imagined the Acadian milkmaid far from her Nova Scotia birthplace. We

improvised costumes and acted out the tale of the diaspora and its ill-fated lovers.

Évangéline planned to be a poet one day. She'd memorized her favorites, most French, some English. Edward Blake. Elizabeth Barrett Browning. The New Brunswick–born bard Bliss Carman. I listened. Together, we wrote bad verse.

I preferred stories with plots. Though the English was difficult for her, Évangéline tried my favorite authors: Anna Sewell. Carolyn Keene. C. S. Lewis. And, endlessly, we discussed Anne Shirley and imagined life at Green Gables farm.

In those days I hoped to become a veterinarian. At my instigation we kept notebooks on egrets in the marsh and on pelicans gliding high on the wind. We constructed protective walls around turtle nests. We trapped frogs and snakes with long-handled nets.

Some days we staged elaborate tea parties for Harry and Obéline. Curled their hair. Dressed them like dolls.

Tante Euphémie cooked us *poutine râpée, fricot au poulet, tourtière*. I can see her in her ruffle-strapped apron, telling stories of the Acadian people in broken English. Stories she'd heard from her father, he from his. Seventeen fifty-five. Ten thousand forced from their homes.

Where did they go? Harry would ask. Europe. The Caribbean. America. Those in Louisiana became your Cajuns.

How could such things happen? I would ask. The British wanted our farms and dikes. They had guns.

But the Acadians returned? Some.

That first summer, Évangéline planted the seed for my lifelong addiction to news. Perhaps because hers was such an isolated corner of the planet. Perhaps because she wanted to practice English. Perhaps simply because of who she was. Évangéline's thirst for knowing everything was unquenchable.

Radio. Television. Newspapers. We absorbed and comprehended in our limited way. At night, on her porch or mine, June bugs banging the screens, transistor radio sputtering the Monkees, the Beatles, Wilson Pickett, the Isley Brothers, we spoke of a man with a rifle in a Texas tower. The deaths of astronauts. Stokely Carmichael and a strange group called SNCC.

At age eight, I thought Évangéline Landry the smartest and most exotic being I would ever know. She was beautiful in a dark gypsy way, spoke a foreign language, knew songs and poems I'd never heard. But, even then, despite the sharing of secrets, I sensed a reserve in my new friend, a mystery. And something else. Some hidden sadness of which she didn't speak and which I could not identify.

The hot, muggy days rolled by as we explored our little Lowcountry island. I shared places familiar from previous visits with Gran. Together, Évangéline and I discovered new ones.

Slowly, as it inevitably does, my pain receded. My thoughts dwelled on new things. Pleasant things.

Then it was August and time to go.

Mama never returned to live in Chicago. My life settled into a new comfortableness in Charlotte. I grew to love Gran's old house in Dilworth, the smell of honeysuckle crawling the backyard fence, the leafy dark tunnel formed by willow oaks arcing our street.

I made friends, of course, but none as exotic as my summer soul mate. None who wrote poetry, spoke French, and had seen Green Gables and the Queen of England.

While apart, Évangéline and I exchanged letters containing news of our winter lives, our poetry, our preteen impressions of current events. Biafra. Why didn't other countries feed these people? My Lai. Did Americans really kill innocent women and children? Chappaquiddick. Do celebrities have such troubles, too? We speculated on the guilt or innocence of Jeffrey MacDonald. Could any person

be bad enough to kill his children? The evil of Charlie Manson. Was he the devil? We counted the days until summer with hash-marked calendars.

The school year ended earlier in Charlotte than in Tracadie, so I'd arrive first at Pawleys Island. A week later, *madame* Landry's rusted Ford Fairlane would roll across the causeway. Laurette would spend one week at her sister and brother-in-law's small house on the marsh, then return north to her jobs at a lobster cannery and a tourist motel. In August, she'd repeat the long trip.

In between, Évangéline, Obéline, Harry, and I lived our summer adventures. We read, we wrote, we talked, we explored. We collected shells. I learned about fishing for a living. I learned some bad French.

Our fifth summer unfolded like the previous four. Until July 26.

Psychologists say some dates remain permanently fixed in the mind. December 7, 1941. The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. November 22, 1963. President Kennedy assassinated. September 11, 2001. The World Trade Center in flames.

My list includes the day Évangéline disappeared.

It was a Thursday. The Landry children had been on the island six weeks, were scheduled to remain for another four. Évangéline and I planned to go crabbing early that morning. Other details remain as fragments.

Pedaling through a misty dawn, crab net angled across my handlebars. A car passing in the opposite lane, male silhouette at the wheel. Oncle Fidèle? One backward glance. One silhouette in back.

The *tic tic tic* of pebbles winged onto Évangéline's bedroom window screen. Euphémie's face through a barely cracked door, hair bobby-pinned, eyes red, lips dead white.

They are gone. You mustn't come here again.

Gone where, *ma tante?*

Go away. Forget.

But why?

They are dangerous now.

Pedaling hard, tears streaming my cheeks, watching a car swallowed by fog on the causeway. Gone? No warning? No good-bye? No “I’ll write”? Don’t come back? Forget?

My friend and her sister never summered on Pawleys again.

Though I returned over and over to the small house on the marsh, begging for information, I was always rebuffed. Tante Euphémie and Oncle Fidèle never spoke to me except to repeat “You must go. They are not here.”

I wrote letter after letter. Some came back undelivered, others did not, but there was no response from Évangéline. I asked Gran what I could do. “Nothing,” she said. “Events can alter lives. Remember, you left Chicago.”

Distraught, I swore to find her. Nancy Drew could do it, I told myself. And I tried, as much as a twelve-year-old was able in the days before cell phones and the Internet. For the rest of that summer and into the next, Harry and I spied on Tante Euphémie and Oncle Fidèle. We learned nothing.

Back in Charlotte, we persisted. Though the libraries within our small orbit kept no phone directories for New Brunswick, Canada, we managed to obtain an area code for Tracadie-Sheila. There were more Landrys in the region than the operator could sort without a first name.

Laurette.

No listing. Thirty-two L. Landrys.

Neither Harry nor I could recall mention of Évangéline’s father’s name.

Realization. Through all those long days and nights, Évangéline and I had talked of boys, sex, Longfellow, Green Gables, Vietnam. By some unspoken agreement, we’d never ventured into the subject of fathers.

Using a pay phone and coins from our banks, Harry and I phoned every L. Landry in Tracadie. Later we tried the

surrounding towns. No one knew of Évangéline or her family. Or so they said.

My sister lost interest in sleuthing long before I did. Évangéline had been my friend, five years Harry's senior. And Obéline had been too young, half a lifetime Harry's junior.

In the end, I, too, gave up searching. But I never stopped wondering. Where? Why? How could a fourteen-year-old girl be a threat? Eventually, I grew to doubt my recall of Tante Euphémie's words. Had she really said "dangerous"?

The emptiness left by Évangéline was a void in my life until high school crowded out reflection and regret.

Kevin. Daddy. Évangéline. The ache of that triple whammy has faded, dulled by the passage of time and displaced by the press of daily living.

But, now and then, a trigger. Then memory rears up in ambush.

3

I'D BEEN IN Montreal a full hour when LaManche phoned. Until then, my June rotation to the recently thawed tundra on the St. Lawrence had gone swimmingly.

The flight from Charlotte and the connection from Philadelphia had both operated on time. Birdie had given me minimal grief, protest-meowing only during takeoffs and landings. My luggage had touched down with me. Arriving home, I'd found my condo in reasonably good shape. My Mazda had started on the very first try. Life was good.

Then LaManche rang my mobile.

"Temperance?" He, alone, rejected the more user-friendly "Tempe" employed by the rest of the world. My name rolled off LaManche's tongue as a high Parisian "Tempéronce."

"*Oui*." My brain kicked into French mode.

"Where are you?"

"Montreal."

"So I thought. Your trip was good?"

"As good as it gets."

"Air travel is not what it was."

"No."

"You will come early tomorrow?" I sensed tension in the old man's voice.

"Of course."

"A case has arrived that is …" Slight hitch. "… complicated."

“Complicated?”

“I think it best to explain personally.”

“Eight o’clock?”

“*C’est bon*.”

Disconnecting, I felt a vague sense of trepidation. LaManche rarely phoned me. When he did, it was never good news. Five bikers torched in a Blazer. A woman facedown in a senator’s pool. Four bodies in a crawl space.

LaManche had been a forensic pathologist for over thirty years, directed our medico-legal division for twenty of that. He knew I was scheduled back today, and that I’d report to the lab first thing in the morning. What could be so complicated that he felt the need to double check my availability?

Or so gruesome.

As I unpacked, shopped, stocked the fridge, and ate a salade Niçoise, my mind conjured up scenarios, each worse than the last.

Climbing into bed, I decided to bump my arrival to 7:30 A.M.

One upside to air travel is that it wears you out. Despite my apprehension, I drifted off during the eleven o’clock news.

The next day dawned as if auditioning for a travel brochure. Balmy. Breezy. Turquoise skies.

Having commuted to Quebec for more years than I care to admit, I was certain the climatic fluke would be short-lived. I wanted to bike in the country, picnic on the mountain, Rollerblade the path along the Lachine canal.

Anything but face LaManche’s “complicated” issue.

By seven-forty I was parked at the Édifice Wilfrid-Derome, a T-shaped high-rise in a working-class neighborhood just east of centre-ville. Here’s how the place works.

The Laboratoire de sciences judiciaires et de médecine légale, the LSJML, is the central crime and medico-legal lab for the entire province of Quebec. We've got the building's top two floors, twelve and thirteen. The Bureau du coroner is on ten and eleven. The morgue and autopsy suites are in the basement. The provincial police, La Sûreté du Québec, or SQ, occupies all other space.

Swiping my security card, I passed through metal gates, entered the restricted LSJML/ Coroner elevator, swiped again, and ascended with a dozen others mumbling "*Bonjour*" and "*Comment ça va?*" At that hour, "Good morning" and "How's it going?" are equally perfunctory no matter the language.

Four of us exited on the twelfth floor. After crossing the lobby, I swiped a second security card, and passed into the lab's working area. Through observation windows and open doors I could see secretaries booting computers, techs flipping dials, scientists and analysts donning lab coats. Everyone mainlining coffee.

Past the Xerox machines, I swiped again. Glass doors swooshed, and I entered the medico-legal wing.

The board showed four of five pathologists present. The box beside Michel Morin's name said: *Témoignage: Saint-Jérôme*. Testimony in Saint-Jérôme.

LaManche was at his desk, assembling the case list for that morning's staff meeting. Though I paused at his door, he remained hunched over his paperwork.

Continuing along the corridor, I passed pathology, histology, and anthropology/odontology labs on my left, pathologists' offices on my right. Pelletier. Morin. Santangelo. Ayers. Mine was last in the row.

More security. Good old-fashioned lock and key.

I'd been away a month. The place looked like I'd been gone since we occupied the building.

Window washers had displaced the framed pictures of my daughter, Katy, and all other memorabilia from the

windowsill to a filing cabinet top. Floor polishers had then placed the wastebasket and two plants on the conveniently emptied sill. New CSU coveralls and boots had been heaped on one chair, clean lab coats draped on another. My laminated Dubuffet poster had nosedived from the wall, taking out a pencil holder.

My desk was mounded with materials forwarded from my mail slot in the secretarial office. Letters. Fliers. Ads. In addition, I could identify the following: an updated list of personnel telephone extensions; four packets of prints from Section d'identité judiciaire photographers; two sets of antemortem X-rays and two medical dossiers; a copy of *Voir Dire*, the LSJML gossip sheet; and three demande d' expertise en anthropologie forms. Three requests for anthropological analysis.

After collecting the upended pens and pencils, I dropped into my chair, cleared a small section of desktop, and scanned the first form asking for my expertise.

Pathologist: M. Morin. Investigating officer: H. Perron, Service de police de la Ville de Montréal. SPVM. Formerly known as the Service de police de la Communauté urbaine de Montréal, or SPCUM, the SPVM are the city boys. Same force, new spin. *Nom: Inconnu*. Name: Unknown. Skipping over the LSJML, morgue, and police incident numbers, I went straight to the summary of known facts.

Skeletal parts had been bulldozed up at a construction site west of centre-ville. Could I determine if the bones were human? If human, the number of persons? Time since death? If recent, could I ascertain age, sex, race, and height, and describe individuating characteristics for each set of bones? Could I establish cause of death?

Typical forensic anthropology stuff.

The second form was also SPVM, city police. Emily Santangelo was the pathologist, and therefore coordinating all expertise concerning the cadaver. This case involved a house fire, an incinerated corpse, and a denture melted