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206 Bones

Kathy Reichs

Chapter 1

COLD.

Numb.

Confused.

I opened my eyes.

To dark. Black as arctic winter.

Am I dead?

Obeying some limbic command, I inhaled deeply.

Smells registered in my brain.

Mold. Musty earth. Something organic, hinting at the passage of time.

Was this hell? A tomb?

I listened.

Silence. Impenetrable.

But no. There were sounds. Air moving through my nostrils. Blood pounding in my ears.

Corpses don't breathe. Dead hearts don't beat.

Other sensations intruded. Hardness below me. Burning on the right side of my face.

I raised my head.

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Bitter bile flooded my mouth.

I shifted my hips to relieve pressure on my twisted neck.

Pain exploded up my left leg.

A groan shattered the stillness.

Instinctively, my body went fetal. The pounding gained volume.

I lay curled, listening to the rhythm of my fear.

Then, recognition. The sound had come from my own throat.

I feel pain. I react. I am alive.

But where?

Spitting bile, I tried reaching out. Felt resistance. Realized my wrists were bound.

I flexed a knee toward my chest, testing. My feet rose as one. My wrists dropped.

I tried a second time, harder. Neurons again fired up my leg. Stifling another cry, I struggled to force order onto my addled thinking. I'd been bound, hands to feet, and abandoned.Where?When? By whom?

Why?

A memory search for recent events came up empty. No. The void in recollection was longer than that.

I remembered picnicking with my daughter, Katy. But that was summer.

The frigid temperature now suggested that it must be winter.

Sadness. A last farewell to Andrew Ryan. That was October. Had I seen him again?

A bright red sweater at Christmas. This Christmas? I had no idea.

Disoriented, I groped for any detail from the past few days. Nothing stayed in focus.

Vague impressions lacking rational form or sequence appeared and faded.

A figure emerging from shadow. Man or woman? Anger. Shouting. About what? At whom?

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Melting snow. Light winking off glass. The dark maw of a cracked door.

Dilated vessels pounded inside my skull. Hard as I tried, I could not evoke recollection from my semiconscious mind.

Had I been drugged? Suffered a blow to the head?

How bad was my leg? If I managed to free myself, could I walk? Crawl?

My hands were numb, my fingers useless. I tried tugging my wrists outward.

Felt no give in my bindings.

Tears of frustration burned the backs of my lids.

No crying!

Clamping my jaw, I rolled to my back, raised my feet, and jerked my ankles apart. Flames roared up my left lower limb.

Then I knew nothing.

I awoke. Moments later? Hours? No way to tell. My mouth felt drier, my lips more parched. The pain in my leg had receded to a dull ache.

Though I gave my pupils time, they took in nothing. How could they adjust? The dense blackness offered not a sliver of light.

The same questions flooded back. Where? Why? Who?

Clearly, I'd been abducted. To be the victim in some sick game? To be removed as a threat?

The thought triggered my first clear memory. An autopsy photo. A corpse, charred and twisted, jaws agape in a final agonal scream.

Then a kaleidoscope sequence, image chasing image. Two morgues. Two autopsy rooms. Name plaques marking two labs. Temperance Brennan, Forensic Anthropologist. Temperance Brennan, Anthropologue Judiciaire.

Was I in Charlotte? Montreal? Far too cold for North Carolina. Even in winter. Was it winter? Was I in Quebec?

Had I been grabbed at home?On the street? In my car?Outside the Édifice Wilfrid-Derome? Inside the lab?

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Was my captor a random predator and I a random victim? Had I been targeted because of who I am? Revenge sought by a former accused? By a conspiracy-theorist next of kin? What case had I last been working?

Dear God, could it really be so cold? So dark? So still?

Why that smell, so disturbingly familiar?

As before, I tried wriggling my hands.My feet. To no avail. I was hog-tied, unable even to sit.

“Help! I’m here! Someone! Help me!”

Over and over I called out until my throat grew raw.

“Anyone! Please!”

My pleas went unanswered.

Panic threatened to overwhelm me.

You will not die helpless!

Trembling from cold and fear, and frantic to see, I shifted to my back and started bucking my hips, stretching my hands upward as far as possible, oblivious to the agony in my leg. One thrust. Two. Three. My fingertips scraped hardness little more than a foot above my face.

I lunged again.Made contact. Sediment cascaded into my eyes and mouth.

Spitting and blinking, I rolled onto my right side and shoved backward with one arm and both feet. The rough ground abraded the skin on my elbow and heels. One ankle screamed in protest. I didn’t care. I had to move. Had to get out.

I’d advanced a very short distance when I encountered a wall. Rectangular contours surrounded by mortar. Brick.

Heart hammering, I rolled to my other side and inched in the opposite direction. Again, I soon hit a wall.

Adrenaline flooded my body as terror piggybacked onto terror.My gut curdled.

My lungs drew great heaving breaths.

My prison was no more than thirty inches high and six feet wide! Its length

didn’t matter. Already I felt the walls pressing in.

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I lost control.

Scooching forward, I began yelling and beating the brick with my fists.

Tears streamed down my cheeks. Over and over I called out, hoping to attract the attention of a passerby. A worker. A dog. Anyone.

When my knuckles grew raw I attacked with the heels of my hands.

When I could no longer flail with my arms, I rolled and lashed out with my feet.

Pain ripped from my ankle. Too much pain. My calls for help morphed into agonized moans.

Defeated, I fell back, panting, sweat cooling on my icy flesh.

A parade of faces marched through my mind. Katy. Ryan. My sister, Harry. My cat, Birdie. My ex-husband, Pete.

Would I never see them again?

Great heaving sobs racked my chest.

Perhaps I lost consciousness. Perhaps not. My next awareness was of sound.

A noise outside my body. Not of my making.

I froze.

Tick. Tick. Tick. Tick. Tick.

A cerebral crack opened.

Memory slipped through.

Chapter 2

ANOTHER WRISTWATCH CHECK. ANOTHER SIGH. MORE SHIFTING

feet.

Above us, a wall clock ticked steadily, indifferent to Ryan's restlessness.

It was the old-fashioned analog kind, round, with a sweep second hand that jumped in one-second increments with sharp little clicks.

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I surveyed my surroundings. Same plastic plant. Same bad print of a street scene in winter. Same half-empty mugs of tepid coffee. Phone. LCD projector. Screen. Laser pointer. Nothing new had magically appeared since I last looked.

Back to the clock. A logo identified the manufacturer as Enterprise.Or perhaps that was a name for this particular model.

Did people christen timepieces? Arnie Analog? Reggie Regulator?

OK. I was as edgy as Ryan. And very, very bored.

Tick. Tick. Tick. Tick. Tick.

Old Enterprise said it was ten twenty-two. Oh-six. Oh-seven. Oheight.

We'd been waiting since nine o'clock.

Finger-drumming recommenced on the tabletop. Ryan had been performing off and on for thirty minutes. The staccato beat was getting on my nerves.

"He'll meet with us as soon as he can," I said.

"Our coming here was his idea."

"Yes."

"How do you lose a stiff in a morgue?"

"You heard Corcoran. They've got over two hundred bodies. The facility is overstretched."

While I have been described as impatient, Lieutenant-détective Andrew Ryan, Section des crimes contre la personne, Sûreté duQuébec, takes the term to a whole new plane. I knew the routine. Soon he'd be pacing.

Ryan and I were in a conference room at the Office of the Cook County Medical Examiner, on Chicago's West Side. We'd flown from Montreal at the request of Christopher Corcoran, a staff pathologist with the CCME.

More than three years earlier, a fifty-nine-year-old woman named Rose Jurmain had taken a trip from Chicago to Quebec to view the fall foliage.On the fourth day of her visit she'd left her country inn for a walk and never returned. Her belongings remained behind in her room. No one saw or heard from her again.

Thirty months later remains were discovered in a forested area half a mile north of the inn. Decomposition was advanced and animal damage was extensive. I'd done the ID. Ryan had led the investigation. Now he and I were bringing Rose home.

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Why the personal service? For me, friendship with Corcoran and an excuse to visit the old hometown. For Ryan? A free trip to theWindy City.

For Chris Corcoran and his boss? That would be one of my very first questions. Surely a CCME employee could have come to Montreal to collect the remains. Or a transport service. Until now the family had shown no interest in what was left of Rose Jurmain.

And why the request for our presence in Chicago nine months after resolution of the case? The Bureau du coroner had ruled Rose's death an accident.Why the special interest now?

Despite my curiosity, so far there'd been no time for questions. Ryan and I had arrived to find media vans lining Harrison Street and the facility in lockdown.

While parking us in the conference room, Corcoran had provided a quick explanation. The previous day, a funeral home had attempted to collect a body for cremation. Inexplicably, the corpse was nowhere to be found.

All hands were engaged in crisis control. The chief was spinning for the press. A frantic search was under way. And Ryan and I were cooling our heels.

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