



A girl  
goes  
missing.

A killer  
returns.

# Kathy Reichs

## BONES NEVER LIE

THE SUNDAY TIMES NO. 1 BESTSELLER

# BONES NEVER LIE

As a forensic anthropologist to the province of Quebec, Canada, Kathy Reichs has often said that she works *with* the dead, but *for* the living.

Forensics are an integral part of her world, with cases constantly coming in to her lab. And yet her chosen profession is, she says, like any other job. However, though you may get used to what's happening around you, and to the sounds and smells and sights of death, this doesn't mean you become immune to it.

Each of her books is based loosely on the cases she's worked on, or an experience she's had. She believes that her stories remain fresh because they originate from her being enmeshed and engaged in forensic work on a regular basis.

Kathy Reichs is one of only eighty-two forensic anthropologists ever certified by the American Board of Forensic Anthropology. She served on the Board of Directors and as Vice President of both the American Academy of Forensic Sciences and the American Board of Forensic Anthropology, and is currently a member of the National Police Services Advisory Council in Canada. She is a Professor in the Department at the University of North Carolina–Charlotte. She is a native of Chicago, where she received her PhD at Northwestern. She now divides her time between Charlotte, NC and Montreal, Quebec.

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'Reichs' real-life expertise gives her novels an authenticity that most other crime novelists would kill for'  
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'Reichs is the queen of pathology thrillers'  
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'Completely engrossing ... drags the reader into a different world where dialogue is tense, dead men tell the best tales and the ice will freeze the bones. Read this and you'll know why the word "thriller" was invented'  
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*Publishers Weekly*

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*Spider Bones* (published as *Mortal Remains* in hardback in the UK)

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**Kathy  
Reichs**

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NEVER LIE**



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*For*  
*Alice Taylor Reichs*  
*born August 3, 2012*  
*and*  
*Miles Aivars Mixon*  
*born August 11, 2012*



# Part One



# 1

I received the message first thing Monday morning. Honor Barrow needed me at an unscheduled meeting.

Not what I wanted, with cold germs rolling up their sleeves in my head.

Nevertheless, coming off a weekend of Sudafed, Afrin, and lemon-honey tea, instead of finishing a report on a putrefied biker, I joined a billion others slogging uptown in rush-hour traffic.

By seven-forty-five, I was parked at the back of the Law Enforcement Center. The air was cool and smelled of sun-dried leaves—I assumed. My nose was so clogged, I couldn't sniff out the difference between a tulip and a trash can.

The Democrats had held their quadrennial soirée in Charlotte in 2012. Tens of thousands came to praise or protest and to nominate a candidate. The city had spent \$50 million on security, and as a result, the ground floor of the Law Enforcement Center, once an

open lobby, now looked like the bridge of the starship *Enterprise*. Circular wooden barrier. Bulletproof glass. Monitors displaying the building's every scar and pimple, inside and out.

After signing the register, I swiped my security card and rode to the second floor.

Barrow was passing as the elevator hummed to a stop and opened. Beyond him, through the door he was entering, arrows on a green background directed *Crimes Against Property* to the left, *Crimes Against Persons* to the right. Above the arrows, the hornet's-nest symbol of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department.

"Thanks for coming in." Barrow barely broke stride.

"No problem." Except for the kettledrums in my head and the fire in my throat.

I followed Barrow through the door, and we both turned right.

Detectives crowded the corridor in both directions, most in shirtsleeves and ties, one in khaki pants and a navy golf shirt featuring the intrepid wasp logo. Each carried coffee and a whole lot of firepower.

Barrow disappeared into a room on the left marked by a second green sign: 2220: *Violent Crimes Division*. Homicide and assault with a deadly.

I continued straight, past a trio of interview rooms. From the nearest, a baritone bellowed indignation in strikingly inharmonious terms.

Ten yards down I entered a room identified as 2101: *Homicide Cold Case Unit*.

A gray table and six chairs took up most of the square footage. A copy machine. File cabinets. White erasable board and brown corkboards on the walls. In the rear, a low-rise divider set off a desk holding the usual phone, mug, withered plant, and overfilled in- and out-baskets. A window threw rectangles of sunlight across the blotter.

Not a soul in sight. I glanced at the wall clock. 7:58. Seriously? Only I had arrived on time?

Head pounding and slightly peeved, I dropped into a chair and placed my shoulder bag at my feet.

On the table were a laptop, a cardboard carton, and a plastic tub. Both containers bore numbers on their covers. The ones on the tub were in a format familiar to me: 090430070901. The file dated to April 30, 2009. A single call had come in at 7:09 A.M.

The numbering system on the carton was different. I assumed the case was from another jurisdiction.

A bit of background.

The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department had roughly five hundred unsolved murders dating back to 1970. Recognizing that this was a lot of bodies and a lot of folks waiting for justice, in 2003 the CMPD established a cold case unit.

Honor Barrow, twenty years at the murder table, had run the CCU since its inception. The other full-timers included a police sergeant and an FBI agent. A volunteer review team composed of three retired FBI agents, a retired NYPD cop, a civilian academic, and a

civilian engineer provided support in the form of pre-investigation triage and analysis. The cold case unit regulars gathered monthly.

As a forensic anthropologist, I work with the not so recently dead. No secret why I was sometimes invited to the dance. But I usually got a heads-up about why my presence was being requested. A query concerning a set of remains. A question about bones, trauma, or decomposition.

Not this time.

Impatient, and curious why I'd been summoned, I drew the tub to me and pried off the lid. Inside were hundreds of pages separated by dividers. I knew the headings on each of the tabs. Victimology. Summary of the Crime. Crime Scene Report. Evidence/Property Recovered/Analyzed. Medical Examiner's Report. Witnesses. Related Investigation. Potential Suspects. Recommended Follow-up.

Lying across the files was a case review summary written by Claire Melani, a criminologist and colleague at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. I flipped to the first section of her report. And felt my neck muscles tense.

Before I could read further, voices sounded in the hall. Moments later, Barrow appeared with a guy looking like something off the cover of a survivalist manual. Washed-out jeans. Faded army jacket over long-sleeved red tee. Dark hair curling from below a neon-orange cap.

I replaced the report in its tub. "Everyone stuck in traffic?"

"I didn't invite the volunteer team."

Though that surprised me, I said nothing.

Barrow noticed my gaze shift to the survivalist and introduced him. "Detective Rodas is down from Vermont."

"Umparo. Umpie to my friends." Self-deprecating smile. "Both of them."

Rodas extended a hand. I took it. Umpie's grip matched his appearance, rough and strong.

As Barrow and Rodas took seats, a familiar figure framed up in the doorway. Erskine "Skinny" Slidell, cop legend in his own mind.

Can't say Slidell's presence thrilled me. Since Skinny works homicide, and I work the morgue, we are often thrown together. Over the years our relationship has had more ups and downs than a polygraph chart. His manner is often grating, but the man clears cases.

Slidell stretched both hands in a "What gives?" gesture and drew in one wrist to look at his watch. Subtle.

"Glad you could pry yourself free from the computer porn." Smiling, Barrow hooked a chair free from the table with one foot.

"That sister of yours does love a camera." Cushions *hoofed* as Slidell deposited his substantial *derrière*.

Barrow partnered with Slidell back in the eighties

and, unlike most, claimed to have enjoyed the experience. Probably their shared concept of witty repartee.

Barrow had just introduced Rodas and Slidell to each other when the door swung out. A man I didn't recognize entered the room. He had a weak chin and a too-long nose and, standing ramrod, matched me in height. His polyester shirt, tie, and off-the-rack suit suggested midlevel management. His demeanor screamed cop. The four of us watched as polyester man took a place at the table.

"Agent Tinker is SBI." Barrow's reference to the State Bureau of Investigation conveyed zero warmth.

I'd heard of Beau Tinker. Intel had him as a narrow thinker with a mile-wide ego. And a player with the ladies.

"Don't seem like such a long drive was warranted." Slidell spoke without looking up from the fingers laced on his belly.

Tinker regarded Slidell with eyes as gray and bland as unpolished pewter. "I'm right up the road at the Harrisburg field office."

Slidell's jaw muscles bulged, but he said nothing.

Like everywhere else on the planet, North Carolina has its share of interagency rivalries. Sheriff's, campus, airport, and port police versus local PD's. The state versus the city boys. The feds versus the world.

Except for some offenses in which it's required—

such as drug trafficking, arson, gambling, and election fraud—SBI involvement in criminal investigations was usually at the request of local departments. The chill coming from Barrow and Slidell suggested no such invite had been issued.

Was Rodas the draw? If so, why the interest in Raleigh about a case from Vermont?

Slidell considers himself a hot property in the homicide squad. Too hot to gasbag around a table, as he'd once put it. I also wondered why he was here.

I remembered the file in the plastic tub.

I glanced over at Slidell. His gaze was up now, aimed at Tinker with the kind of expression normally reserved for pedophiles and mold.

Did the hostility go beyond turf issues? Did Slidell share history with Tinker? Or was Skinny just being Skinny?

Barrow's voice cut into my thoughts. "I'm going to let Detective Rodas start off."

Barrow leaned back and repositioned the neck chain holding his badge. He often reminded me of a large leathery turtle. Skin dark and crinkled as that on a shrunken head, eyes wide-set and bulgy above a pointed little nose.

Rodas opened the carton, withdrew a stack of reports, and slid one to each of us. "Sorry if my style's less formal than yours." His voice was deep and gruff, the kind you associate with white cheddar and the Green Mountain Boys. "I'll give you the

rundown, then take questions on anything that's unclear."

I started flipping through pages. Heard Tinker and Slidell doing the same.

"Between two-thirty and three P.M., on October 18, 2007, a twelve-year-old white female named Nellie Gower disappeared while riding her bicycle home from school. Six hours later, the bike was found on a rural two-lane a quarter mile from the Gower farm."

A nuance in tone caused me to look up. Rodas's Adam's apple made a round-trip before he continued. "Nellie's body was discovered eight days later at a granite quarry four miles outside town."

I noted that Rodas was using the child's name, not depersonalizing, as cops often do—the kid, the vic. It didn't take Freud to recognize that Rodas was emotionally invested in the case.

"The ME found no signs of trauma or sexual assault. The child was fully clothed. Manner of death went down as homicide, cause as unknown. The scene yielded nothing. Ditto the body. No tire tracks, no trace, no blood or saliva, no forensics at all.

"The usual persons were interviewed—registered sex offenders, parents and relatives, friends, friends' families, neighbors, babysitters, a Girl Scout leader, those working at the school, the church, the community center. Anyone with even the remotest link to the victim."

Rodas dug spirals of bound three-by-fives from the tub and winged them around the table croupier-style. Went silent as each of us viewed the grim cards we'd been dealt.

The first several prints showed the quarry. A leaden sky overhung an expanse of rock and soil bereft of trees. On the left, a gravel road climbed from the foreground toward a ragged horizon.

Temporary barricades had been set up along the road. Parked behind them were cars, pickups, and media vans. Drivers and passengers stood in twos and threes. Some conversing, others staring across the sawhorses or looking at the ground. A number wore T-shirts printed with the words *Find Nellie* above the face of a smiling adolescent.

I knew the players. Samaritans who'd devoted hours to searching and to answering phones. Gawkers eager for a glimpse of a body bag. Journalists seeking the best slant on another human tragedy.

Inside the barrier were cruisers, a crime scene truck, a coroner's van, and a pair of unmarked cars, each angled as though suddenly frozen in flight. I recognized the usual responders. Evidence and coroner's techs. A woman in a windbreaker with *Medical Examiner* printed in yellow block letters on the back. Cops in uniform, one with his head cocked to speak into a shoulder radio.

A canopy had been erected at center stage. Below the blue plastic, yellow tape stretched from pole to pole,

forming a rough rectangle. Enclosed in the rectangle was a painfully small mound. Rodas squatted beside it, face grim, notepad in hand.

The next series focused on the child. Nellie Gower lay on her back, legs straight, arms tight to her torso. Her red wool jacket was zipped to her chin. Her sneaker laces were looped in symmetrical bows. The bottom of a polka-dot blouse was neatly tucked into bright pink jeans.

Several photos framed the face printed on the tees. No smile now.

Nellie's hair covered her shoulders in long chocolate waves. I noted that it was parted down the center of her scalp and evenly draped, as though combed and arranged.

Eight days of exposure had wrought the inevitable. The child's features were bloated, her skin mottled purple and green. A maggot mass filled her mouth and each of her nostrils.

The last three shots were close-ups of the child's right hand. Dotting the palm were traces of a filmy white substance.

"What's that?" I asked.

"CSS bagged both hands. The ME swabbed her skin and scraped under her nails. The trace guys thought it might have been remnants of a tissue."

I nodded, still staring at the photos. Synapses were firing in my brain. I remembered another child. Another set of heartbreaking photos.

I knew why I'd been called. Why Skinny was here. "Sonofabitch."

Rodas ignored Slidell's outburst. "We got a few leads, phone tips, a witness saying a teacher showed unusual interest in Nellie, a neighbor claiming he saw her in a truck with a bearded man. Nothing panned out. Eventually, the case went cold. We're a small department. I had to move on. You know how it is."

Rodas looked at Slidell, then Barrow. Met eyes that knew only too well. "But it ate at me. Kid like that. Whenever I had spare time, I'd pull the file, hoping to spot something I missed."

Again, the Adam's-apple bob. "According to all accounts, Nellie was timid. Careful. Not likely to go with a stranger. We all believed the perp was local. Someone she knew. I guess we got channeled on that."

"Last year I figured what the hell. Think outside the box. I tried VICAP."

Rodas was referring to the FBI's Violent Criminal Apprehension Program, a national database maintained to collect and analyze information about homicides, sexual assaults, missing persons, and other violent crimes. The repository contains approximately 150,000 open and closed investigations submitted by some 3,800 state and local agencies, and includes cold cases dating as far back as the 1950s.

"I entered what we had, MO, signature aspects, crime scene descriptors and photos, victim details. Took weeks to get a response. Then damned if our

profile didn't match an unsolved here in Charlotte."

"The Nance kid." Slidell spoke through barely parted lips.

"Never got a collar on that one." Tinker's first words since telling Slidell he was posted locally.

Slidell opened his mouth to reply. Apparently reconsidered and closed it.

I glanced at the tub. 090430070901. Lizzie Nance. Skinny's own gut-eating failure.

On April 17, 2009, Elizabeth Ellen "Lizzie" Nance left a ballet class, heading for her mother's apartment three blocks away. She never made it home. Media coverage was massive. Hundreds turned out to answer tip lines, post flyers, and search the woods and ponds near Lizzie's complex. To no avail.

Two weeks after Lizzie's disappearance, a decomposed body was found at a nature preserve northwest of Charlotte. The corpse lay supine with feet together, arms tucked to its sides. A black leotard, tights, and pink cotton underwear still wrapped the putrefied flesh. Bright blue Crocs still covered the feet. Residue found under a thumbnail was identified later as common facial tissue.

Slidell led the homicide investigation. I analyzed the bones.

Though I spent days bending over a scope, I spotted not a single nick, cut, or fracture anywhere on the skeleton. Tim Larabee, the Mecklenburg County medical examiner, was unable to establish definitively

whether sexual assault had occurred. Manner of death went down as homicide, cause as unknown.

Lizzie Nance died when she was eleven years old.

“Fortunately, Honor had also entered his unsolved. The system picked up the similarities.” Rodas raised both hands. “So here I am.”

A moment of silence filled the room. Tinker broke it. “That’s it? Two girls roughly the same age? Still wearing their clothes?”

No one responded.

“Wasn’t the Nance kid too far gone to exclude rape?”

Palming the table, Slidell leaned toward Tinker. I cut him off.

“The autopsy report noted complicating factors. But the child’s clothing was in place, and Dr. Larabee was confident in concluding there’d been no rape.”

Tinker shrugged, not realizing or not caring that his cavalier attitude was offending everyone. “Seems weak.”

“It’s not just the VICAP profile that brings me to Charlotte,” Rodas continued. “By the time we found Nellie, her body had been rained on for a day and a half. Her clothes were saturated with a mixture of water and decomp runoff. Though not optimistic, I submitted everything to our forensics lab up in Waterbury for testing. To my surprise, some DNA had survived.”

“All hers,” Slidell guessed.

“Yes.” Rodas placed his forearms on the table and leaned in. “Eighteen months ago, I went over the file yet again. This time I caught something I thought could be a break. The residue from Nellie’s hand hadn’t been submitted with her clothing. I phoned the ME; she found the scrapings taken at autopsy by her predecessor. Knowing it was a long shot, I had her send them up to Waterbury.”

Rodas looked straight at me.

I looked straight back.

“The material contained DNA not belonging to Nellie.”

“You sent the profile through the system?” Tinker asked the unnecessary question.

Rodas chin-cocked the report in my hands. “Take a look at the section marked ‘Updated DNA Results,’ Dr. Brennan.”

Curious why I’d been singled out, I did as instructed.

Read a name.

Felt the flutter of adrenaline hitting my gut.

## 2

The report was short, printed in both French and English.

Struggling to make sense of it, I reread the closing paragraph. In both languages.

A match was obtained on DNA sample 7426 to Canadian national number 64899, identified as Anique Pomerleau, W/F, DOB: 12/10/75. The subject is currently not in custody.

Anique Pomerleau.

My eyes rose to Rodas. His were still fixed on me. "You can imagine how amped I was. Years of nothing, then I get word they've sequenced DNA that isn't Nellie's. I told the analyst to shoot the profile through CODIS."

Like VICAP, the Combined DNA Index System is a database maintained by the FBI. CODIS stores DNA

profiles and uses two indexes to generate investigative leads.

The convicted offender index contains profiles of individuals convicted of crimes ranging from misdemeanors to sexual assault and murder. The forensic index contains profiles obtained from crime scene evidence, such as semen, saliva, or blood. When a detective or analyst enters an unknown profile, the CODIS software electronically searches both indexes for a potential match.

A match within the forensic index links crimes to one another, possibly identifying serial offenders. Based on a “forensic hit,” police in multiple jurisdictions can coordinate their investigations and share leads. A match between the forensic index and the convicted offender index provides investigators with an “offender hit.” A suspect. A name.

Anique Pomerleau.

“She’s not American.” *Lame*, but that’s what I said. What I meant was, how did Rodas get a match to a Canadian citizen? Our neighbors above the forty-ninth use the CODIS software but maintain their own national repository of DNA data.

“We came up blank in the U.S., so I decided to send the profile north. It’s not uncommon. Hardwick is less than an hour’s drive from the border.” Rodas pointed at the report I was holding. “That’s from the Canadian National DNA Data Bank.”

I knew that. In the course of my work at the

Laboratoire de sciences judiciaires et de médecine légale in Montreal, I'd seen dozens of these reports. The pseudoephedrine and oxymetazoline I'd taken for my cold were short-circuiting my ability to articulate clearly. "How did you make the connection to me?" I clarified.

"The hit was in Canada, so it seemed logical to start there. I have a buddy at the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. He ran the name and found an Anique Pomerleau who fit the identifiers. Pomerleau is wanted by the Sûreté du Québec on a warrant dating to 2004."

"Hold on. You're saying that five years after the Canadians are looking for this chick, she leaves DNA on a dead kid in Vermont?" Tinker, king of compassion.

"The lead detective still works there, but apparently, he went AWOL recently." Rodas gave a wry smile. "I got the feeling that was a story in itself."

I felt a soft pulsing in my wrist. Stared at the delicate blue vein worming under my skin.

"No one remembered much about the perp or the case. But a coroner hooked me up with a pathologist who's been around forever. Pierre LaManche.

"LaManche told me Pomerleau was a suspect in the deaths of several young girls. Said her accomplice was a guy named Neal Wesley Catts. Back in '04, Catts either shot himself or Pomerleau killed him. Then she vanished.

"I told LaManche about the DNA found on Nellie Gower's hand and about the VICAP match to your

unsolved here in Charlotte. He advised me to contact Dr. Brennan."

Anique Pomerleau.

The monster.

The only one who ever got away.

I kept my face blank. My eyes focused on the vessel snaking my flesh.

"You're thinking Pomerleau did both Gower and the Nance kid." Tinker, again stating the obvious.

"I think it's a possibility."

"Where's she been all this time?"

"We sent out a BOLO." Be on the lookout. "So did the SQ, though I didn't feel a lot of love there. Can't really blame them. It's been ten years. Pomerleau's maybe dead, maybe using an alias, and the only pic they have dates to 1989."

I remembered. It was the only photo we had. Taken when Pomerleau was around fifteen.

"So. After Montreal, Pomerleau goes to ground for three years, then resurfaces and grabs a kid in Vermont." From his tone, I knew Slidell was rolling the theory past his own ears.

"Last I checked, North Carolina's a few miles from the tundra," Tinker said. "How'd Pomerleau end up here?" When no one responded, he pressed on. "DNA links this Pomerleau to the Gower kid. But what links Gower to Nance? I said it before, and I'll say it again. It's sad, but kids are murdered every day. What makes you so sure we're looking at one doer?"

The pressure in my sinuses suddenly felt explosive. Discreetly, I pressed a hand to one cheek. My skin was fiery hot. Was the virus upping the ante? Or was it the shock of what I was hearing?

As I reached for a tissue to blow my nose, Rodas ticked off points, beginning with his right thumb. “Both victims were female. Both were eleven to fourteen years of age. Both vanished during daylight from a public road—a highway, a city street. Both were left on the surface in an unprotected setting—a quarry, a field. Both bodies were lying faceup, with arms and legs straight, hair carefully arranged.”

“Posed,” Barrow said.

“Definitely.”

Rodas shifted to his left hand. “Both victims were clothed. Both had remnants of tissue on their fingers. Neither showed evidence of trauma. Neither showed evidence of sexual assault.” He withdrew a plastic sleeve from his carton and put it on the table. Inside was a white-bordered five-by-seven color print.

Barrow dug a similar print from the tub and placed it beside Rodas’s. As one, we leaned forward to view them.

The photos were undoubtedly school portraits. The kind we all sat for as kids. The kind kids still take home every year. The backgrounds differed. A tree trunk versus rippled red velvet. But each subject looked straight at the camera with the same awkward smile.

"I got to admit," Tinker admitted, "they are of a type."

"Of a type?" Slidell pooched air through his lips. "They look like friggin' clones."

"Both victims were roughly the same height and weight," Rodas said. "No bangs. No glasses. No braces, which I'd guess are fairly common in that age group."

It was true. Both girls had fair skin, fine features, and long dark hair center-parted and drawn back from the face. Gower had hers tucked behind her ears.

I looked at Lizzie Nance. At the face I'd studied a thousand times. Noted the dusting of caramel freckles. The red plastic bow at the end of each braid. The hint of mischief in the wide green eyes.

And felt the same sorrow. The same frustration. But new emotions were stirring the mix.

Unbidden, images genied up in my mind. An emaciated body curled fetal on a makeshift bench. Yellow-orange flames dancing on a wall. Blood-spattered crystal casting slow-turning shadows across a dimly lit parlor.

My gaze drifted past Slidell toward the back of the room.

Though I couldn't see the view from where I was seated, I knew the window looked out over the parking lot. And the buildings of uptown. And the interstate snaking through the power grids of the Northeast. And the far distant Canadian border. And

a dead-end street beside an abandoned railroad yard.  
Rue de Sébastopol.

The sound of silence brought me back to the present.

“You need a break?” Barrow was studying me with an odd expression. They all were.

I nodded, rose quickly, and left the room.

As I hurried up the hall, more images popped. A dog collar circling a willowy neck. Dark refugee eyes, round and terrified in a morgue-white face.

I locked the lavatory door, crossed to the sink, and held my hands under the faucet. Watched and didn’t watch as water ran over them. A full minute.

Then I cupped my fingers and drank.

Finally, I straightened and looked in the mirror. A woman looked back, knuckles white as the porcelain she was clutching.

I studied the face. Not young, not old. Hair ash blond but showing gray feelers. Eyes emerald green. Revealing what? Grief? Rage? Congestion and fever?

“Pull yourself together.” The reflected lips mouthed the words. “Do your job. Nail the bitch.”

I shut off the tap. Yanked paper towels from the dispenser and dried my face. Blew my nose.

Returned to the CCU squad room.

“—just saying it’s unusual to find no sexual component.” Tinker sounded steamed.

I resumed my seat.

“Who knows what’s sexual to these fuckwads.”

Slidell slumped back in his chair, dragging a balled fist across the tabletop.

"If the perp's female, we could be looking at a whole different ball game," Tinker said.

"Yeah, well, it's *our* ball game," Slidell snapped. After a pause, "Gower was 2007."

"So?"

Slidell slid Tinker a withering look. "Gower was 2007. So there's a three-year gap between Vermont and what went down earlier in Montreal. Another year and a half goes by and Nance is grabbed here."

"What's your point?"

"Time line, you dumb shit." Slidell shot to his feet before Tinker could fire off a cutting retort. "I'm done here."

"Let's call it a morning." Barrow, trying to defuse what was escalating toward open combat. "We'll reconvene when Detective Slidell and the doc have reviewed the Nance file."

A look passed between Barrow and Slidell. Then Skinny was gone.

"Send in the clowns." Giving a tight shake of his head, Tinker pushed up from his chair.

Rodas watched Tinker disappear through the door before eyebrowing a question at Barrow. Barrow gestured at him to stay put. Rodas settled back. So did I.

Slidell reappeared minutes later, a manila folder in one hand. Attached to the folder was a snapshot.

Dropping into the closest chair, Slidell thumbed off the paper clip and placed the photo beside the two school portraits.

I felt adrenaline flutter anew.

The girl had brown eyes and light olive skin. Her long chestnut hair was center-parted and drawn up in combs. I guessed her age at twelve to thirteen.

"Michelle Leal. Goes by Shelly," Slidell said. "Thirteen. Lives with her parents and two siblings in Plaza-Midwood. Last Friday afternoon the mother sent her to a convenience store at Central and Morningside. She bought milk and M&M's around four-fifteen. Never made it home."

I'd spent most of the weekend zoned out on cold meds, drifting off quickly every time I turned on the TV. I recalled vague fragments of news reports on a missing child, video of a search team, a mother's teary appeal.

Now I was seeing that little girl's face.

"She hasn't turned up?" I swallowed.

"No," Slidell said.

"You think it's related."

"Look at her. And the MO fits."

I glanced up. Met Barrow's eyes. "You think I'm the draw," I said evenly.

Barrow tried a comforting smile. It didn't work out.

"You think Pomerleau learned where I live, came here, and killed Lizzie Nance. And now she's taken Shelly Leal."

"We have to consider the possibility," Barrow said quietly.

"That's why you asked me here this morning."

"That's one reason." Barrow paused. "With cold cases, we've got all the time in the world. No pressure from the public, the media, the guys up the pay scale. That won't be the situation with Shelly Leal."

I nodded.

"Maybe the kid's already dead," Slidell said. "Maybe not. Gower was found eight days after she was snatched. If Leal is alive, we may be looking at a real narrow window."

Barrow jumped back in. "You're familiar with Pomerleau's thinking, her way of operating."

"I'm an anthropologist, not a psychologist."

Barrow raised both palms. "Understood. But you were there. That's one reason we need your help."

"And the other?"

"A detective named Andrew Ryan was lead on the Pomerleau investigation. Word is you know the guy personally."

Heat rushed my face. I hadn't seen that one coming.

"We want you to find him."

### 3

"I do not keep track of Detective Ryan's whereabouts."

My heart was still sending blood to my cheeks. I hated it. Hated that I was so easy to read.

Barrow had a habit of clearing his throat. He did it now. "You've worked with this Ryan a long time, right?"

I nodded.

"Do you know why he dropped off the grid?"

"His daughter died."

"Suddenly?"

"Yes." OD'd in a heroin den.

"Age?"

"Twenty."

"That would knock anyone off the rails."

I glanced down at my watch. Reflex. I knew the time.

"It's been almost two months, and no one has a clue where this Ryan has gone."

I said nothing.

"He ever talk about favorite getaways? Places he wanted to visit? Places he'd gone on vacation?"

"Ryan is not the vacationing type."

"The guy has quite a reputation." Rodas grinned. "Way they *parlez-vous* up there, he's cleared every homicide since the Black Dahlia."

"Elizabeth Short was killed in L.A."

The burn of embarrassment also colored Rodas's cheeks. Or something did.

"Ryan worked Pomerleau," Barrow said. "We could really use his input."

"Good luck." Testy, but I don't respond well to pressure.

"LaManche had the impression that you and Ryan were close."

I managed to curb my impulse to get up and leave.

"Sorry. That came out wrong."

*No, Detective Rodas, that came out right. Ryan and I share more than murder. We share memories, affection. We once shared a bed.*

"What I meant was, LaManche thought if anyone could find Ryan, it would be you."

"Bring him in from the cold?"

"Yeah."

"That only happens in books."

Original files never leave the CCU squad room. After telling Slidell, Barrow, and Rodas everything I

could remember about Anique Pomerleau, I set about photocopying the contents of the plastic tub.

Slidell went to take a call. He never came back.

Shortly before one, my mobile rang. Tim Larabee wanted me to examine remains found in the trunk of a Subaru at an auto salvage yard.

My head felt like lead, my throat like hot gravel. And I was about to pass out from toner fumes.

Screw it.

I delivered a duplicate of the Nance file to Slidell's desk. Then I got a box, loaded my own copy, and left.

Instead of heading to the ME facility west of uptown, I called Larabee to beg off, citing plague as an excuse. Then I pointed my Mazda toward an enclave of overpriced homes set beneath trees so large, their summer foliage turned the streets into tunnels. Myers Park. My 'hood.

In minutes, I turned off Queens Road onto a circular drive that swooped up to the pompous brick Georgian reigning over Sharon Hall. My complex.

I continued past the carriage house to a tiny two-story structure tucked in one corner of the grounds. The "annex," date of birth and original purpose unknown. My home.

I let myself in and called out, "Hey, Bird."

No cat.

I thumped the box on the counter and looked around the kitchen. The shutters were angled down, casting long golden slashes across the oak floor.

The refrigerator hummed. Otherwise, the place was quiet as a crypt.

I pushed through a swinging door, crossed the dining room, and climbed to the second floor.

Birdie was curled on my bed. He lifted his head from his paws at the sound of movement. Looked startled. Maybe irked. Hard to tell with felines.

I tossed my purse to the chair, then my clothes. After pulling on sweats, I downed two decongestant tabs and slipped under the covers.

Eyes closed, I listened to familiar sounds, trying not to think about Anique Pomerleau. Trying not to think about Andrew Ryan. The steady *dip dip dip* of the bathroom faucet. The soft *scree scree* of a magnolia branch scraping the screen. The rhythmic *prrrrr* of air flowing past Birdie's vocal cords.

Journey burst into song. "Don't stop believin' . . ."

My lids flew open.

The room was dim. A thin rectangle of gray outlined the shade.

"Hold on . . ."

I rolled to my side. The glowing orange digits on the clock said 4:45.

I groaned.

The music ended abruptly. I stumbled to my purse, yanked out my iPhone, and checked caller ID.

Groaned again.

Dropping onto the edge of the bed, I hit callback.

Slidell picked up right away. Background noise suggested he was in a car. "Yo."

"You phoned."

"Tell me this ain't some new epidemic?"

My drug-clogged brain could do nothing with that.

"First Ryan takes a powder, then you."

Seriously? "You're welcome for the photocopies," I said.

Slidell made a noise I took to mean thanks.

"You pulled your own disappearing act." I yanked a tissue from the box and held it to my nose.

"Had to check out a lead on the Leal thing."

"What lead?"

"Guy walking on Morningside Friday afternoon spotted a kid getting into a car. Said she looked upset."

"Meaning?"

"Meaning the moron's got the IQ of lentil soup. But the time line fits, and the guy's sketch of the kid skews right."

"Did he get the license?"

"Two digits. What the hell's wrong with your voice?"

"It could be a break."

"Or it could be the toad's hallucinating."

"What's with you and Tinker?"

"Guy's like something crawled out of a saucer at Roswell."

Slidell's negativity didn't surprise me. His knowledge of the alleged UFO incident did.

Kathy Reichs

“Is it just that Tinker’s state?”

“It’s all bullshit.”

“What do you mean?”

“The SBI’s taken a real hosing in the press lately. Now some asshole in Raleigh’s decided a clear on a serial involving kids is just the spit shine they need.”

Beginning in 2010, the SBI had been rocked by a scandal involving the serology and bloodstain units in its forensics lab. The North Carolina attorney general commissioned an investigation, and the conclusions were blistering. Faulty lab reports. Failure to report contradictory results. A unit director who lied about his training, perhaps perjured himself. Prosecutorial bias up the wazoo.

Defense attorneys throughout the state did the happy dance.

Appeals were submitted. Convictions were overturned. The ensuing avalanche of litigation was expected to cost North Carolina millions.

The media went batshit.

In the end, heads rolled, including that of the lab director. The legislature enacted a number of reforms. Procedures and policies were revamped. The accreditation process was changed. The SBI was still battling to restore credibility.

Was Slidell right? Was the bureau inserting itself into our investigation in an attempt to rehab its image?

“You think Tinker was sent to this morning’s meeting because of politics?”

"Nah. I think he likes the pickles they serve downstairs."

"Nance has been cold for years. Isn't it risky for the SBI to insist on involvement in such an old unsolved?"

"The public sees a clear, they're heroes. They don't, we're the dumb rubes who screwed up."

I had to admit, that made some sense. "SBI input isn't necessarily a bad thing. Maybe Tinker can help. You know, bring a different perspective."

"The fuckstick's already on my back."

"Meaning?"

"Meaning I'm topping his speed dial."

"Perhaps he has something useful to tell you."

"He's trying to slime into my case."

Sensing further discussion of Tinker would be unproductive, I changed tack. "What's your take on Rodas?"

"Lose the cap. It ain't bear season."

"Actually, it is. In some counties."

"Guy seems okay."

"His first name is Umpie."

"No shit."

"No shit."

"I may have to rethink my view. Look, while I'm tied up with Leal, what say you go back over Nance. See if anything jumps out at you."

"Sure." I closed my eyes for a moment. Rebunched the tissue. "You think you'll find her alive?"

"I gotta get back on the street."

Kathy Reichs

Three beeps, then dead air.

Birdie was in the kitchen staring at his dish. I filled it.

No appetite, but I forced myself to eat. Tuna on toast. Gourmet.

When I was finished, I took the Nance file to the dining room and spread the folders on the table. I started with the case review I'd glanced at earlier.

The cold meds were still jamming my wiring. And the morning's retelling of the horror had me on edge. Instead of Lizzie Nance, I kept seeing the old house on rue de Sébastopol. The dank cellar where Pomerleau and Catts had caged their victims.

The case had started quietly enough. Many do. A pizza-by-the-slice joint. Leaky pipes. A long forgotten staircase.

Who knew why the plumber ventured into the basement. How he spotted the human femur sticking out of the dirt.

The proprietor called the cops. The cops called me.

I excavated three partial skeletons, one in a box, two buried naked in shallow graves. I brought them to my lab for analysis. Young girls.

Foul play? No one thought so at first. The bones were probably ancient, like the rat-infested building under which they lay.

Radioactive isotopes proved that theory wrong.

Ryan worked the case also. And a city cop named Luc Claudel.

In the end we learned the names of the dead. The names of their killers.

But questions remained.

The bones provided no clue as to cause of death. Did the girls die of starvation? Abuse? Loss of will to live another day in hell?

We learned of one captive from a journal entry. Never found her remains. Kimberly Harris. Hamilton. Hawking. Where was this young woman whose name I couldn't remember? Did she lie somewhere in an unmarked grave? Did others?

One victim had survived, and I'd thought of her from time to time ever since. Asked myself: Is recovery possible after years of torture and isolation? After a childhood stolen by madness?

Andrew Ryan also invaded my thoughts. More fragmented images.

Ryan's features gouged from darkness by the soft yellow of my porch light.

Ryan's tears as he talked of Lily's death. His embarrassment at having shed them.

Ryan's back receding into the night.

Ryan didn't inform his superiors, didn't take leave. He told no one his destination or when he'd return. *If* he'd return.

That no one included me.

I'd numbed the pain by blocking Ryan from my thoughts.

Now, as I tried to focus, it all crashed back.

Kathy Reichs

Murdered children in Montreal. Murdered children in Vermont, possibly Charlotte. The unthinkable. The horrific possibility that Anique Pomerleau was active again.

Pressure to locate a man I'd forced myself to forget. To persuade him to reenter a world he'd abandoned.

And waves of fever rolling over me.

At nine I gave up.

After a hot, steamy shower, I downed two more tabs and dropped back into bed.

I'd been there only moments when the landline rang.

The voice blindsided my overwrought, overmedicated brain.

## 4

I love the Carolina mountains. Love driving the narrow two lanes that worm like twisty black ribbons through the humpty-back giants.

That morning the beauty was wasted on me. I hadn't the time. Or the mindset for a Blue Ridge outing.

The dashboard clock said 7:44 A.M. I'd been up two hours, on the road ninety minutes. Surprisingly, I felt good. Or at least better. God bless chemistry.

Just before Marion, I turned east off Highway 226. The sun floated above the horizon, a yellow-orange ball winking on and off as I rounded curve after curve. Long slanted rays sparked mist still lingering in low spots between the ridges.

I passed a field with a chocolate mare grazing side by side with her colt. Both raised their heads and ears, mildly curious, then resumed eating.

Within minutes a sign peeked from the foliage on my right. Wrought-iron script announced the entrance

to Heatherhill Farm. Discreetly. If you don't know we're here, just keep on motoring.

I turned onto an unmarked strip of asphalt arrowing through enormous azaleas and rhododendron. When I cracked the window, a post-dawn mix scented the car's interior. Pine, wet leaves, damp earth.

Soon I passed buildings, some small, some large, each looking like a set straight out of *Christmas in Connecticut*. Ivy-covered chimneys, long porches, white siding, black shutters.

I knew Heatherhill's forty acres contained multiple structures. A chronic-pain center. A gym. A library. A computer lab. Amenities for the well heeled with issues.

Knew only too well.

Beyond the four-story main hospital, I split off onto a tributary road, passed a low-rise building housing business and admissions offices, and made another left. The tiny lane ended fifty yards later in a rectangle of gravel enclosed by a white picket fence.

I parked, grabbed my jacket and purse, and got out.

Through a gate in the fence, a flagstone path led to a small bungalow. Above its door, a sign said *River House*. One calming breath, then I started toward it.

On the inside, River House could have been anyone's mountain cottage. Anyone with a predilection for antique reproductions and a whole lot of bucks.

The floors were wide plank and covered with Oushaks and Sarouks that cost more than my house.

The upholstery involved shades a decorator probably called mushroom and moss. The wooden pieces were stained and distressed to look old.

I wound through the living room, past gas-fed flames dancing in a stacked stone fireplace, and exited double glass doors at the back of the house. The deck held a teak table and matching chairs, several tubs planted with pansies and marigolds, and four chaise lounges with bright melon cushions.

The farthest chaise had been displaced several feet and angled away from the others. On it was a woman with white hair cut pixie-short. Before her, on the porch rail, sat a thick ceramic mug. The woman wore khaki slacks and an Irish sweater that hung to the middle of her thighs. On her feet were ballet flats, two-tone, the leather on the toes a perfect match for the pants.

I watched a moment. The woman sat motionless, hands clasped, eyes fixed on a forest thick with morning shadows.

I approached, my bootfalls loud in the stillness.

The woman didn't turn.

"Sorry I couldn't make it last night." Cheerful as Mickey's Marching Band.

No response.

I dragged a chaise close and positioned it parallel. Sat sideways, oriented toward the woman. "I like your new haircut."

Nothing.

"The drive was good. I made it in under two hours."