

DEADLY JEWELS

JEANNETTE DE BEAUVOIR



MINOTAUR BOOKS

NEW YORK



[Begin Reading](#)

[Table of Contents](#)

[About the Author](#)

[Copyright Page](#)

**Thank you for buying this
St. Martin's Press ebook.**

To receive special offers, bonus content,
and info on new releases and other great reads,
sign up for our newsletters.

[Sign Up](#)

Or visit us online at
us.macmillan.com/newslettersignup

For email updates on the author, click [here](#).

The author and publisher have provided this e-book to you for your personal use only. You may not make this e-book publicly available in any way. **Copyright infringement is against the law. If you believe the copy of this e-book you are reading infringes on the author's copyright, please notify the publisher at: us.macmillanusa.com/piracy.**

For Assaf, who inspires me (more than he knows), encourages me, and keeps me on track. And for Jacob and Anastasia, who continue to teach me a lot about love.

PROLOGUE

He really had to do something about the noise the girls were making. His wife was supposed to be resting.

“Right,” he said, going down on his knees on the rug next to his giggling daughters. “Enough of that. A little c-c-c-care, if you don’t m-m-mind.”

The stutter coming back because he was so tired.

“Father!” Margaret, the younger one, holding a bloodred ruby to the center of her forehead. “Aren’t I beautiful?”

“You are the most b-b-b-beautiful of all p-p-princesses,” he said gravely. “But even princesses have to work, s-s-sometimes.”

“They call jewels ‘bijoux’ in French,” she said, showing off.

“Indeed they do.”

Lilibet was trying on a tiara for size. “I’ve never seen this one before,” she said. “Why do you keep them locked away, Papa? What’s the point of having crown jewels if nobody’s ever meant to see them?”

He took the tiara from her and reached for one of the hatboxes. “The p-p-p-point is that they’re th-th-there,” he said. “And we’re meant to be taking these apart, not trying them on.” Worry was making him abrupt.

“What does that mean, that they’re there? It sounds like a riddle!”

The king allowed himself a smile. “The crown jewels are only ever used at c-c-c-coronations. You’ll wear them when you are c-c-c-crowned queen, someday, Lilibet.” God willing, he thought. If the whole island isn’t speaking German by then.

“When will I be queen, Father?”

A conversational turn he hadn’t expected. “When I d-d-d-die, my dear. That’s when you’ll be queen. It’s a long way off.”

“I don’t want to be queen if it means that you’ll die!” It was a squeal.

“Everyone dies,” said Margaret unexpectedly.

“But not our sp-sp-sp-spirit,” he said. “And that’s precisely why we need to attend to the task at hand. Every st-st-stone taken out of every setting.” Remembering what his wife had told him about children needing encouragement, he added, “and you’re almost there, cl-cl-clever girls that you are.”

“In hatboxes?” Earlier in the day, his wife had been shocked at the idea. “You cannot be serious, surely!”

“We can hardly send them off with, ‘Caution, royal jewels’ on the shipping labels, my dear,” he’d said mildly.

“But hatboxes!” She shook her head. “Needs must, I expect. They’re an important

symbol. Best to get on with it. Have the girls help you, it will just look like playtime together.”

“Perhaps we’re the ones p-p-playing,” he said. “Worrying about jewels when Winston is sending s-s-s-securities and gold.”

“Mr. Churchill doesn’t understand the value of tradition.”

“What Mr. Churchill understands, my d-d-d-dear,” he said, “is the value of fighting on, no matter what.”

A moment of silence. “It’s going that badly, then.” It wasn’t a question.

She was too perceptive, he thought. “Yes.” There was no reason to deny it. “If the securities and gold are safe in Canada, we’ll be able to pay to stay alive. Supplies. Perhaps s-s-s-ships. It’s what Winston s-s-s-says.”

“Bertie!” she said, and then stopped, gathering herself together. “Bertie,” she said again, more calmly this time. “They won’t invade England, will they?”

“My dear,” he said. “I’m very much afraid that’s the plan.”

Now he sat on the floor with his two daughters, prizing jewels from their settings and wrapping them and putting them in hatboxes. A king and two princesses in the lamplight, the jewels flashing with colored refracted light and, all the while, the dread gathering in his heart.

CHAPTER ONE

“I see we have a lot of Americans on this tour,” said the man with the headset standing at the front of the bus. “Okay, let me ask you this: who here speaks French? Raise your hands? Only a few people? Do you all understand English? Everybody? Yes? Good, we can do the tour in one language, eh?”

I watched as he started distributing maps of the city to the other Gray Line passengers. While all of Canada is supposedly bilingual, Québec’s first language is officially French, and here in Montréal there’s always the question. Go into a shop, and they’ll say, “Hello-bonjour,” all in one breath, and wait to see how you respond. In which language flavor, so to speak.

But while tourists come in all shapes, sizes, and native tongues, most of the people sitting on the bus with me were part of a group that had just gotten off the cruise ship docked out on the waterfront, tremendous and a little overpowering on the St. Lawrence Seaway skyline. Americans, all of them.

The guide handed me my map with nothing more than an impersonal friendly smile, and I was glad: what I didn’t need was to be recognized and have anything on the tour changed or adapted because I was there. I’m the *directrice de publicité*—the publicity director—for the city of Montréal, and the tourism people tend to be a little touchy about my treading on their perceived territory. Most of the time we’re able to play well together, but it’s a tenuous relationship with plenty of opportunities for faux pas and worse.

I try to take the Gray Line excursions at least once a year, both the half-day tour of Montréal that I was on now and the full-day expedition that goes to Québec City. It would be easy, in my job, to just sit in my office down in the Old City and handle problems, soothe ruffled feathers, solve perceived, potential, and real crises, and leave every day with a headache the size of Manitoba—and that isn’t what I signed on for. Taking the sightseeing tour reminds me of all the reasons I’m really here. The history of my city, its diversity, its cultural riches, its urban pulse, its amazing cuisines, all of that gets touched on during these trips, and every single bit of it lifts my spirits.

I was born here and have spent most of my life in Montréal, and I still fall in love with this city over and over again at least a couple of times a year.

My ability to do my job flows directly from that love. Like any entity, human or geographic, Montréal has its detractors, and I’m here to protect it, to make sure that they don’t hurt the city too much. It ends up being damage control a lot of the time. And when you consider the city, provincial, and federal politics that go on here ... well, you understand why what I do is so vital.

And so headache-inducing.

The guide, who had identified himself in the usual Montréal manner (“My name is Frank, or François in French”), was now asking us to open our maps. “Yes, this way. No, the other side. There you are. Here is what we call *centre-ville*, *vieux-Montréal*, the *vieux port*: that’s the downtown area, with Old Montréal and the Old Port, eh? As you can remark, it follows the great river, the Saint Lawrence. We will soon see that Montréal is still a working port as well as an historic one.”

He folded his map and everyone around me struggled to do the same. If any of these people had seen their seventieth birthday in the past few years, it would have surprised me. Good for them for being out and about. “We are starting our tour today in front of the Sun-Life Building, where during the Second World War, the British crown jewels were stored for safekeeping. And now, if everyone is ready, we’ll begin, eh?” He settled himself in his seat and started the engine, causing the floor beneath our feet to vibrate. The bus pulled slowly and a little ponderously out into Dorchester Square.

“Again, I wish to welcome you to Montréal,” François was saying in English. I’m one of the city’s francophones—well, seriously, with a name like Martine LeDuc, what would you expect?—and so I automatically mentally assigned him the French version of his name rather than the English one. “I will tell you a little about it now. There are sixty-five subways in the city. These are a very useful way to get around, especially in the winter, eh?” He had the native Canadian way of liting the end of his sentences so that they sounded like questions, as if he were inviting agreement. It’s actually a pretty sophisticated psychological technique; hard to disagree when agreement is almost forced upon you.

“You may have heard of our underground city, what we call the *ville souterraine*, or the *ville intérieure*, the internal city, and you can go and see it for yourself at the end of this tour. I can drop you off right at one of the entrances, it is not a problem. Much of that underground city is linked by the Métro system, eh? Some people can go from their apartment buildings directly into the city, so that in January they can go and get their coffee and newspaper without putting on a winter coat!”

There was, I recalled, an almost absolutely apocryphal story of a man leaving his high-rise through an underground passage, getting his coffee and paper, hopping onto the Métro, getting off in the financial district, walking through a few corridors, and taking an elevator up to his office, where he finally realized that he was still wearing his slippers. It’s one of the stories that we love to tell the tourists, and apparently the tale was still evergreen. I think I’d first heard it at least a decade ago.

There was a titter of reaction to his remark, the bus made a few turns as he navigated some crowded streets, and then he continued. “Montréal is a large city. Our downtown population is one-point-seven million people, and we welcome fifty million visitors every year.”

“Imagine that!” said the woman sitting behind me. “No wonder everyone speaks English!”

I grimaced, but in silence. Most of us *do* speak English, actually, but for rather different reasons than she assumed. Like much of eastern North America, Québec had its share of being tossed back and forth between French and British governments, both completely ignoring the indigenous populations, and both going to war at tediously

regular intervals. But it was the wealth of the fur traders and the railroad that built the big mansions up on Mont-Royal, and those captains of industry all spoke English.

Over there, on the west side of the city, they still do.

“Look on the right and you can see a fast-food restaurant, with the chicken?” said Francois. “You see it there? This is a chain of restaurants we have here, it’s called Saint Hubert. They’ve been around since the nineteen-forties, delivering rotisserie chicken in yellow cars. I want you to try some; it’s very good.”

Well, my stepkids would agree with that, anyway. Both Lukas and Claudia, who lived most of the time in a Boston suburb with their mother and visited us on a regular schedule, loved St. Hubert chicken. Mine, it seemed, never quite measured up to what the friendly fellow with the red crown had to offer.

“Here we have the rue Sainte-Catherine, Saint Catherine Street. It is the longest commercial street in Canada....” And has changed a lot, I found myself thinking. There was a time when a good third of this very long street was given over to peep shows, topless bars, and streetwalkers. Prostitution is legal in Canada, but this was a little too in-your-face for a lot of the city to feel comfortable with. Sainte-Catherine cleaned up most of its act, but sometimes I wondered if the upscale chain stores that lined it now were such a big improvement.

Some people, Claudia among them, thought so. The moment my stepdaughter arrives for her bimonthly weekend with her father and me, she’s off and running: La Baie, Eaton Center, Sainte-Catherine. Bright lights and the dopamine high of purchasing.

I roused myself. Daydreaming about my family wasn’t a great way to spend this tour. “This is the *quartier chinois*, Chinatown,” François was saying. “It is very small, just this one street. It is very good; I invite you to visit it while you are here. I enjoy to have ginger and lobster here, myself.” I listened to the sentence structure with a smile: François was clearly more at home in French than in English.

He wasn’t alone in that—a lot of people here don’t speak any English at all. Or speak it with some resistance. Take, for example, my boss, the current corrupt mayor of a city that specializes in corrupt mayors. Actually, Jean-Luc Boulanger and I were generally at odds about everything *but* our shared language. He wanted the impossible: to be popular (his biggest and best dream is to have a street named after him), but also to line his pockets at the expense of everyday Montréalers, whom I try to represent before him. That never goes very well.

If it weren’t Jean-Luc, it would be someone similar and possibly even worse: we seem incapable of electing a mayor who might actually put the city’s well-being first. I remembered my husband, Ivan, remarking a mere two weeks after the election of my current boss’s predecessor, “Well, he hasn’t called in sick yet. That has to be a good sign.”

We were heading down into the Old City now, with a half-hour stop so passengers could get a coffee, take photographs, and buy souvenirs at the myriad tiny shops lining the rue Saint Paul. We were also very near my office, and I considered whether I should leave the tour and go look at the pile of papers and e-mails no doubt awaiting me. Maybe.

“This is the basilica of Notre Dame,” François announced. “It was an Irish-American architect who designed the church. He was a Protestant, but he converted to

Catholicism just so that he could be buried here, it is so beautiful. And now we will all look at our watches to determine the time we will meet here again. If you are not here, we have to leave without you. The good news is that you can wait, and I will be by again at the same time tomorrow!”

A wave of obedient laughter, and then people began getting up, reaching for maps, sweaters, and handbags. I sat and waited. The basilica is in fact, to my mind at least, the most beautiful church in the world. It’s where I go to Mass every Sunday. It also is the place where, last year, I was kidnapped, after a surreal chase that had me hiding (rather stupidly) in confessionals, under pews, and behind the high altar, all of it to no avail. For one horrible half hour, the church that usually felt like a piece of heaven had threatened to become my own personal hell.

Not that it was the church’s fault, of course. Still, not all of my feelings about the Protestant architect’s masterpiece are positive.

François was waiting and I realized I was the last passenger getting off the bus. “*Tu viens de Montréal?*” he asked, conversationally, and I nodded. “Yes, I live here. I like taking the tour,” I said in French. “It reminds me of how much I love the city.”

That got a smile, quicksilver and warm, and then he was shutting the door, closing up the bus. “Will you join me for a coffee?”

“Thanks, but no. I have—an errand. I’ll be back on time, though, don’t worry!”

“*Très bien.*” He was already turning away and clearly still had no idea who I was. That was a good thing. Another good thing was that I could get to City Hall in less than two minutes, check in with my deputy, Richard, and be back before the tourists had finished buying their cans of maple syrup and their postcards.

* * *

As it turned out, I never got back to François and his tour.

Richard texted me even as I was crossing the Old City’s cobblestones, heading toward City Hall. “Mayor wants to see you.”

I stopped, staring at my smartphone, annoyed. I’d let everyone know I couldn’t be available until well after four o’clock: the Gray Line tour is comprehensive. I punched his single-digit code into my phone and snapped when he answered, “What is it that can’t wait?”

“*Bonjour, Martine,*” Richard said calmly.

I sighed. He was right: courtesy should always come first. “*Désolée,* Richard. But, seriously, what is it? I’m out all afternoon. That’s what’s on the calendar. That’s what I told Chantal. Out all afternoon. That’s what everyone was supposed to expect.” And respect, too, but there’s not a lot of *that* in city government.

“I know that you are out all afternoon. Chantal knows that you are out all afternoon. The mayor knows that you are out all afternoon, also, but for his part, he doesn’t care.”

I sighed. This wasn’t a battle I was going to win. “Okay. *Bon, d’accord.* So, what disaster has occurred that needs me specifically? It’s not something you can handle?” Wishful thinking, Martine.

“Perhaps it is; he was not kind enough to offer up that information.” Richard is nothing if not smooth. “But—well, I think you want to come in. There is a buzz that I cannot identify going on in the building. Something is happening here.”

I grimaced; this wasn't going to be pretty. Somebody caught with his hand in the cookie jar, no doubt; that's our usual scandal. Sexual peccadillos aren't as popular here as they are in our neighboring country to the south: we're French enough that we really don't care who sleeps with whom, as long as the job gets done. But graft and corruption? *That's* our daily bread and butter. And that of the newspapers, needless to say: a PR nightmare.

My nightmare.

"All right. Give me five minutes to tell François."

"François? Who is François?"

"If it doesn't sound too odd, he's the man with whom I was hoping to spend the afternoon," I said. "The Gray Line tour director. You really have no idea what it's about?"

"As to that," Richard said cheerfully, "we may be pleasantly surprised."

* * *

There was a little man in the little room, and he was worried.

"They got here from London all right," he said to Faith Spencer, his assistant, for the fourth or fifth time.

London to Scotland. That alone seemed enough of a miracle.

She shivered. "I don't even like to think about it." She was twisting her hands. "I can't believe there's not some other way. Some other place. What happens if they never come back?"

He looked at her sharply. "It's hardly up to us to question it. London knows what they're doing. The Prime Minister—"

"You really believe this comes from the Prime Minister?" She started shuffling papers on her desk, lining up the edges of the piles so that they were perfectly even.

He said, "It's not up to us to question who it came from."

"You know what it means. It means they think we're about to be invaded."

"It means nothing of the sort," he said, irritable because he agreed with her.

The crates were sitting under guard in the next room; that knowledge alone was enough to induce a heart attack. The king himself had dismantled the jewels, and had hidden them in hatboxes, much to the delight of his two daughters, Elizabeth Alexandra and Margaret Rose; the royal princesses had helped with the packing, and Princess Margaret had even left a saucy note attached to one of them. Her Royal Highness was known for her cheekiness, and Faith had thought it best to discreetly remove the paper.

"Is it true," she asked, "that they're not even insured?"

He looked at her sharply. "For heaven's sake, Faith. Who would insure them? For what amount? How do you insure the embodiment of eight hundred years of monarchy?"

She sighed. "I suppose you're right." Faith liked things clear. She liked everything organized and official and aboveboard. She liked her work accompanied by regular correspondence and excellent filing and predictable outcomes.

This project was none of those things.

The crates had come to Greenoch under heavy—but very discreet—security, and

even now the HMS Emerald was sitting in the harbor, waiting for them to be added to its cargo.

The Emerald, Faith knew, had already started ferrying valuables across the Atlantic: back in September it had headed up a convoy from Plymouth to Halifax with gold—the first installment, as it were. Two million pounds sterling in gold. The mind boggled.

And now? Churchill had replaced Chamberlain as prime minister, and he gave the convoys a name: Operation Fish. He'd used the War Powers Act to confiscate securities ledged with the Bank of England and was sending them, along with the gold bullion, to pay for munitions.

Britain was isolated and embattled and the convoys were its lifeline.

The Royal Navy knew only that there was additional freight being added, and sailors had been instructed to dress in tropical whites; there was a lot of guessing among the men as to why, and what their destination might be. The gold bullion that HMS Emerald was taking across the Atlantic to safety in Canada had already been loaded, openly enough; no one in Greenoch had any feelings about gold bullion one way or the other, and they had to pay for the convoys somehow.

But the crown jewels? That was something else altogether.

CHAPTER TWO

Jean-Luc was lying in wait for me.

Chantal, our administrative assistant, lurked nervously in the corridor outside the office, looking, as always, as if she'd chosen her outfit somewhat randomly from a vintage-clothing shop, and not a great one at that. For all I knew, perhaps she had. "He is here," she said in a low voice.

"Who is here? And why are we whispering?"

She lowered her voice still more. "*Monsieur le maire*. He is waiting for you."

"Yes, I know, Richard already told me," I said briskly. "I just need to drop off—"

"*Non*," she interrupted. "*Tu n'comprends pas*. He is *here*. In your office."

Well. That was a first. Whatever this was, it had to be serious. I wouldn't even have suspected that Jean-Luc knew where my office was located.

Not only was my boss in there, he was pacing like a harried hamster. The comparison was apt: he had plump cheeks that looked like pouches, coupled with a tendency to sniff the air. Trying to home in on possible illicit monetary sources, no doubt. "Madame LeDuc," he said as I opened the door. "What has kept you?"

I walked past him to put my purse on my desk. Standing behind it gave me high ground in terms of authority, something Jean-Luc never voluntarily gave up. I wondered why he'd been willing to do it this time. "I was working out of the office," I said.

"So I understand. That is the trouble. You're letting the biggest PR coup this city has ever experienced slip through your fingers!"

Did I mention his tendency to lapse into hyperbole? I should have. I assumed a serious expression. "What coup is that, monsieur?"

He wasn't going to give it away that easily. He pulled out one of my conference chairs and sat down, adjusting his ever-perfect suit coat and tie as he did. A well-dressed hamster, my boss. "I have called a meeting," he said importantly.

That was nothing new: the mayor liked meetings. Preferably long ones at upscale restaurants, with the city footing the bill. I didn't get invited to *those* very often. Mine were more of the let's-see-what-Martine-has-done-wrong-this-time variety, held in his office or at a convenient corridor for maximum spectator attention. "I see," I said cautiously.

"In one hour," he added, looking at his Rolex by way of illustration and urgency.

"And can you tell me what it is about, monsieur?" I was starting to feel testy with his drama. For this I gave up my afternoon with François and the Gray Line?

"Madame, all that you need to know is this. You must be there. Monsieur Rousseau

must be there. And you must be prepared to launch a campaign that will bring the eyes of the world to Montréal!” Well, you can see how he got elected. Who isn’t up for a little overstatement served fresh with their morning *café* and croissants? “I came here myself,” he added importantly, “to be sure that you understand, and to see that you are on time.”

That was a little unfair. I’m always on time. In fact, I’m usually the first to arrive for any appointment or meeting. Courtesy, one would think; yet actually it’s because I like to be able to pick my geography. There’s nothing worse than coming late to an awkward encounter and finding oneself sitting in the least comfortable seat. And with Jean-Luc, most encounters tend toward the awkward.

“I’ll be there, monsieur,” I said levelly.

“*Bon.*” He tapped his knees and lifted himself out of the seat, acting for all the world as though we’d just made an important decision. “My office. Four o’clock.”

“I’ll be there,” I said again; but I said it to his back.

Chantal was hovering in my doorway in the wake of his departure. Jean-Luc always made her nervous. One of his predecessors had once sacked the entire secretarial and administrative staff at City Hall, and she remembered that. Of course the strikes and marches that followed hadn’t been to *his* advantage. “Are we in trouble?” she asked, eyes wide.

“Something’s going on,” I said slowly. “I don’t know what to think. Where’s Richard?” Richard Rousseau was my deputy and always seemed to have his finger firmly on the pulse of City Hall. If anyone knew what this was about, it would be him. And if *he* didn’t know ...

“In his office, I think,” said Chantal. “Shall I tell him to come in?”

“Would you?”

I turned and looked out the window behind my desk while I was waiting. If I hadn’t wanted this job for the substance, I’d have wanted it for the view: City Hall sits on a rise in the Old City, and my window takes in the esplanade and the river, an ever-changing panorama of action. I could even see the cruise ship that the geriatric tour goers had debarked from, and I could imagine François’s tour continuing: “These are silos and grain elevators: the island is manmade, using rock that was excavated from the Métro and the Underground City. They call this the Canal Lachine, does anyone know why? It is because when the French arrived here, they thought it was China, eh?”

Or something to that effect.

Behind me, Richard cleared his throat. Dressed impeccably—he was always dressed impeccably, always looked like he just stepped out of a magazine spread, elegant and at ease, even during that bad time last year when his new girlfriend was murdered and he was briefly on the list of suspects—and bemused. “Monsieur Boulanger is in good spirits,” he said cautiously.

“So it would seem.”

“It makes one nervous,” Richard said.

“It does indeed,” I agreed. “You don’t know anything about this magnificent PR coup we’re about to be orchestrating, I assume?”

He shook his head, sitting down in the chair that Jean-Luc had vacated and crossing one elegant leg over the other, flicking an imaginary bit of lint off his trousers. I swear

this man should be gay. “I hear it’s good news, for once.” He smiled. “That makes for a change, anyway, doesn’t it?”

“Boulanger’s not exactly about change,” I reminded him. Jean-Luc wanted everything exactly the same all the time, so that he wouldn’t take the fall if any innovation failed. Change was bad; status quo was good.

Richard shrugged elegantly. “Perhaps he is now.”

* * *

Richard and I were on time, but that turned out to be meaningless: everyone else was already there. Maybe the mayor had things he wanted to talk about with them before I came into the room.

“Ah, Madame LeDuc,” Jean-Luc said as we entered. “Kind of you to join us.” He was speaking English, and that underlined my earlier conclusion that this was indeed something different and, for once, positive: *monsieur le maire* doesn’t do anger in English. If he were going to list failures, the numbering system he used would be French.

“I don’t mean to interrupt,” I said, taking in the table and the people sitting around it.

“It is nothing. Thank you for coming,” the mayor said, gesturing a welcoming hand. Richard and I slipped into the only two vacant seats at the conference table. Richard was looking amused; he’d tell the story, later, and everyone would laugh.

Still, the fact that Jean-Luc was in a good mood had to be appreciated.

I looked around the room to see what—or who—had inspired this generosity of spirit. Three men, one woman, and I only knew one of them, Dr. Pierre LaTour, curator of Montréal’s Pointe-à-Callière archaeological museum. When one considers that my job really involves knowing people, a lot of people, knowing only *one* of them? That alone was strange.

“You know *monsieur le docteur* LaTour, of course,” said the mayor, and Pierre and I nodded to each other. “This is Mademoiselle Patricia Mason.” Her name—which he managed to mangle—made it clear why we were all speaking English.

She smiled. “Hello.” The other two men were, apparently, not to be introduced.

The mayor cleared his throat. “We have wonderful news,” he informed me.

Okay. I settled my face into an I’m-waiting-to-hear-wonderful-news expression and shot another look at Richard. He gave a very Gallic shrug in response.

Patricia Mason was about ten years younger and about ten pounds heavier than I was, with neat black hair in a bob and glasses that kept sliding down on her nose; she used her left index finger to keep pushing them up.

“It’s for my doctorate,” she explained now, her voice earnest, her eyes eager behind the thick lenses. “I’ve been doing research in London and Scotland and here in Montréal for my dissertation, and the mayor thought that you might be interested in it. In what I’ve been studying, and what I think I’m about to find—um—what I’m going to confirm.”

“I see.” I was noncommittal, my interest level ratcheting down a notch. Doctoral research may be—*must* be, I suppose—intensely exciting for those involved in it, but my experience has been that long dissertation titles and pages of footnotes have little

to do with anything related to public relations.

Museums, yes. My office? Not so much.

Patricia was undaunted by my lack of enthusiasm. “As you probably know, in Europe, World War Two displaced a lot of valuable items—art, jewelry, that sort of thing.”

“Wasn’t most of it stolen by the—er—Germans?” I asked. Like everyone else since the book and its subject had been made into a George Clooney movie, I knew about the Monuments Men.

She nodded. “Of course, but that’s normal. Well, normal, no. I mean normal in terms of war. That’s what occupying forces do, they steal stuff.” She brushed it away with her hand, an annoying gnat of an idea. “But what’s known, also, is that the United Kingdom was looking at what would happen if the British Isles were occupied, and so, very early on, they conducted a massive shipping effort, sending a lot of their treasures abroad.”

“Gold,” said the mayor, nodding. I could almost see it reflected in his eyes. He managed to restrain himself from licking his lips.

“Gold,” Patricia agreed. “A whole lot of gold. Gold that they needed to pay for war expenses. Gold to pay for the American and Canadian convoys that were supplying Great Britain. The island would have starved, otherwise.” The glasses had slipped a little and she pushed them up again. “It went on for months, this shipping stuff to North America in payment. It was called Operation Fish—yeah, I know, but it really was called that, I’m not making this up. It was the largest movement of wealth in history.” She looked around the room, her face positively glowing. “The treasure ships,” she said softly.

Jean-Luc’s eyes were predatory. “Treasure ships,” he repeated.

“The first shipment,” said Patricia, “was sent to Canada in 1939 on a British cruiser called the HMS *Emerald*—I’m not making *that* up, either—which docked at Halifax.”

“Interesting,” I said. I still had no idea where this was going, but I could suddenly see it clearly, what she was describing: rain sluicing down on the ships plowing through the North Atlantic waves, the holds filled with gold. Gold to pay for food and supplies. Gold to pay for the life of a besieged country.

She caught my eye and smiled. “Bear with me, Ms. LeDuc,” she said. “It really is interesting, and the story gets better.” A deep breath. “So, anyway, the gold was transferred off the cruiser in Halifax. There was a train waiting, and the next day it arrived here in Montréal. The gold spent the war in a specially designed underground vault three stories under the Sun-Life Building on Metcalfe Street. No one knew: it was all very hush-hush.”

It was tickling something in my mind; I’d heard about that already. The combination of gold and Sun-Life (which, in the normal Montréal custom of using both French and English when possible, was called the *Edifice Sun-Life Building*) sounded familiar.

Or maybe it just felt that way because of the voraciousness of insurance companies.

Patricia shifted in her chair, pushing her glasses up on her nose. “Something else that no one knew, but that’s been circulating as rumors in the war-history community, was that the British crown jewels were on that first ship, on the HMS *Emerald*, as well.”

Okay. That was it. Not exactly stop-the-presses earthshaking news, since François of the Gray Line tours had already announced it as fact—and offhandedly at that—just that very morning. And I’d heard the rumor before, somewhere, sometime, I was pretty sure. Rumors came and went. But proof? I looked at Patricia Mason, doctoral student, and found her wavelength with a click. If there *were* proof positive, then we could work with that. I could see the press releases already, the headlines: MONTRÉAL PLAYS VITAL ROLE IN WORLD WAR TWO. MONTRÉAL SAVES THE ENGLISH CROWN. Even as a historic event, it was good PR.

Who was I kidding? It was *great* PR. I exchanged glances with Richard and he was nodding. “The crown jewels *definitely* spent the war in the basement of the Sun-Life Building,” I repeated. “You have proof.”

She nodded, then qualified her agreement. “I have a *line* on proving it,” she said. “I’m at McGill, and so I have some resources, stuff that’s open to scholars. Archives. Memories. And, of course, Doctor LaTour.”

Pierre LaTour caught the metaphoric ball from her and cleared his throat. “Mademoiselle Mason is interested in what we’re doing with the museum expansion in terms of the access that might be available as we’re opening up some of the disused underground tunnels,” he said.

Ah. I parsed his rather flowery language into museum expansion and tunnels. That, I knew about. The museum, which was primarily archaeological in focus, was engaged in a multimillion-dollar expansion slated to be finished in a few years—timed not coincidentally with the city’s 375th anniversary. My office was already hard at work planning events in conjunction with the tourist board. There were milestones in the meantime, including excavating and opening up St. Ann’s Market, the site of Canada’s 1832 parliament.

But the largest and most ambitious part of the work was the underground network that would be made available for the museum complex via the collector sewer that was all that remained, now, of the Little Saint-Pierre River.

Montréal isn’t exactly a stranger to the underground. Its own underground or interior city, dreamed of in the urban-loving 1930s and gradually coming into being in the decades after the war, is one of the world’s largest, offering food, shopping, transportation, and entertainment to a city that gets more snow every winter than does Moscow.

What the museum was doing, however, had nothing to do with shopping for high fashion or the occasional bite of fast food.

The Iroquois—the First-Nations tribe that called this area Hochelaga and lived here until Samuel de Champlain claimed it for France—no doubt used the Saint Pierre River. In 1611 Champlain wrote about the river, the wild strawberries and other fruit and nut trees that grew along its banks.

But when Montréal needed land, the river went underground. Literally.

“As you know,” said Pierre, “we are undertaking an important project at the museum. The Little Saint-Pierre River, converted into a collector sewer, will be the backbone of the Montréal Archaeology and History Complex: a network connecting a unique collection of authentic archaeological and historic sites. The collector sewer, accessible along a distance of three hundred and fifty meters, is a magical place in itself, a dramatic and fascinating journey into the belly of our historic city.

Aboveground, it will be transformed into urban gardens.”

Patricia Mason was nodding eagerly. “Most of Montréal’s rivers were buried in the late 1800s,” she said. “Well, they had to be, they’d become open sewers, the city’s reputation was terrible.”

“A public-relations nightmare,” murmured Richard.

She hadn’t heard the undercurrent of amusement I’d caught in my deputy’s voice. “Right? But then the William Collector, which diverted part of the Saint Pierre River, was built, and it was an amazing engineering feat for its time. So all the sewers went underground. And that’s how Montréal grew, actually, because the villages around it couldn’t afford to build sewers on their own, for themselves, so they became part of the city.”

“Give up independence, get sanitation,” Richard said. This time the irony was felt by everyone in the room, and the mayor gave him a hard look. Well, he would: all of those incorporated villages were now Jean-Luc’s domain. He didn’t really care how they got there, as long as he could make some money from them.

“I’m not sure that I understand what the sewers have to do with the crown jewels,” I said. Someone had to get to the point. “If they were stored here, they were stored in the basement with the gold, isn’t that the story?”

“It’s more than a story,” snapped Patricia. She took a second to compose herself, then said, carefully, “They really were here. That’s not a rumor. That’s true, and I’m going to prove it. But you’re right about there being a rumor. The *rumor* is that some of them stayed here, they were stolen and smuggled out through the sewers.”

She paused. “The rumor is that there are still British crown jewels here in Montréal somewhere. And I believe that *that’s* true, too.”

* * *

It was a gamble, and no one knew that better than Winston Churchill himself. The nation was taking a gamble on him, and he was taking a world-shattering gamble with its future.

“You’re a bloody Cassandra,” his friend Frederick Lindemann told him. “Nobody wants to hear what you have to say, and you’re always right, which makes it all a damned sight worse.”

“Not always,” Winston grunted. “Was wrong about the war in Spain—thought they knew what they were doing. Was wrong about the king’s abdication—still angry with him about it, in fact.”

“You’ve been right about Germany all along,” said Frederick. “And that’s what bloody counts.”

Was it?

He’d already started setting things in order. On the same day that Germany invaded Belgium and the Netherlands, he’d taken the prime minister’s seat in the House of Commons Chamber for the first time and ruthlessly woke Britain from her appeasement. On this, the darkest of nights, he hoped he wasn’t too late.

The British Expeditionary Force, long considered the finest fighting machine in the world, was standing alongside the French army. But everyone knew how poorly trained and equipped the French were. Still, the BEF would take care of things; they

always did. Who could have known what would happen?

Now, he knew.

His aide had woken him at 7:30 on May 15, five days after he became prime minister. “Urgent telephone for you, sir. Monsieur Reynaud, the French president.”

Paul Reynaud was hysterical. “We are defeated!” he screamed. “We have lost! Tout est perdu!”

Winston put down the telephone, took a deep breath, and wrote his first letter to the president of the United States. There was simply no time to lose: France was about to fall, and Britain was clearly going to be next. The Americans had to enter the war. “We expect to be attacked here ourselves, both from the air and by parachute and airborne troops in the near future,” he wrote. “If necessary, we shall continue the war alone and are not afraid of that. But I trust you realize, Mr. President, that the voice and force of the United States may count for nothing if they are withheld too long.”

“It’s all about the Americans now,” he told his wife. “We’ve got to get them involved. They have to see that it’s the only course.”

“It may not be in time,” she said.

“I know. I know that.”

The next day, he put legislation before the House of Commons that The Daily Telegraph described as “the most sweeping constitutional measure ever placed,” giving the government full powers over both property and persons in Britain. Defending it before the war cabinet, he was able, somehow, to find the right words: “It had hitherto been thought that a seaborne invasion of this country was an enterprise which the Germans could not hope to launch with any prospect of success for some considerable time. I think the events of the past few days and the grim possibilities of the next must cause us to modify our views.”

Days later, Boulogne fell, and Calais was under siege. The boys from the British Expeditionary Force were flooding the beach at Dunkirk, right up against the English Channel, and that had to be his first concern: getting them out. Getting them home. Keeping them alive.

They’d fought fiercely and well, they’d endured a nightmare crossing northern France, only to find themselves caught between the sea and Jerry, with nowhere to go, past exhaustion, wounds going septic, and no hope of escape.

British warships were unable to make it to the beach because of Dunkirk’s shallow harbor. There was only one thing to do. “Get me everything,” Winston told his aide. “Every Thames River sightseeing boat, every fishing boat, every yacht, everything that can cross the Channel, I want them over there, evacuating.”

“Sir?”

He was impatient. “They can ferry men out to the warships. Let the call go out!”

It did, and the miracle of Dunkirk was that they responded, every last one of them. It still gave him chills, the bravery, the sacrifice, the instant and unequivocal support. Yachts, pleasure boats, yawls. Sailboats from a sailing school. Ferries, trawlers, sloops. Fishermen all up and down the coast battening their nets in preparation for hauling a different catch altogether onto their decks.

Anything that had a means of propulsion was called for—and everyone answered the call. All of them sailing straight into horror: Calais aflame, the Luftwaffe strafing the beaches and the harbor, boats exploding, and still there they were, going over

again and again until all the boys were safe. That was who the British were, thought Winston. That was who was worth saving.

He didn't have time to waste. As soon as the "little boats" had performed their miracle, there was more to be done. Most of the men had been saved, but their fighting equipment was still littering the beach in France, being picked up and over by the Germans. Britain's munitions factories were already running day and night, but it would take months to replace what had been lost.

Britain didn't have months.

Two things had to be done: weapons, airplanes, and warships had to be purchased from the United States. And Britain's wealth—some of it in gold, but most of it in the form of securities—had to be kept out of German hands.

Winston had a plan that would take care of both.