

As she walked uphill on Rue Maréchal Foch in the old town of Saint-Pierre, Valerie heard clocks. There were hundreds of them ticking, her ears itching with tiny sounds, as if she'd stepped into a puddle of time, sending up a swarm of minutes and seconds. She stopped walking and glanced at her watch — seven-forty, Mid-Atlantic daylight time. It was a foggy late-summer morning, the steep, narrow street alive with pedestrians edging their way around parked minivans and moving cyclists. If she'd looked southward, back the way she'd come, she'd see *le barachois*, the inlet that sheltered the town's harbor from the Atlantic Ocean. A few days ago she'd arrived at Saint-Pierre, a dot of French soil east of Nova Scotia and south of Newfoundland, a period at the end of a long Canadian sentence. *Not Canada*, Valerie thought. Or her American birthplace. A speck of France in the eye of the sea.

As she inched along the cobbled sidewalk, she heard the sound again, the chatter of dozens of tiny, meshing gears. *Tick-tock, tickety-tock*. She wondered where the sound was coming from, and then she asked herself why clocks couldn't tick together on cue, like a well-conducted choir. She'd read somewhere that time is an illusion. In that case, their randomness wouldn't matter.

Valerie noticed a sign a short block from the intersection, right next door to the photo shop. *Horlogerie*. The clock shop was too far away for such a racket, but as she approached it, the sound grew no louder. The shop turned out to be nothing special, with its display window full of conservative gold wristwatches, black leather-banded ones, a few funky pastel styles with fat faces and big hands. She could glimpse larger, noisier clocks inside. Next to the door was a plaque that read *L. Sarazin, Propriétaire*. The door was open, but there was no one behind the counter. The shop was empty.