



LOIS CLOAREC HART'S  
**WALKING**  
— THE —  
**LABYRINTH**



IS THERE LIFE AFTER LOSS?

# Excerpt

## Walking the Labyrinth

by Lois Cloarec Hart

Lee straightened with a groan.

Gaëlle called from the other side of the rubble pile, “Are you okay, old woman?”

“Who you calling old, Ms. Soon-to-be-a-Senior-Citizen?”

Lee twisted slowly and worked the kinks out of her lower back.

“You know, I think we need to re-examine the terms of my contract.”

“We do, eh? I don’t know. It’s a pretty iron-clad document.”

“It’s a napkin.”

“But an iron-clad napkin.”

Lee laughed and stretched. “Well, Eileen did witness it. I’ll give you that.”

“Lee, I found it!”

Lee looked across the remains of the old barn to see Gaëlle wrestling something out from under a broken tress. She quickly clambered across the debris. “What have you found?”

“The stone for the threshold. I knew there would be one in

here somewhere.”

In the last six weeks, Lee and Gaëlle had transported and laid enough of the old barn’s fieldstone to pave five of the labyrinth’s seven circuits. But Gaëlle had her heart set on finding what she deemed the perfect threshold, and nothing they’d found to date had measured up.

Lee eyed the stone dubiously. Aside from being much larger than most of the ones they’d transported, it didn’t look particularly outstanding to her. As she had discovered, however, Gaëlle had a precise vision of her labyrinth, so if her friend said this was perfect, so be it. “Okay. Then let’s see if we can get it on the cart.”

Lee retrieved the odd-looking cart from where they’d been loading it. The first day they’d begun sorting, hauling, and laying stone, they’d used Gaëlle’s garden cart, but they’d soon realized the sides were too high. Even working together, lifting fieldstones up over the sides had strained their muscles unnecessarily.

When they quit at the end of the first day and returned to the house, they found that Wally had solved their problem. He’d constructed a flat cart with a folding ramp. The cart ran on what appeared to be tricycle wheels. The cart bed was only six inches off the ground, so they didn’t have to lift very far, and it

trundled over the rough terrain without difficulty. The ramp allowed them to roll larger stones onto the cart rather than lifting them.

Lee had been amused when she recognized various pieces of their new cart as things she'd seen on Wally's junk wagon. But for a Rube Goldberg contraption, it served their purposes perfectly. They moved twice as many stones the next day and on subsequent days.

Lee rolled the cart into position and lowered the ramp, and they pushed, pulled, and rotated the stone into place for transport. Both were gasping for breath by the time they finished. Lee sank down on a pile of rubble and worked to catch her wind.

Gaëlle was bent at the waist, doing the same.

“Damn, I’m glad I quit smoking.”

“Me too.”

They grinned at each other, and Lee stood up. “I think we’ve got enough of a load for another trip.”

“Agreed.”

They grasped the long handle together and started pulling. By now they knew every metre of their route, where to ease to the left or right to avoid gopher holes, and when to put their backs into it to get up a rise. Lee enjoyed how harmoniously

they worked together without any direction needed.

“So, I was thinking.”

Lee glanced at Gaëlle. “Yeah? About what?”

“I told you I need to go to Regina on Wednesday to meet Dale’s flight, right?”

“Do you think he’s really going to make it this time? He’s postponed twice just since I’ve been here.”

“I know. His heart is there, not here, but Dechontee told him last week that she needs to study for her exams and it was a good time for him to return to Canada.”

Lee chuckled. “Basically she kicked him out of Guinea.”

“Pretty much. The point being, he *will* be on the Wednesday flight. Why don’t you come with me? We’ll go down a day early and have a bit of a break. The hotel I always stay at has a wonderful spa. We’ll treat ourselves royally—have a nice dinner, maybe take in a play or concert. We can even do some shopping if you like. You said you needed new work gloves and safety boots.”

“I do, but I could just pop into the Donegal Co-op for those. Still, I like the idea of a respite from our labours. Someone’s been working me like she’s an overseer on the pyramids.”

“I wasn’t an overseer. I was a stonecutter.”

Lee didn’t even flinch. Over the past month and a half,

she'd grown accustomed to the odd things that came out of Gaëlle's mouth. They'd long ceased to irritate or confuse her. Lee occasionally challenged Gaëlle, but mostly she simply accepted the statements for what they were—Gaëlle's unconventional beliefs.

“Dragging you back on topic, a trip to Regina sounds good.”

Gaëlle clapped her hands in delight. “Wonderful. I'm so looking forward to this.”

“And, I imagine, to seeing Dale again.”

“Absolutely. I always miss that boy of mine, even if we do talk every second day.”

“I look forward to meeting him.”

“You two will get along well. You're kindred spirits.”

“You mean he's into hauling hundreds of kilos of rocks too?”

“Silly. No, I mean he's also a strong, solid, dependable soul. He's quieter than you, but you've both got the same staunch values, particularly love and loyalty toward friend and family.”

“Sounds like he's a good man.”

“And you're a good woman.”

They'd arrived at the labyrinth, so Lee was relieved not to have to respond. Gaëlle was not one to hide her affection, and Lee wasn't always sure how to react.

Gaëlle was never flirtatious; she was simply straightforward. She was very fond of Lee and apparently saw no need to disguise that. Lee was accustomed to the love of her friends and family and returned it in great measure, but Gaëlle... Gaëlle didn't fit neatly into any slots. She wasn't lover or family, but she had rapidly become more than friend.

Lee banished the thoughts that had become her standard bedtime reverie and set to work helping grapple the threshold stone into place.

“A little to the left. That's it. Right there. Ease it down. There—good.” Gaëlle stood back and admired their handiwork. “Is that not a superb fit?”

“I have to admit, you have a great eye. Well done.”

Gaëlle extended her hand with a grin. “Congratulations.”

“For what?”

“For a one-time overseer, you've certainly mastered working in the trenches.”

Lee played along. “I was an overseer? Did I have a chariot?”

“No, but you had a whip, and you sure knew how to use it.”

“Ouch. Did I use it on you?”

“Once or twice, but I was an excellent stonecutter, and you mostly left me alone.” Gaëlle picked up another stone off the cart and carried it to the end of the circuit they were working

on.

Lee watched Gaëlle carefully place her stone and shook her head. To listen to Gaëlle speak, millennia past were as real to her as last night's excursion to the Four Corners Café. The woman was a walking cryptogram. Lee doubted she'd ever break the code. She wasn't entirely sure she even wanted to try.

“Hey, did someone call a coffee break that I don't know about?”

The teasing words echoed across the labyrinth, and Lee picked up a stone. “Yeah, yeah. I'm coming.” *I'm sure I liked it better when I was overseer!*

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