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## Dust (Scarpetta 21)



*Par Patricia Cornwell  
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**Par Patricia Cornwell : Dust (Scarpetta 21)** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Dust (Scarpetta 21):

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### Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurAfter working on one of the worst mass killings in US history, Chief Medical Examiner Kay Scarpetta returns home to recover, but an unsettling call drives her straight back to work. The body of a young woman has been discovered inside the sheltered gates of MIT, draped in an unusual cloth and posed in a way that is too deliberate to be the killer's first strike. A preliminary examination reveals that the body is covered in a fine dust that under ultra-violet light fluoresces blood-red, emerald-green and sapphire-blue, and physical evidence links this to another series of disturbing homicides in Washington, DC. As she pieces together the fragments of evidence, Scarpetta discovers that the cases connect, yet also seem to

conflict, drawing herself and her team deeper into the dark world of designer drugs, drone technology, organised crime, and shocking corruption at the highest level. Dust is a thrilling, addictive novel featuring one of the most iconic, original and compelling characters in crime fiction today.

Extrait  
CAMBRIDGE,  
MASSACHUSETTS  
WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 19  
4:02 A.M.  
The clangor of the phone violates the relentless roll of rain beating the roof like drumsticks. I sit straight up in bed, my heart leaping in my chest like a startled squirrel as I glance at the illuminated display to see who it is. Whats up? There is nothing in my voice when I greet Pete Marino. It cant be good at this hour. My rescued greyhound Sock presses closer to me and I place my hand on his head to calm him. Switching on a lamp, I retrieve a pad of call sheets and a pen from a drawer as Marino starts in about a dead body discovered several miles from here at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, MIT. Out in the mud at one end of the athletic fields, whats called Briggs Field. She was found about thirty minutes ago, he says. Im on my way to where she probably disappeared from, then heading to the scene. Its being secured until you get there. Marinos big voice is the same as if nothing has happened between us. I almost cant believe it. Im not sure why youre calling me. He shouldnt but I know his reason. Technically, Im not back to work. Technically, Im still out sick. I sound polite enough and calm, just a little hoarse. Youd be better off calling Luke or... Youre going to want to take care of this one, Doc. Its going to be a PR nightmare and you sure as hell dont need another one. Hes wasted no time alluding to my weekend in Connecticut that was all over the news and Im not going to discuss it with him. Hes calling me because he can and hell probe where he wants and do as he wishes to make sure I know that after a decade of taking orders from me the roles suddenly are reversed. Hes in charge. Im not. Thats the world according to Pete Marino. Whose PR nightmare? And PRs not my job, I add. A dead body on the MIT campus is everybodys nightmare. Ive got a bad feeling about this. I would have gone with you if youd asked. You shouldnt have gone by yourself. Hes talking about Connecticut again and I pretend I dont hear it. Really, you should have asked me. You dont work for me anymore. Thats why I didnt ask. Its as much as Im going to say to him. Im sorry about what it must have put you through. Im sorry about what it put the entire world through. I cough several times and reach for water. Do we have an ID? I rearrange pillows behind me, Socks narrow head finding my thigh. Possibly a twenty-two-year-old grad student named Gail Shipton. A grad student where? MIT computer engineering. Reported missing around midnight, last seen at the Psi Bar. My nieces favorite hangout. The thought disconcerts me. The bar is located near MIT and caters to artists, physicists, and computer wizards like Lucy. Now and then she and her partner Janet take me there for Sunday brunch. Im familiar with the place is all I offer this man who has abandoned me and I know Im better off. If only it felt like it. Apparently Gail Shipton was there late yesterday afternoon with a girlfriend who claims that at around five-thirty Gails phone rang. She went outside so she could hear better and never came back. You shouldnt have gone to Connecticut alone. At least I could have driven you, Marino says, and hes not going to ask how Im doing after what hes caused by walking off the job so he could start over. Hes a cop again. He sounds happy. The hell with how I feel about the way he did it. All he wants to know about is Connecticut. Its what everyone wants to know about and I didnt give a single interview and its not the sort of thing to talk about. I wish to hell he hadnt brought it up. Its like something hideous Id filed in a back drawer and now its in front of me again. The friend didnt think it was unusual or reason for concern that this person she was with went out to talk on the phone and never came back? Im on autopilot, able to do my job while I try not to care about Marino anymore. All I know is when Gail quit answering her phone or texts, the girlfriend got worried something bad happened. Already hes on a first-name basis with this missing woman who may be dead. Already theyve bonded. Hes sunk his hooks into the case and hes not about to let go. Then when it got to be midnight and still no word she started trying to find her, he says. The friends name is Haley Swanson. What else do you know about Haley Swanson and what do you mean by girlfriend? It was a very preliminary call. What hes really saying is he doesnt know much at all because what Haley Swanson reported likely wasnt taken very seriously at the time. Does it bother you that she wasnt worried earlier? I ask. If Gail was last seen at five-thirty, some six or seven hours passed before her girlfriend called the police. You know how the students are around here. Drinking, they go off with someone, they dont keep track or notice shit. Was Gail the type to go off with someone? I got a lot of questions to ask if it turns out the way I suspect it will. It sounds like we dont know a whole hell of a lot. Even as I say it I know I shouldnt. I didnt talk to Haley Swanson very long. Hes starting to sound defensive. We dont officially take missing-person reports by phone. Then how is it you talked to her? First she called nine-one-one and was told to come to the department and fill out a report, and thats standard. You come in and do it in person. Hes gotten loud enough that I have to turn the volume down on my phone. Then she calls back a little later and asks for me

by name. I talked to her for a few minutes but didnt take her all that seriously. If she was so worried, come fill out the report ASAP. Were open twenty-four-seven. Marinos been with the Cambridge police but a few weeks and it strikes me as almost unbelievable that a stranger would request him by name. Instantly Im suspicious of Haley Swanson but it wont do any good to say it. Marinos not going to listen if he thinks Im trying to tell him how to do his job. Did she sound upset? I ask. A lot of people sound upset when they call the police but it doesnt mean what theyre saying is true. Ninety-nine times out of a hundred missing students arent missing. These types of calls arent exactly uncommon around here. Do we have an address for Gail Shipton? Those really nice condos near the Charles Hotel. He gives me the details and I write them down. Very expensive real estate. I envision gracious brick buildings close to the Kennedy School of Government and the Charles River, not far from my headquarters as a matter of fact. Probably her familys paying the bills, the usual around here in Ivy Leagueville. Marino is typically snide about the people of Cambridge, where police will give you a ticket for being stupid he likes to say. Has anybody checked to see if she might be home and simply isnt answering her phone? Im making copious notes, more focused now, distracted by a different tragedy, the latest one. But as I sit up in bed and talk on the phone its exactly as it happened and I cant block out what I saw. The bodies and the blood. Brass cartridge cases were bright like pennies scattered over floors inside that red brick elementary school, all of it indelibly vivid as if Im still there. Twenty-seven autopsies, most of them children, and when I pulled off my bloody scrubs and stepped into the shower I refused to think about what Id just done. I switched channels. I compartmentalized, having learned long years ago not to see destroyed human flesh after Ive had my hands in it. I willed the images to stay where I left them at the scene, in the autopsy room and out of my thoughts. Obviously I failed. By the time I got home this past Saturday night I had a fever and ached all over as if something evil had infected me. My usual barriers had been breached. Id offered my help to Connecticuts Office of the Chief Medical Examiner and no good deed goes unpunished. Theres a penalty for trying to do whats right. The dark forces dont like it, and stress will make you sick. She claimed she went over to make sure Gail wasnt there, Marino is saying, and then got security to check inside the condo but there was no sign of her or that shed ever come home from the bar. I comment that she must be familiar to people who work at Gail Shiptons apartment building because security wouldnt open up a door for just anyone, and as Im saying all this my attention drifts to the ridiculous mountain of FedEx packages still unopened by the sofa on the other side of the bedroom. Im reminded why its not a good thing if Im isolated for days and too sick to work or cook or leave the house and afraid to be alone with my thoughts. I will distract myself and I did. A vintage Harley-Davidson leather riding vest and skull belt buckle are for Marino, and theres Herms cologne and Jeff Deegan bracelets for Lucy and Janet, and for my husband Benton a titanium watch with a carbon-fiber face that Breguet doesnt make anymore. His birthday is tomorrow, five days before Christmas, and its very hard to shop for him and theres not much he needs or doesnt have. There is an abundance of gifts to wrap for my mother and my sister, and for our housekeeper Rosa and members of my staff, and all sorts of things for Sock and also for Lucys bulldog and my chief of staffs cat. Im not sure what the hell got into me when I was sick in bed, ordering like mad off the Internet, and Ill blame it on my fever. Im sure to hear all about the typically sensible and reserved Kay Scarpetta and her wild holiday spending spree. Lucy in particular wont let me live it down. Gails not answering her cell phone, e-mails, texts, Marino continues as rain slashes the windows, clicking loudly against glass. Nothing posted on Facebook, Twitter, or whatever, and her physical description is consistent with the dead lady and thats the bigger point. Im thinking she might have been abducted, was held somewhere, her body wrapped in a sheet and dumped. I wouldnt bother you under the circumstances but I know how you are. He does know how I am and Im not driving myself to MIT or anywhere, not when Ive been in virtual quarantine for the past five days. I tell him that. Im stubborn and all business with my former lead investigator. Yes, former, I think. How you feeling? I told you not to get a flu shot. Thats probably why you got sick, he says. You cant get sick from a dead virus. Well, the only two times I had a flu shot I came down with the flu, was sick as a damn dog. Im glad you sound better. Marino pretends to care because he has a purpose for me. I suppose its all relative. I could be better. I could be worse. In other words, youre pissed at me. We may as well put it on the table. I was talking about my health. To say Im pissed would trivialize what I feel right now. Marino hasnt seemed to consider what his walking off the job might say about me, the chief medical examiner of Massachusetts and director of the Cambridge Forensic Center, the CFC. For the past ten years hes been my head of investigations and suddenly he professionally divorces me. I can imagine what cops in particular will say or already are saying. I anticipate being doubted at scenes, at my office, in the autopsy room, and on the witness stand. I

imagine being second-guessed when in fact none of this is about me. Its all about Marino and a mid-life crisis hes been afflicted with for as long as Ive known him. Lets be clear, I would tell the world, if I were indiscreet, that Pete Marino has suffered poor self-esteem and identity confusion since the day he was born to an abusive alcoholic father and weak, submissive mother in a bad part of New Jersey. Im a woman out of his reach and the one he punishes, possibly the love of his life and for sure his best friend. His motivation is neither fair nor rational for ringing me up at this hour when he knows Ive been home with the flu, so sick that at one point I worried I was dying and it began drifting through my mind, This is it, what its like. During a feverish epiphany I saw the meaning of everything, life the colliding of God particles that make up all matter in the universe and death the absolute reverse of it. When I spiked a temperature of 103.8 it became even clearer, explained simply and eloquently by the hooded man at the foot of my bed. If only Id written down what he said, the elusive formula for nature giving mass and death taking it away, all of creation since the Big Bang measured by the products of decay. Rust, dirt, sickness, insanity, chaos, corruption, lies, rot, ruin, shed cells, dead cells, atrophy, stench, sweat, waste, dust to dust, that at a subatomic level interact and create new mass, and this goes on infinitely. I couldnt see his face but I know it was compelling and kind as he spoke to me scientifically, poetically, backlit by fire that gave off no heat. During moments of astonishing clarity I realized what we mean when we talk of forbidden fruit and original sin, and walking into the light and streets paved in gold, of extraterrestrials, auras, ghosts, and paradise and hell and reincarnation, of being healed or raised from the dead, of coming back as a raven, a cat, a hunchback, an angel. A recycling crystalline in its precision and prismatic beauty was revealed to me. The plan of God the Supreme Physicist, who is merciful, just, and funny. Who is creative. Who is all of us. I saw and I knew. I possessed perfect Truth. Then life reasserted itself, pulled Truth right out from under me, and Im still here, held down by gravity. An amnesiac. I cant recall or share what at last I could explain to devastated people after Ive taken care of their dead. Im clinical at best when I answer the questions they ask, always the same ones. Why? Why? Why! How could someone do something like this? Ive never had a good explanation. But there is one and I knew it fleetingly. What Ive always wanted to say was on the tip of my tongue, then I came to and what I knew was replaced by the job Id just done. The unthinkable images no one should ever see. Blood and brass in a hallway lined with bulletin boards decorated for the holidays. And then inside that classroom. The children I couldnt save. The parents I couldnt comfort. The reassurances I couldnt give. Did they suffer? How quick would it have been? Its the flu doing this, I tell myself. Theres nothing I havent seen and cant deal with and I feel the anger stir, the sleeping dragon within. Trust me, you dont want anybody else taking care of this. There cant be even one damn thing that gets screwed up, Marino perseverates and if Im honest with myself, Im glad to hear his voice. I dont want to miss his company the way I just did. There was no one else I would take to a frenzied media carnival on a scale that was incomprehensible, the streets overwhelmed for miles by TV vans, production trucks, and pole-mounted satellites, the thudding of helicopters incessant, as if a movie were being filmed. Were the shots close range? The anger again and I cant afford to rouse it, the dragon within. It was better Marino wasnt with me. I just didnt feel like it. I know what he can handle and he would have blown apart like glass shattered by vibrations too intense to hear. All I can tell you is I got a gut about it, Doc, his familiar voice says but he sounds different, stronger and more sure of himself. Some sick fuck out there just getting started. Maybe got the idea from what just happened. From what happened in Newtown, Connecticut? I dont see how he can possibly leap to such a conclusion and he needs to stop bringing it up. Thats the way it works, he says. One sick fuck gets the idea from some other sick fuck who shoots up a movie theater or a school for attention. I IMAGINE HIM driving the dark streets of Cambridge in this weather. No doubt he doesnt have his seat belt on and it will be a waste of breath for me to tell him now that hes a cop again. How quickly he returns to his old bad habits. She wasnt shot, was she? I ask him pointedly to derail an inappropriate and awful subject. Youre not even sure shes a homicide, isnt that right? It doesnt appear she was shot, Marino verifies. Lets not confuse things by comparing it to what just happened in Connecticut. Im sick and tired of assholes getting rewarded by the media. Arent we all? It makes it worse and more likely to happen again. We shouldnt release their names and should bury them in a damn unmarked grave. Lets stick with the case at hand. Do we know if she has obvious injuries? Nothing at a glance, he says. But she sure as hell didnt wrap herself up in a sheet and walk out there on her own two bare feet and lay down and die in the rain and mud. Marinos bypassing my deputy chief medical examiner, Luke Zenner, or any of my forensic pathologists at the CFC isnt about my being the most qualified even though I am. Its about Marino stepping back into his earlier life so he can be who he was when we first met. He no longer works for me. He gets to summon me on command. Thats the way he figures things and hell remind

me as often as he can. I mean, if you really don't feel up to it... he starts to say and it sounds like a challenge or maybe he's goading me. I don't know. How can I judge anything right now? I'm worn-out and famished. I can't stop thinking about boiled eggs with butter and coarsely ground peppercorns, and hot fresh baked bread and espresso. I would kill for a chilled glass of freshly squeezed blood orange juice. No, no, the worst is past. I reach for the bottle of water on the nightstand. Let me get myself together here. I don't move beyond taking a big swallow, the thirst no longer unquenchable, my lips and tongue no longer as dry as paper. I had cough syrup before I went to bed. Codeine. Lucky you. I'm a little groggy but fine. It's not a good idea for me to drive, certainly not in this weather. Who found her? Maybe he already told me that. I press the back of my hand to my forehead. No fever. I'm sure it really is gone, not just Advil suppressing it. A girl from MIT, a guy from Harvard out on a date and decided to find a little privacy in her dorm room. You know Simmons Hall? That huge building that looks like it was built out of LEGOs on the other side of the MIT baseball and rugby fields, Marino says. I can tell he has a police scanner with the squelch turned up loud. In his element, I'm sure. Armed and dangerous with a detective's badge on his belt, driving an unmarked police vehicle equipped with lights and a siren and God knows what else. In the old days when he was a cop, he used to trick out his police vehicles like he does his Harleys. They noticed what they thought at first was a manikin in a toga lying in the mud at the far end of the field inside the fence that separates it from a parking lot, says the Marino from my past, Marino the detective. So they walked inside an open gate to get a closer look and when they realized it was a female wrapped in a sheet with nothing on under it and that she wasn't breathing they called nine-one-one. The body is nude? What I'm really asking is if it's been disturbed and by whom. They claim they didn't touch it. The sheets soaking wet and I think it's pretty obvious she's naked. Machado talked to them and says he's confident they've got nothing to do with whatever happened to her but we'll swab them for DNA, do backgrounds, the whole nine yards. He goes on to say that Cambridge detective Sil Machado suspects the woman is a drug overdose. Which may be related to the weird-ass suicide from the other day, Marino adds. As you know there's some bad stuff on the streets and it's causing huge problems around here. Which suicide? Unfortunately there have been a number of them while I was out of town and ill. The fashion-designer lady who jumped off the roof of her Cambridge apartment building and splattered the plate-glass windows of the first-floor health club while people were inside working out, he says. It looked like a spaghetti bomb went off. Anyway, they're thinking it could be related. I don't know why. They think it could be drugs, some bad shit she got into. Whos they? I didn't work the suicide of course and I reach down for the stacks of cases on the floor by the bed. Machado. Also his sergeant, his lieutenant, Marino says. It's gone straight up the chain to the superintendents and the commissioner. I set files on the bed, what must be at least a dozen folders, printouts of death reports and photographs my chief of staff Bryce Clark has been leaving on the sunporch for me daily, along with provisions he's been kind enough to pick up. The concern is it could be the same really bad meth or designer-type shit in other words, some latest version of bath salts that's been hitting the streets around here. Maybe what the suicide lady was on, Marino tells me. One theory is that Gail Shipton, if it's her whos dead, was with someone doing some really bad drugs and she Oded so he dumped her body. This is your theory? Hell no. If you're dumping a body why do it in a damn university playing field like you're displaying it to shock people? That's my point, the biggest threat we've got to watch for these days. Do something sensational enough and it will be all over the news and get the attention of the president of the United States. I think whoever dumped her body at Briggs Field is a bird of that kind of feather. He's doing it for attention, to be headline news. That could be part of it but probably not all of it. I'm texting you a few photos that Machado texted me. Marino's deep voice continues in my ear, a rough voice, a rude, pushy voice. You shouldn't text while you drive. I reach for my iPad. Yeah, so I'll write myself a ticket. Any drag marks or other indications of how the body ended up where it is? You can see in the photos it's real muddy and unfortunately any drag marks or footprints probably got mostly washed out by the rain. But I haven't been there yet and looked for myself. I open the photographs he just e-mailed and note the soaked grass and red mud inside Briggs Field's fence, then I zoom in closer on the dead woman wrapped in white. Slender, flat on her back, her long wet brown hair neatly arranged around a young pretty face that is tilted slightly to the left and glazed with rain. The cloth is wound around her upper chest like a bath sheet, like the big towels people wrap up in while they're lounging at a spa. Recognition stirs, and then I'm startled by the similarity to what Benton sent me several weeks ago when he took a considerable risk. Without authorization from the FBI he asked my opinion about the murders he's working in Washington, D.C. But those women had plastic bags over their heads and this one doesn't. They had designer duct tape around their necks and a bow attached, and that's a pattern unique to the killer and it's absent here. We don't even know that she's a homicide,

I remind myself, and I shouldn't be surprised if she died suddenly and a panicky companion wrapped her in a bedsheet, perhaps one from a dormitory, before leaving her outside, where she'd be found quickly. I suspect someone pulled their car into the parking lot close to the fence, opened the gate, and dragged or carried her in, Marino continues as I stare at the image on my iPad, disturbed by it on a level that's out of reach, a deeply intuitive place, and I try to reason away what I'm feeling but I can't, and I can't say a word about it to him. Benton would be fired if the FBI knew what he's done, sharing classified information with his wife. It doesn't matter that I'm an expert whose jurisdiction includes federal cases and it would have made sense for me to be consulted anyway. Usually I am but for some reason I wasn't. His boss, Ed Granby, has little use for me and would take delight in stripping Benton of his credentials and sending him packing. That one gate wasn't locked, Marino says. The couple that found her said it was shut when they got to it but not locked. The rest of the gates are secured with chains and padlocks so nobody can get in after hours. Whoever's responsible either knew that one wasn't locked or used bolt cutters or had a key. The body's been deliberately posed. The phantom pain of a chronic headache makes my head feel heavy. On her back, legs together and straight, one arm gracefully resting on her belly, the other extended, the wrist bent dramatically like a dancer or as if she passed out on a fainting couch. Nothing is disarrayed, the sheet carefully arranged around her. Actually, I'm not sure it's a sheet. I zoom in as close as I can before the image begins to deconstruct. It's a white cloth at any rate. Her positioning is ritualistic, symbolic. I'm sure of it, and the flutter in my stomach is fear. What if it's the same thing? What if he's here? I remind myself that the D.C. cases are fresh on my mind because they're why Benton isn't home right now and it wasn't that long ago when I went through the scene photographs and autopsy and lab reports. A body wrapped in a white cloth and positioned modestly and rather languidly by no means suggests this case is connected to the other ones, I tell myself repeatedly. She was left like that on purpose, Marino is saying, because it means something to the sick asshole who did it. How could anyone get the body out there without being seen? I focus my attention where it belongs. On a playing field in the heart of MIT apartment buildings and dorms? Start with the idea that we may be dealing with someone familiar with the area, possibly another student, an employee, a person who lives or works around there. Where she was dumped isn't lit up at night, he says. Behind the indoor tennis courts, you know the big white bubble, then the athletic fields. I'll pick you up in thirty, forty minutes. Pulling up to the Psi Bar now. Closed of course. No sign of anyone, no lights on. I'll take a look around outside where she might have been using her phone, then head over to your house. You're alone, I assume. Ten-four. Be careful, please. I SIT UP IN BED and sort through files inside the master suite of our nineteenth-century home that was built by a well-known transcendentalist. I start with the suicide Marino mentioned. Three days ago, on Sunday, December 16, twenty-six-year-old Sakura Yamagata stepped off the roof of her nineteen-story Cambridge apartment building, and her cause of death is what I'd expect in such a violent event. Multiple blunt-force traumatic injuries, her brain avulsed from the cranial cavity. Her heart, liver, spleen, and lungs lacerated. The bones of her face, her ribs, arms, legs, and pelvis extensively fractured. I sort through 8-by-10 scene photographs that include shocked people gawking, many of them in gym clothes and hugging themselves against the cold, and a distinguished gray-haired man in a suit and tie who looks defeated and dazed. In one of the photographs he's next to Marino, who's pointing and talking, and in another the gray-haired man is crouched by the body, his head bent and tragic and with the same utterly defeated look on his face. It's obvious he had a relationship with Sakura Yamagata, and I imagine the frightened reaction of people using the fitness center on the first floor, looking out at the exact moment her body struck. It thudded hard, like a heavy sandbag, as one witness described it in a news report included in the case file. Tissue and blood splattered the plate-glass windows, teeth and fragmented parts scattered as far as fifty feet from the site of impact. Her head and face were damaged beyond visual recognition. I associate such severely mutilating deaths with psychosis or the influence of drugs, and as I skim through the pages of the detailed police report, I'm struck by how strange it feels to see Marino's name and ID number on it. Reporting Officer, Marino, P. R. (D33). I haven't seen a police narrative written by him since he left Richmond PD a decade ago, and I read his description of what occurred this past Sunday afternoon at a Cambridge luxury high-rise on Memorial Drive.... I responded to the above address after the incident had occurred, and I interviewed Dr. Franz Schoenberg. He informed me he is a psychiatrist with a practice in Cambridge and that Sakura Yamagata, a fashion designer, was a patient of his. On the day of the incident at 1556 hours, she texted him, indicating her intention to fly to Paris from the roof of her apartment building. At approximately 1618 hours Dr. Schoenberg arrived at her address and was escorted to the roof area through a rear door. He stated to me that he observed her nude and standing on the other side of a low rail on the ledge, her back to him, her arms

spread wide. He called to her once, saying, Suki, Im here. Everything is going to be all right. He stated that she did not answer or make any indication she heard him. She immediately fell forward in what he described as a swan dive that was intentional...LUKE ZENNER performed her autopsy and submitted the appropriate tissues and fluids to the toxicology lab. Heart, lung, liver, pancreas, blood...I stroke Socks lean brindle body, feeling his ribs gently rise and fall as he breathes, and Im suddenly exhausted again as if talking to Marino took everything Ive got. Struggling to stay awake, I skim through the photographs again, looking for ones with the gray-haired man who I suspect is Dr. Franz Schoenberg. Thats why the police allowed him near the body. Thats why hes next to Marino, and I cant imagine watching your patient jump off a roof. How does anyone ever get over that? I search my thoughts as they fade in and out, wondering if I might have met the psychiatrist somewhere. You dont get over it, I think. Some things you wont get over, not ever, you cant...Bad drugs, I recall what Marino just suggested to me. Designer ones, bath salts that have hit Massachusetts hard this past year, and weve had a number of bizarre suicides and accidents relating to them. There have been homicides and property crimes, an alarming increase in general, especially in the Boston area where there are Section 8 housing developments or what the police call the projects. People dealing drugs, gang members get a nice roof over their heads for a bargain, and they bring down the neighborhood and cause damage all around them. I go through my mental list of what needs to be done as I log on to my office e-mail. I notify toxicology to put a rush on the analysis in the Sakura Yamagata case and screen for designer stimulants. Mephedrone, methylenedioxypropylone or MDPV, and methylone. Luke didnt think to include hallucinogens and we should test for those, too. LSD, methylergometrine, ergotamine...My thoughts drift and focus. Ergot alkaloids can cause ergotism also known as ergototoxicosis or Saint Anthonys Fire, with symptoms resembling bewitchment that some believe may have led to the Salem witchcraft trials. Convulsions, spasms, mania, psychosis...My vision blurs and clears, my head nods and jerks up as rain splashes the roof and windows. I should have told Marino to ensure someone makes a tent out of a waterproof tarp or plasticized sheets to protect the body from the weather, from the eyes of the curious. To protect me, too. I dont need to be out in the elements, getting soaked, chilled, filmed by the media...Television and production trucks were everywhere, and we made sure all of the blinds were drawn. Dark brown carpet. Thick slicks of dark coagulated blood that I could smell as it began to decompose. Sticky on the bottom of my shoes as I moved around inside that room. There was so much blood and I tried so hard not to step in it, to work the crime scene properly. As if it mattered. But there is no one to punish and no punishment would be enough. And I sit quietly propped up against pillows, the anger tucked in its dark place, perfectly still, looking out with citrine eyes. I see its mighty shape and feel its weight on the foot of my bed. Marino will have made sure the body is protected. The anger shifts heavily. The sound and rhythm of the downpour change from fortissimo to pianissimo...Marino knows what hes doing. Fugue from adagio to furioso...TEN YEARS EARLIER RICHMOND, VIRGINIA heavy rain splashes the driveway, flooding granite pavers and thrashing trees, the summer storm beating up an angry sky over a city Im leaving. I cut off a strip of packing tape, sweating inside my garage, slightly disinhibited, a little weird from alcohol. Richmond Police Detective Pete Marino is trying to get me drunk, to defeat me when Im weak. Maybe I should have sex with you and get it over with. Marking boxes with a Sharpie, I designate areas of my Richmond home, the one I built of reclaimed wood and stone, what was supposed to be a dream meant to last: living room, master bath, guestroom, kitchen, pantry, laundry room, office... Anything to make it easier on the other side, having no idea what the other side will be ultimately. God I hate moving. I run the tape dispenser over a box and it sounds like cloth ripping. Then why the hell do it all the time? Marino flirts aggressively, and right now I let him. All the time? I laugh out loud at his ridiculousness. And in the same damn city. One neighborhood to the next. He shrugs, oblivious to whats really going on with both of us. Who can keep track? I dont move without good reason. I sound like a lawyer. I am a lawyer. A doctor. A chief. Run, run as fast as you can. Marinos bloodshot eyes pin me to his emotional board. Im a butterfly. A red spotted purple. A tiger swallowtail. A luna moth. If I let you, youll knock the color off my wings. Ill be a trophy you no longer want. Be my friend. Why isnt that enough? I secure another lid to another box, comforted by the downpour outside my open garage door, a mist blowing in, one hundred percent humidity, steamy, dripping. Like a deep hot bath. Like being in the womb. Like a warm body folded into mine, an exchange of warm fluids over skin and deep inside sad lonely places. I need heat and moisture to hug me, to hold me close like my damp clothes clinging as Marino stares from his folding chair, in cut-off sweatpants and a tank top, his big face flushed from lust, wantonness, and beer. I wonder about the next overbearing detective Ill have to deal with and I dont want whoever it is. Someone I have to train and put up with, and

respect and loathe and get tired of and lonely for and love in my own way. It could be a woman, I remind myself. Some tough female investigator who assumes she'll be partners in crime with the new chief medical examiner, assumes she knows what I imagine a wolfish woman detective showing up at every death scene and autopsy, appearing in my office and roaring up in her truck or on her motorcycle the way Marino does. A big tattooed suntanned woman in sleeveless denim and a do-rag who wants to eat me to the bone. I'm being irrational and unfair, bigoted and ignorant. Lucy isn't competitive and controlling with the women she wants.

She doesn't have tattoos or a do-rag. She isn't like that. She doesn't need to be a predator to get what she wants. I can't stand these obsessive, intrusive thoughts. What has happened? Grief grabs the hollow organs of my belly and chest until I almost can't breathe. I'm overwhelmed by what I'm about to leave, which isn't really this house or Richmond or Virginia. Benton is gone, murdered five years ago. But as long as I stay right here I feel him in these rooms, on the roads I drive, on stultifying summer days and the raw, bleak ones of winter, as if he's watching me, is aware of me and every nuance of my being. I sense him in shifts of air and scents and feel him in shadows that become my moods as a voice from somewhere out of reach says he isn't dead. He's returning. A nightmare that isn't real. I'll wake up and he'll be right here, his hazel eyes locked on mine, his long tapered fingers touching me. I'll feel his warmth, his skin, and the perfect shape of his muscles and bones, so recognizable as he holds me, and I'll be as alive as I've ever been. Then I won't have to move to some existential dead place where more pieces of me will wither inch by inch, cell by cell, and I envision dense woods beyond my property and the canal and railroad tracks. Down the embankment is a rocky stretch of the James River, a timeless part of the city at the back of Lockgreen, a gated enclave of contemporary homes lived in by those with money who covet privacy and security. Neighbors I almost never see. Privileged people who never question me about the latest tragedies on my stainless-steel tables. I'm an Italian from Miami, an outsider. The old guard of Richmond's West End doesn't know what to make of me. They don't wave. They don't stop to say hello. They eye my house as if it's haunted. I have walked my streets alone, emerging from the woods at the canal and rusty railroad tracks and wide shallow rocky water, imagining the Civil War and centuries before that the colony farther downriver in Jamestown, the first permanent English settlement. Surrounded by death, I've been soothed by the past being present, by beginnings that never end, by my belief that there are reasons and purposes for whatever happens and all of it turns out for the best. How could everything come to this? I tape up another box and feel Benton's death, a clammy breath at the back of my neck as humid air stirs. I'm empty, unbearably bereft by the void. I'm grateful for the rain, for the heavy full sound of it. You look like you're about to cry. Marino stares at me. Why are you crying? Sweats sting my eyes. It's hot as hell in here. You could shut the damn door and turn on the air. I want to hear the rain. What for? I'll never hear it again in this place like it is right now. Jesus. Rain is rain. He looks out the open garage door as if the rain might be unusual, a type of rain he's not seen before. He frowns the way he does when he's thinking hard, his tan forehead furrowed as he sucks in his lower lip and rubs his heavy jaw. He's rugged and formidable, huge and exudes aggression, almost handsome before his bad habits got the best of him early in his hard-bitten life. His dark hair is graying and slicked to one side in a comb-over he won't acknowledge any more than he'll admit he's balding prematurely. He's over six feet tall, broad and big-boned, and when his arms and legs are bare like they are right now I'm reminded he's a former Golden Gloves boxer who doesn't need a gun to kill someone. I don't know why the hell you had to offer to resign. He stares boldly at me without blinking. Only to hang around for the better part of a year to buy the asshole's time to find your replacement. That was stupid. You shouldn't have offered a damn thing. Fuck 'em. Let's be honest, I was fired. That's how it translates when you volunteer to step down because you've embarrassed the governor. I'm calmer now, reciting the same old lines. It's not the first time you've pissed off the governor. It probably won't be the last. Because you don't know when to quit. I believe I just did. He watches my every move as if I'm a suspect who might go for a weapon and I continue labeling boxes as if they're evidence: Scarpetta, today's date, belongings destined for the master closet in a South Florida rental house where I don't want to be, what feels like an apocalyptic defeat returning me to the land of my birth. To go back to where I'm from is the ultimate failure, a judgment proving I'm no better than my upbringing, no better than my self-absorbed mother and narcissistic male-addicted only sibling Dorothy, who's guilty of criminally neglecting her only child Lucy. What's the longest you ever stayed anywhere? Marino relentlessly interrogates me, his attention trespassing in places he's never been allowed to touch or enter. He feels encouraged and it's my fault, drinking with him, saying good-bye in a way that sounds like Hello, don't leave me. He senses what I'm considering. If I let you maybe it won't be so important anymore. Miami, I suppose, I answer him. Until I was sixteen and left for Cornell. Sixteen. One of these genius types, you and Lucy cut out of the same cloth. His bloodshot

eyes are fastened to me, nothing subtle about it. I've been in Richmond that long and its time to move on. I tape up another box, this one marked Confidential, packed with autopsy reports, case studies, secrets I need to keep as his imagination undresses me. Or maybe he's simply assessing because he worries I'm slightly crazy, have been made a little unhinged by what's happened to my stellar career. Dr. Kay Scarpetta, the first woman to be appointed chief medical examiner of Virginia, now has the distinction of being the first one forced out of office... If I hear that one more goddamned time on the goddamned news... I'm quitting the police department, he says. I don't act surprised. I don't act like anything at all. You know why, Doc. You're expecting it. This is exactly what you want. Why are you crying? It's not sweat. You're crying. What's the matter, huh? You'd be pissed if I didn't quit and head out of Dodge with you, admit it. Hey. It's okay, he says kindly, sweetly, misinterpreting as usual, and the effect on me is a dangerous comfort. You're stuck with me.

He says what I want to be true but not the way he means it, and we continue our languages, neither of us speaking the same one. He shakes two cigarettes from a pack and gets up from his chair to give me one, his arm touching me as he holds the lighter close. A spurt of flame and he moves the lighter away, the back of his hand touching me. I don't move. I take a deep drag. So much for quitting. I mean smoking. I don't mean so much for quitting the Richmond Police Department. Hell quit and I shouldn't want him to and I don't have to be a psychic to predict the outcome, the aftermath. It's only a matter of time before he's angry, depressed, emasculated. Hell get increasingly frustrated, jealous, and out of control. One day he'll pay me back. Hell hurt me. There's a price for everything. The ripping sound as I tape another box, building my white walls of cardboard that smell like stale air and dust. Living in Florida. Fishing, riding my Harley, no more snow. You know me and cold, crappy weather. He blows out a stream of smoke, returning to his chair, leaning back, and the strong scent of him goes away. I won't miss a damn thing about this one-horse town. He flicks an ash on the concrete floor, tucking the pack of cigarettes and lighter in the breast pocket of his sweat-stained tank top. You'll be unhappy if you give up policing, I tell him the truth. But I'm not going to stop him. Being a cop isn't what you do, it's who you are, I add. I'm honest with him. You need to arrest people. To kick in doors. To make good on whatever you threaten. To stare down scumbags in court and send them to jail. That's your

raison d'être, Marino. Your reason for existing. I know what *raison d'être* means. I don't need you to translate. You need the power to punish people. That's what you live for. *Merde de bull*. All the huge cases I've worked? He shrugs in his chair as the noise of the rain changes, smacking, then splattering, now drumming, his powerful shape backlit by the eerie gray light of the volatile afternoon. I can write my own ticket. And what would that be exactly? I sit down on a box, tapping an ash. You. One person can't be your ticket and were never getting married. I'm that honest but it's not the whole truth. I didn't ask you. Did anybody hear me ask? he announces as if there are other people inside the garage with us. I've never even asked you on a date. It wouldn't work. No shit. Who could live with you? I drop the cigarette into an empty beer bottle and it hisses out. The only thing I'm talking about is having a job with you. He won't look at me now. Being your lead investigator, building a good team of them, creating a training program. The best anywhere in the world. You won't respect yourself. I'm right but he won't see it. He smokes and drinks as rain pummels gray granite pavers beyond the wide square opening, and in the distance agitated trees, churning dark clouds, and farther off the railroad tracks, the canal, the river that runs through the city I'm leaving. And then you won't respect me, Marino. That's the way it will happen. It's already decided. Another swallow of beer, the green bottle sweating, dripping condensation as he refuses to look at me. I got it all figured out. Lucy and me both do. Remember what I just said. Every word, I reply from the taped-up box I'm sitting on, this one labeled *Do Not Touch*. CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 194:48 A.M. An engine rumbles in front of the house, and I open my eyes expecting boxes labeled with a Sharpie and Marino sweating in the folding chair. What I see is simple cherry furniture that's been in Benton's New England family for more than a hundred years. I recognize champagne silk drapes drawn across windows, the striped sofa and coffee table in front of them and then the brown hardwood floor becomes brown carpet. I smell the sweet putrid odor of blood. Dark red streaks and drops on tables and chairs. Pictures colored with crayons and Magic Markers, and a Peg-Board hung with children's knapsacks inside a brightly cluttered first-grade classroom where everyone is dead. The air is permeated with the volatile molecules of blood breaking down, red cells separating from serum. Coagulation and decomposition. I smell it. Then I don't. An olfactory hallucination, the receptors of my first cranial nerve stimulated by something remembered and no longer there. I massage the back of my stiff neck and breathe deeply, the imagined stench replaced by the scent of antique wood and the citrus-ginger reed diffuser on the fireplace mantel. I detect a hint of smoke and burnt split logs from the last fire I built before Benton left town, before Connecticut. Before I got sick. I look at the

clock. Dammit, I mutter. It's almost five a.m. After Marino called I must have drifted back to sleep and now he's in my driveway. I text him to give me fifteen minutes and I'll be right down as I remember the Marino I was just talking to and drinking beer with in the humid heat. Every image, every word, of the dream is vivid like a movie, some of it factual shards of what really happened the summer I left Virginia for good a decade ago, some of it confabulated by my deepest disappointments and fears. All of it is true in what it represents. What I knew and felt back then during the darkest of dark times. That Benton had been murdered. That I was being forced out of office, done in by politics, by white males in suits who didn't give a damn about the truth, didn't give a damn about what I'd lost, which felt like everything. Lowering my feet to the floor, I find my slippers. I have a crime scene to work and Marino is picking me up like the old days, like our Richmond days. He's predicting the case is a bad one and I have no doubt that's what he wants. He wishes for some sensational homicide to reignite his lost self as he rises from the ashes of what he believes he wasted because of me. I'm sorry, I tell Sock as I move him again and get up, weak, light-headed but much improved. I'm fine. In fact, oddly euphoric. Benton's presence surrounds me. He isn't dead, thank God, oh thank God. His murder was faked, a brilliant contrivance by the brilliant FBI to protect him from organized criminals, from some French cartel head undermined. He wasn't allowed to tell me he was alive and safe in a protected witness program. There could be no contact at all, not the slightest clue as he watched me from a distance, checking on me without my knowing. I felt him. I know I did. What I dreamed about it is true and there was a better way to do what was done and I won't forgive the FBI for the years they ruined. Those years were broken and cruel as I languished miserably in the Bureau's lies, my heart, my soul, my destiny commanded by an artless ugly precast building named after J. Edgar Hoover. Now Benton and I won't allow such a thing, not ever. Were each other's first loyalty and he tells me things. He finds a way to let me know whatever he needs me to know so we never again go through such an outrageous ordeal. He's alive and well and out of town. That's all, and I try his cell phone to say I miss him and Happy Almost-Birthday. I get voice mail. Next I try his hotel in northern Virginia, the Marriott where he always stays when he has business with his FBI colleagues at the Behavioral Analysis Unit, the BAU. Mr. Wesley has checked out, the desk clerk tells me when I ask for Benton's room. When? I don't understand. It was right as I was coming on duty around midnight. I recognize the clerk's voice, soft-spoken with a Virginia lilt. He's worked at this same Marriott for years and I've spoken to him on many occasions, especially these past few weeks after a second and third murder occurred. This is Kay Scarpetta. Yes, ma'am, I know. How are you? This is Carl. You sound a little stopped-up. I hope you don't have the bug that's going around. I hear it's a bad one. I'm just fine but thanks for asking. Did he happen to mention why he was checking out earlier than planned? He was supposed to be there until this weekend, last I heard. Yes, ma'am, I'm looking. Checkout was scheduled for Saturday. Yes, three more days. Well, I'm puzzled. You don't know why he suddenly left at midnight? I'm rambling a bit, trying to work through what doesn't make sense. Mr. Wesley didn't say. I've been reading about the cases around here his units working, what little there is, the FBI being so hush-hush, which only makes it worse, you ask me, because I'd rather know what we're dealing with. You know there are those of us who don't wear guns and badges and travel in packs and we have to worry about even going to the mall or a movie. It would be nice to know what's going on around here, and I got to tell you, Dr. Scarpetta, there are a lot of nervous people, a lot of people really scared including me. If I had my way, my wife wouldn't leave the house anymore. I thank him and extricate myself as politely as I can, contemplating the possibility that there's been another awful case somewhere. Perhaps Benton has been deployed to a new location. But it's not like him not to let me know. I check to see if he's e-mailed me. He hasn't. He probably didn't want to wake me up, I say to my lazy old dog. That's one of the perks if you're sick. You already feel bad enough and then people make you feel worse because they don't want to bother you. I catch a glimpse of myself in the mirror I pass, pale in rumpled black silk pajamas, blond hair plastered to my head, blue eyes glassy. I've lost a few pounds and look haunted from dreams that seem a replay of a past I miss and don't. I need a shower but it will have to wait. Opening dresser drawers, I find underwear, socks, black cargo pants, and a black long-sleeved shirt with the CFC crest embroidered in gold. I retrieve my Sig nine-millimeter from the bedside table and zip the pistol inside a quick-release fanny pack as I wonder, Why bother? Nobody cares what I wear to a muddy death scene. I don't need a concealed weapon if Marino is picking me up. Even the smallest decision seems overwhelming, possibly because I haven't had to make any important ones over recent days. Heat up chicken broth and refill Sock's water bowl, feed him, don't forget his glucosamine chondroitin. Drink fluids, as much as you can stand. Don't touch the cases on the floor by the bed, the autopsy and lab reports awaiting your review and initialing, not when you have a fever. And of course I've done a lot of online shopping with so much time to drift in and out of

thoughts and dreams and spend money on all the people I want to make happy and am grateful for, even if they disappoint me like my mother and my sister Dorothy and maybe Marino, too. Confined to the bedroom, with Benton some 450 miles south of here, and its a good thing Ive reminded myself until I almost believe it.

Most physicians really are bad patients and I might be the worst. When I got home from Connecticut he wanted to leave Washington, D.C., right then and I knew that wasnt what he should do. He was trying to be a good husband. He said hed catch the next flight but I wouldnt hear of it. When hes in pursuit of a predator theres no room for anything else, not even me. It doesnt matter what Im going through and I told him no. Im not dying but other people are. I was adamant on the phone with him. Ive seen enough death. I just saw more of it than anyone ever should. I dont know what the hell is wrong with people. Im coming home. A few days early and its not going to matter. You can trust me on that. Things are bad here, Kay. A mother has a son with severe developmental problems so she teaches him how to use a damn Bushmaster assault rifle, for

Gods sake? You need me with you and I need to come home. Then maybe he can massacre an entire elementary school so he feels powerful for a moment before he takes his own life. I can understand how angry you must feel. Anger doesnt do any damn good at all. Ill catch a plane or Lucy can pick me up. I told him that the top priority was for him and his colleagues at the BAU to catch a killer the media has dubbed the Capital Murderer. Stop the infamia bastardo before he kills someone else, I said. Im okay. I can manage. I have the flu, Benton. I brushed it off. I wont be pleasant to be around and I dont want you or anyone else catching what Ive got. Dont come home. Its not going well here, from bad to worse, he said. Im worried hes gone somewhere else and is killing again or will be soon, and everyone at the BAU disagrees with me about everything. Youre still convinced hes not local to the D.C. area. I believe hes in and out, which would explain why there were no murders between April and Thanksgiving. Seven months of silence and then two in a row. This is someone intimately familiar with certain geographic areas because he has a job that requires travel. What hes told me makes sense but what doesnt is why hes being ignored. Benton has always gotten the respect he deserves but not now in the Washington cases, and I know hes fed up and aggravated as hell but what he cant do is worry about me. I know hes had his fill of sitting around with a group of criminal investigative analysts, what people still call profilers, and listening to theories and psychological interpretations that are being run from Boston and not the BAU. Ed Granby has his fingerprints all over this case and thats the biggest problem, and Benton needs to deal with all that and not his wife. SOCK

FOLLOWS ME into the bathroom and I squint in the overhead light, old subway tile shiny and bright. White bath sheets folded on top of a hamper near the tub remind me of the dead body wrapped in white at MIT. Then I think again about the victims in Washington, D.C., and my review of their cases last month after two more women were murdered one week apart. I deliberate whether I should e-mail the MIT photograph to Benton but its not for me to do. Its for Marino to do and its premature, and its also not up to me to divulge details to him about Bentions cases. In fact, I cant possibly. I wash my face, freshening up, as I remind myself what he said about repetitive behavior that goes beyond the killing, the bags, the duct tape, each victim wearing the previous victims underwear except in the first case, Klara Hembree. She was originally from Cambridge and thats bothering me, too. In the midst of an acrimonious divorce from her wealthy real estate developer husband, she moved to D.C. last spring to be near her family and barely a month later was abducted and dead. DNA on the panties she was wearing came back to an unknown female of European descent, and Benton feels strongly this indicates there are other victims. But theres no opportunity for cases to be compared or connected because the FBI has been miserly about releasing information. Nothing about the bags or the duct tape has made it into the news. Theres not even been a mention of the white cloths or sheets, certainly not about the bags, clear plastic with the hologram of an octopus, an iridescent oblong head and tentacles that shimmer in rainbow hues depending on the angle of light. Klara Hembree was murdered last April, and then this past month before Thanksgiving there were two more Sally Carson, a professor, and Julianne Goulet, a concert pianist. Each of the women, like the first one, is believed to have been suffocated with a plastic bag from the D.C. spa store called Octopus that was burglarized about a year ago, cases of the customized bags and other inventory stolen from the loading dock. Benton is certain the killer is escalating out of control but the FBI is not listening to him or his repeated suggestion that certain details of the crimes should be released publicly. Maybe some police department somewhere has had a similar crime but Bentions argument continues to be overruled by his boss Ed Granby. Hes ordered that there can be absolutely no sharing of investigative information about former Cambridge resident Klara Hembree and that means there cant be information released about the other two recent cases. Details will get leaked and might inspire a copycat and Granbys not going to budge from that opinion. While hes got a valid point, hes ground the

investigation to a halt, according to Benton. Since Granby took over the Boston division last summer Benton has felt increasingly ostracized and marginalized, and Ive continued to remind him that some people are jealous, controlling, and competitive. Its an ugly fact of life. By now the two of them cordially despise each other and this is probably a hidden reason why my husband wanted to come home. It wasnt just about my being sick or that his birthday is tomorrow or that the holidays are here. He was extremely unhappy when I talked to him last and Ive been halfway expecting him any minute, or that might be wishful thinking. He left for D.C. almost a month ago and I miss him terribly. I walk back into the bedroom with Sock on my heels, and Marinos just going to have to wait a minute or two longer. Retrieving my iPad from the bed, I log on to my office database and find what Benton scanned to me last month, quickly scrolling through the files. The three homicides play out in my mind as if theyre happening before my eyes and the details are just as perplexing as when I first looked at them. I envision what Ive envisioned before, reconstructing the way I know biology works or doesnt, and I watch them die as Ive watched them die before. I see it. A woman with a clear plastic bag over her head and duct tape around her neck, a designer duct tape with a black lacy pattern, and clear plastic rapidly sucks in and out, her eyes panicked as her face turns a deep blue-red. Pressure builds, causing a light scattering of petechial hemorrhages across the cheeks and eyelids, tiny pinpricks blooming bright red as vessels rupture. Fighting to stay alive but restrained somehow and then all goes silent and still, and the final act, a bow fashioned from the same designer duct tape is attached under her chin, the killer wrapping his gift to inhumanity. Yet the physical findings dont add up to what I would expect. They tell a truth that seems a lie. The victims would have struggled violently. They would have frantically fought to breathe when they were being suffocated but theres no evidence they did. As Benton put it, they seemed to comply as if they wanted to die and I know damn well they didnt. These arent suicides. Theyre sadistic murders and I believe the killer is restraining them, possibly with a ligature that leaves no mark. But I cant figure out what that might be. Even the softest material will leave a bruise or abrasion if someone is tightly bound with it and panics and fights. I cant fathom why the duct tape left no injury. How do you suffocate someone and leave virtually no sign of it? Each body was found in a northern Virginia or southern Maryland public park, and I continue to quickly skim through what Benton sent to me the end of November, knowing Ive got to hurry up and I cant tell Marino whats on my mind. Three different parks, two with a lake, another with a golf course, all of them very close to railroad tracks and within twenty miles of Washington, D.C. In the scene photographs the victims were clad only in panties that were identified as belonging to a previous victim except in the case of the former Cambridge resident Klara Hembree. A DNA profile recovered from the panties she had on is the unknown female of European descent in other words, white. I click through photographs of dead faces staring through plastic bags from the bath and body boutique called Octopus near Lafayette Square, mere blocks from the White House. Theres no evidence of sexual assault, nothing significant recovered from the bodies except two types of Lycra fibers, one blue-dyed and the other white. The morphology of the fibers in each of the three cases is slightly different. Its been speculated they might be from athletic clothing the killer wears or possibly from furniture upholstery in his residence. I sit down on the sofa to dress, conserving strength, before venturing out to MITs playing fields where I will examine a dead human being whose truth must be coaxed and cut out of her, as I have done thousands of times in my career. Sock jumps up and rests his grizzled muzzle on my lap. I stroke his head and velvety long snout, careful with his ears, tattered and scarred from his former cruel life at the racetrack. You need to get up, I tell him. I have to take you out, then Ive got work to do. I dont want you to get into a state about it. Promise? I reassure him our housekeeper Rosa will be here soon and will keep him company. Come on. Then youll eat breakfast and take a nap. Ill be home before you know it. I hope dogs dont know when we lie. Rosa wont be here soon and I wont be home before Sock knows it. Its very early and will be a very long day. The message alert dings on my phone. You coming or what? Marino texts me. Ready, I reply. I clip the fanny packs nylon strap around my waist, tightening it as I move a curtain aside. Veils of rain billow past streetlights in front of our Federal-style antique home in central Cambridge, close to Harvards Divinity School and the Academy of Arts and Sciences. I watch Marino climb out of an SUV that doesnt belong to him personally. The Ford Explorer is black or dark blue, parked in my puddled driveway, the old brick boiling with heavy rain. He opens a passenger door, unaware that Im staring down at him from a second-floor window, oblivious to what I feel when I see him, indifferent to how anything might affect me. He never announced his news and of course he didnt need to because I already knew. The Cambridge Police Department wouldnt have cared about his petition for exemption, and no number of glowing advisory letters was going to matter if I didnt personally recommend him for a lateral transfer into

their investigative unit. I got him his damn new job. Thats the truth of it and the irony.I lobbied on his behalf to the Cambridge police commissioner and the local district attorney, telling them with authority that Marino is the perfect candidate. With his vast experience and training he shouldnt be obliged to go through the academy with rookies, and the hell with age limitations. Hes gold, a treasure. I made my case for him because I want him to be happy. I dont want him to resent me anymore. I dont want him to blame me.I feel a twinge of sadness and anger as he unlatches the dog crate in the backseat to let out his German shepherd, a rescue he named Quincy. He snaps a leash on the harness and I hear the muffled thud of the car door shutting in the hard rain. Through the bare branches of the big oak tree on the other side of the glass I watch this man Ive known most of my professional life lead his dog, still a puppy, to shrubbery.They follow the brick walk, and motion-sensor lights blink on as if saluting Cambridge police detective Pete Marinos approach. His large stature is exaggerated by the shadow he casts, on the front porch steps now in the glow of old iron gas lamps. Socks nails click on the hardwood floor, following me to the stairs.My opinion is it wont work out the way he thinks, I continue talking to a dog as silent as a mime. Hes doing it for the wrong reason.Of course Marino doesnt see it. He has it in his head that he left policing ten years ago because it was my idea and completely against his will. Were he asked Is your every disappointment Kay Scarpettas fault? hed say yes and pass a polygraph.I TURN ON LIGHTS that fill the French stained-glass windows over the landings, wildlife scenes in rich, brilliant hues.In the entryway I disarm the alarm system and open the front door, and Marino looms large on the front porch mat, his dog all legs and paws tugging desperately to give Sock and me a playful, sloppy hello.Come in. Ive got to let Sock out and feed him. In the entryway closet I begin collecting my gear.You look like hell. Marino pushes back the hood of his dripping rain slicker, his dog wearing a working vest, IN TRAINING on one side and DO NOT PET on the other in big white letters.I drag out my field case, a large, heavy-duty plastic toolbox I picked up for a bargain like a lot of medicolegal necessities I find at Walmart, Home Depot, wherever I can. Theres no point in paying hundreds of dollars for a surgical chisel or rib cutters if I can pick up tools for a song that do the job just fine.I dont want to get your floor wet. Marino watches me from the porch, staring the same unblinking stare as he did in my dream.Dont worry about it. Rosas coming. The place is a mess. I havent even gotten a tree yet.Looks like Scrooge lives here.Maybe he does. Come in out of the weather.Its supposed to clear off pretty soon. Marino wipes his feet on the mat, his leather boots thudding and scraping.I sit down on the rug as he steps inside and shuts the door. Quincy pulls toward me, his tail wagging furiously, loudly thumping the umbrella stand. Marino the dog handler, or what Lucy calls the dog chauffeur, chokes up on the lead and commands Quincy to sit. He doesnt.Sit, Marino repeats firmly. Down, he adds hopelessly.What else do we know about this case beyond what you described to me on the phone? Sock is in my lap, trembling because he knows Im leaving. Anything further about Gail Shipton, if thats who were dealing with?Theres an alley in back of the bar with a small parking area, deserted, some of the lights burned out, Marino describes. Obviously its where she went to use her phone. I located it and a shoe that are hers.Are we sure theyre hers? I begin putting on ankle-high boots, black nylon, insulated and waterproof.The phone definitely. He digs in a pocket for a biscuit, breaks off a piece, and Quincy sits in what I call his lunging position. Ready to pounce.What about those treats I gave you? Sweet-potato ones, a case of them.I ran out.Then youre giving him too many.Hes still growing.Well, if you keep it up he will but not the way you want.Plus they clean his teeth.What about the dog toothpaste I made for you?He doesnt like it.Her phone isnt password-protected? I ask as I tie my laces in double bows.Ive got my little trick for getting around that.Lucy, I think. Already, Marino is bringing my nieces old tricks to his new trade, and all of us know that her tricks arent necessarily legal.Id be careful about what you might not want to explain in court, I tell him.What people dont know they cant ask about. Its clear from his demeanor he doesnt want my advice.I assume you processed the phone first for prints, for DNA. I cant stop myself from talking to him the same way I did when he was under my supervision. Not even a month ago.The phone and the case its in.I get up from the floor and he shows me a photograph of a smartphone in a rugged black case on wet, cracked pavement near a dumpster. Not just a typical smartphone skin, I think. But a water- and shock-resistant hard-shell case with retractable screens, what Lucy refers to as military-grade. Its what she and I both have, and the detail might tell me something important about Gail Shipton. The average person doesnt have a smartphone skin like this.Revue de presseWhen it comes to the forensic sciences, nobody can touch Cornwell.The New York Times Book