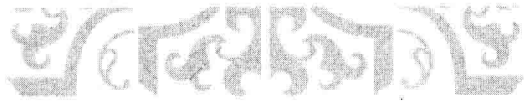


PATRICIA
CORNWELL

BOOK OF
THE DEAD



Book *of the* Dead



Patricia Cornwell

G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS
NEW YORK



G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS
Publishers Since 1838

Published by the Penguin Group

Penguin Group (USA) Inc., 375 Hudson Street, New York, New York 10014, USA *
Penguin Group (Canada), 90 Eglinton Avenue East, Suite 700, Toronto, Ontario M4P 2Y3,
Canada (a division of Pearson Penguin Canada Inc.) * Penguin Books Ltd, 80 Strand,
London WC2R 0RL, England * Penguin Ireland, 25 St Stephen's Green, Dublin 2, Ireland
(a division of Penguin Books Ltd) * Penguin Group (Australia), 250 Camberwell Road,
Camberwell, Victoria 3124, Australia (a division of Pearson Australia Group Pty Ltd) *
Penguin Books India Pvt Ltd, 11 Community Centre, Panchsheel Park, New Delhi-110
017, India * Penguin Group (NZ), 67 Apollo Drive, Rosedale, North Shore 0632, New
Zealand (a division of Pearson New Zealand Ltd) * Penguin Books (South Africa) (Pty)
Ltd, 24 Sturdee Avenue, Rosebank, Johannesburg 2196, South Africa

Penguin Books Ltd, Registered Offices: 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England

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ISBN 978-0-399-15393-8

Printed in the United States of America

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Acknowledgments

I am especially grateful to Dr. Staci Gruber, Assistant Professor of Psychiatry, Harvard Medical School, and Associate Director of the Cognitive Neuroimaging Laboratory, McLean Hospital.

*This book is dedicated
to my publisher,
Ivan Held.*



Rome

Water splashing. A gray mosaic tile tub sunk deep into a terra-cotta floor.

Water pours slowly from an old brass spout, and darkness pours through a window. On the other side of old, wavy glass is the piazza, and the fountain, and the night.

She sits quietly in water, and the water is very cold, with melting ice cubes in it, and there is little in her eyes—nothing much there anymore. At first, her eyes were like hands reaching out to him, begging him to save her. Now her eyes are the bruised blue of dusk. Whatever was in them has almost left. Soon she will sleep.

"Here," he says, handing her a tumbler that was handblown in Murano and now is filled with vodka.

He is fascinated by parts of her that have never seen the sun. They are pale like limestone, and he turns the spigot almost off, and the water is a trickle now, and he watches her rapid breathing and hears the chattering of her teeth. Her white breasts float beneath the surface of the water, delicate like white flowers. Her nipples, hard from the cold, are tight pink buds. Then he thinks of pencils. Of chewing off nubby pink erasers when he was in school, and telling his father and sometimes his mother that he didn't need erasers because he didn't make mistakes. When in truth, he liked to chew. He couldn't help it, and that also was the truth.

"You'll remember my name," he says to her.

"I won't," she says. "I can forget it." Chattering.

He knows why she says it: If she forgets his name, her destiny will be rethought like a bad battle plan.

"What is it?" he asks. "Tell me my name."

"I don't remember." Crying, shaking.

"Say it," he says, looking at her tan arms, pebbly with goose bumps, the blond hair on them erect, her young breasts and the darkness between her legs underwater.

"Will."

"And the rest of it?"

"Rambo."

"And you think that's amusing," he says, naked, sitting on the lid of the toilet.

She shakes her head vigorously.

Lying. She made fun of him when he told her his name. She laughed and said Rambo is make-believe, a movie name. He said it's Swedish. She said he isn't Swedish. He said the name is Swedish. Where did she think it came from? It's a real name. "Right," she said. "Like Rocky," she said, laughing. "Look it up on the Internet," he said. "It's a real name," he said, and he didn't like that he had to explain his name. This was two days ago, and he didn't hold it against her, but he was aware of it. He forgave her because despite what the world says, she suffers unbearably.

"Knowing my name will be an echo," he says. "It makes no difference, not in the least. Just a sound already said."

"I would never say it." Panic.

Her lips and nails are blue, and she shivers uncontrollably. She stares. He tells her to drink more, and she doesn't dare refuse him. The slightest act of insubordination, and she knows what happens. Even one small scream, and she knows what happens. He sits calmly on the lid of the toilet, his legs splayed so she can see his excitement, and fear it. She doesn't beg anymore or tell him to *have his way with her*, if that's the reason she's his hostage. She doesn't say this anymore because she knows what happens when she insults him and implies that if he had a way it would be *with her*. Meaning she wouldn't give it willingly and want it.

"You realize I asked you nicely," he says.

"I don't know." Teeth chattering.

"You do know. I asked you to thank me. That's all I asked, and I was nice to you. I asked you nicely, then you had to do this," he says. "You had to make me do this. You see"—he gets up and watches his

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nakedness in the mirror over the smooth marble sink—"your suffering makes me do this," his nakedness in the mirror says. "And I don't want to do this. So you've hurt me. Do you understand you've critically hurt me by making me do this?" his nakedness in the mirror says.

She says she understands, and her eyes scatter like flying shards of glass as he opens the toolbox, and her scattered gaze fixes on the box cutters and knives and fine-tooth saws. He lifts out a small bag of sand and sets it on the edge of the sink. He pulls out ampules of lavender glue and sets them down, too.

"I'll do anything you want. Give you anything you want." She has said this repeatedly.

He has ordered her not to say it again. But she just did.

His hands dip into the water, and the coldness of the water bites him, and he grabs her ankles and lifts her up. He holds her up by her cold, tan legs with their cold, white feet and feels her terror in her panicking muscles as he holds her cold ankles tight. He holds her a little longer than last time, and she struggles and flails and thrashes violently, cold water splashing loudly. He lets go. She gasps and coughs and makes strangling cries. She doesn't complain. She's learned not to complain—it took a while, but she's learned it. She's learned all of this is for her own good and is grateful for a sacrifice that will change his life—not hers, but his—in a way that isn't good. Wasn't good. Can never be good. She should be grateful for his gift.

He picks up the trash bag he filled with ice from the ice maker in the bar and pours the last of it in the tub and she looks at him, tears running down her face. Grief. The dark edges of it showing.

"We used to hang them from the ceiling over there," he says. "Kick them in the sides of their knees, over and over. Over there. All of us coming into the small room and kicking the sides of their knees. It's excruciatingly painful and, of course, crippling, and, of course, some of them died. That's nothing compared to other things I saw over there. I didn't work in that prison, you see. But I didn't need to, because there was plenty of that type of behavior to go around. What people don't understand is it wasn't stupid to film any of it. To photograph it. It was inevitable. You have to. If you don't, it's as if it never happened. So people take pictures. They show them to others. It only takes one. One person to see it. Then the whole world does."

She glances at the camera on the marble-top table against the stucco wall.

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"They deserved it anyway, didn't they?" he says. "They forced us to be something we weren't, so whose fault was it? Not ours."

She nods. She shivers, and her teeth chatter.

"I didn't always participate," he says. "I did watch. At first it was difficult, perhaps traumatic. I was against it, but the things they did to us. And because of what they did, we were forced to do things back, so it was their fault that they forced us, and I know you see that."

She nods and cries and shakes.

"The roadside bombs. Kidnapping. Much more than you hear about," he says. "You get used to it. Just like you're getting used to the cold water, aren't you?"

She isn't used to it, only numb and on her way to hypothermia. By now her head pounds and her heart feels as if it will explode. He hands her the vodka, and she drinks.

"I'm going to open the window," he says. "So you can hear Bernini's fountain. I've heard it much of my life. The night's perfect. You should see the stars." He opens the window and looks at the night, the stars, the fountain of four rivers, and the piazza. Empty at this hour. "You won't scream," he says.

She shakes her head and her chest heaves and she shivers uncontrollably.

"You're thinking about your friends. I know that. Certainly they're thinking about you. That's too bad. And they aren't here. They aren't anywhere to be seen." He looks at the deserted piazza again and shrugs. "Why would they be here now? They've left. Long ago."

Her nose runs and tears spill and she shakes. The energy in her eyes—it's not what it was when he met her, and he resents her for ruining who she was to him. Earlier, much earlier, he spoke Italian to her because it changed him into the stranger he needed to be. Now he speaks English because it no longer makes a difference. She glances at his excitement. Her glances at his excitement bounce against it like a moth against a lamp. He feels her there. She fears what's there. But not as much as she fears everything else—the water, the tools, the sand, the glue. She doesn't comprehend the thick black belt coiled on the very old tile floor, and she should fear it most of all.

He picks it up and tells her it's a primitive urge to beat people who can't defend themselves. Why? She doesn't answer. Why? She

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stares at him in terror, and the light in her eyes is dull but crazed, like a mirror shattering right in front of him. He tells her to stand, and she does, shakily, her knees almost collapsing. She stands in the frigid water and he turns off the spout. Her body reminds him of a bow with a taut string because she's flexible and powerful. Water trickles down her skin as she stands before him.

"Turn away from me," he says. "Don't worry. I'm not going to beat you with the belt. I don't do that."

Water quietly laps in the tub as she turns away from him, facing old, cracked stucco and a closed shutter.

"Now I need you to kneel in the water," he says. "And look at the wall. Don't look at me."

She kneels, facing the wall, and he picks up the belt and slides the end of it through the buckle.



Chapter 1

Ten days later. April 27, 2007. A Friday afternoon.

Inside the virtual-reality theater are twelve of Italy's most powerful law enforcers and politicians, whose names, in the main, forensic pathologist Kay Scarpetta can't keep straight. The only non-Italians are herself and forensic psychologist Benton Wesley, both consultants for International Investigative Response (IIR), a special branch of the European Network of Forensic Science Institutes (ENFSI). The Italian government is in a very delicate position.

Nine days ago, American tennis star Drew Martin was murdered while on vacation, her nude, mutilated body found near Piazza Navona, in the heart of Rome's historic district. The case is an international sensation, details about the sixteen-year-old's life and death replayed nonstop on television, the crawls at the bottom of the screen doing just that—crawling by slowly and tenaciously, repeating the same details the anchors and experts are saying.

"So, Dr. Scarpetta, let's clarify, because there seems to be much confusion. According to you, she was dead by two or three o'clock that afternoon," says Captain Ottorino Poma, a medico legale in the Arma dei Carabinieri, the military police heading the investigation.

"That's not according to me," she says, her patience beginning to fray. "That's according to you."

He frowns in the low lighting. "I was so sure it was you, just minutes ago, talking about her stomach contents and alcohol level. And the fact they indicate she was dead within hours of when she was seen last by her friends."

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"I didn't say she was dead by two or three o'clock. I believe it is you who continues to say that, Captain Poma."

At a young age he already has a widespread reputation, and not an entirely good one. When Scarpetta first met him two years ago in the Hague at the ENFSI's annual meeting, he was derisively dubbed the Designer Doctor and described as extraordinarily conceited and argumentative. He is handsome—magnificent, really—with a taste for beautiful women and dazzling clothes, and today he is wearing a uniform of midnight blue with broad red stripes and bright silver embellishments, and polished black leather boots. When he swept into the theater this morning, he was wearing a red-lined cape.

He sits directly in front of Scarpetta, front row center, and rarely takes his eyes off her. On his right is Benton Wesley, who is silent most of the time. Everyone is masked by stereoscopic glasses that are synchronized with the Crime Scene Analysis System, a brilliant innovation that has made the Polizia Scientifica Italiana's Unità per l'Analisi del Crimine Violento the envy of law enforcement agencies worldwide.

"I suppose we need to go through this again so you completely understand my position," Scarpetta says to Captain Poma, who now rests his chin on his hand as if he is having an intimate conversation with her over a glass of wine. "Had she been killed at two or three o'clock that afternoon, then when her body was found at approximately eight-thirty the following morning, she would have been dead at least seventeen hours. Her livor mortis, rigor mortis, and algor mortis are inconsistent with that."

She uses a laser pointer to direct attention to the three-dimensional muddy construction site projected on the wall-size screen. It's as if they are standing in the middle of the scene, staring at Drew Martin's mauled, dead body and the litter and earthmoving equipment around it. The red dot of the laser moves along the left shoulder, the left buttock, the left leg and its bare foot. The right buttock is gone, as is a portion of her right thigh, as if she had been attacked by a shark.

"Her lividity . . ." Scarpetta starts to say.

"Once again I apologize. My English isn't so good as yours. I'm not sure of this word," Captain Poma says.

"I've used it before."

"I wasn't sure of it then."

Laughter. Other than the translator, Scarpetta is the only woman present. She and the translator don't find the captain amusing, but the men do. Except Benton, who hasn't smiled once this day.

"Do you know the Italian for this word?" Captain Poma asks Scarpetta.

"How about the language of ancient Rome?" Scarpetta says. "Latin. Since most medical terminology is rooted in Latin." She doesn't say it rudely, but is no-nonsense because she's well aware that his English becomes awkward only when it suits him.

His 3-D glasses stare at her, reminding her of Zorro. "Italian, please," he says to her. "I never was so good in Latin."

"I'll give you both. In Italian, 'livid' is *livido*, which means bruised. 'Mortis' is *morte*, or death. *Livor mortis* suggests an appearance of bruising that occurs after death."

"It's helpful when you speak Italian," he says. "And you do it so well."

She doesn't intend to do it here, although she speaks enough Italian to get by. She prefers English during these professional discussions because nuances are tricky, and the translator intercepts every word anyway. This difficulty with language, along with political pressure, stress, and Captain Poma's relentless and enigmatic antics, add to what already is rather much a disaster that has nothing to do with any of these things. But rather, the killer in this case defies precedents and the usual profiles. He confounds them. Even the science has become a maddening source of debate—it seems to defy them, lie to them, forcing Scarpetta to remind herself and everyone else that science never tells untruths. It doesn't make mistakes. It doesn't deliberately lead them astray or taunt them.

This is lost on Captain Poma. Or perhaps he pretends. Perhaps he isn't serious when he refers to Drew's dead body as uncooperative and argumentative, as if he has a relationship with it and they are squabbling. He asserts that her postmortem changes may say one thing, and her blood alcohol and stomach contents say another, but contrary to what Scarpetta believes, food and drink should always be trusted. He is serious, at least about that.

"What Drew ate and drank is revealing of truth." He repeats what he said in his impassioned opening statement earlier today.

"Revealing of a truth, yes. But not *your* truth," Scarpetta replies, in a tone more polite than what she says. "Your truth is a misinterpretation."

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"I think we've been over this," Benton says from the shadows of the front row. "I think Dr. Scarpetta has made herself perfectly clear."

Captain Poma's 3-D glasses—and rows of other 3-D glasses—remain fixed on her. "I regret if I bore you with my reexamination, Dr. Wesley, but we need to find sense in this. So please indulge me. April seventeenth, Drew ate very bad lasagna and drank four glasses of very bad Chianti between eleven-thirty and twelve-thirty at a tourist trattoria near the Spanish Steps. She paid the bill and left, then at the Piazza di Spagna parted company with her two friends, who she promised to rejoin at Piazza Navona within the hour. She never appeared. That much we know to be true. What remains a mystery is everything else." His thick-framed glasses look at Scarpetta, then he turns in his seat and speaks to the rows behind him. "Partly because our esteemed colleague from the United States now says she's convinced Drew didn't die shortly after lunch or even that same day."

"I've been saying this all along. Once again, I'll explain why. Since it seems you are confused," Scarpetta says.

"We need to move on," Benton says.

But they can't move on. Captain Poma is so respected by the Italians, is such a celebrity, he can do whatever he wants. In the press he is called the Sherlock Holmes of Rome, even though he is a physician, not a detective. Everyone, including the Comandante Generale of the Carabinieri, who sits in a back corner and listens more than he speaks, seems to have forgotten that.

"Under normal circumstances," Scarpetta says, "Drew's food would have been fully digested several hours after she ate lunch, and her alcohol level certainly wouldn't have been as high as the point-two determined by toxicological testing. So, yes, Captain Poma, her stomach contents and toxicology suggest she died shortly after lunch. But her livor mortis and rigor mortis suggest—rather emphatically, let me add—that she died possibly twelve to fifteen hours after she ate lunch at the trattoria, and these postmortem artifacts are the ones we should pay the most attention to."

"So here we are. Back to lividity." He sighs. "This word I have so much trouble with. Please explain it again, since I seem to have so much trouble with what you call postmortem *artifacts*. As if we are archaeologists digging up ruins." Captain Poma's chin rests on his hand again.

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"Lividity, livor mortis, postmortem hypostasis, all the same thing. When you die, your circulation quits and the blood begins to accumulate in the small vessels due to gravity, rather much like sediment settling in a sunken ship." She feels Benton's 3-D glasses looking at her. She dares not look at him. He isn't himself.

"Continue, please." Captain Poma underlines something several times on his legal pad.

"If the body remains in a certain position long enough after death, the blood will settle accordingly—a postmortem artifact we call livor mortis," Scarpetta explains. "Eventually, livor mortis becomes fixed, or set, turning that area of the body purplish-red, with patterns of blanching from surfaces pressing against it or constricting it, such as tight clothing. Can we see the autopsy photograph, please?" She checks a list on the podium. "Number twenty-one."

The wall fills with Drew's body on a steel table in the morgue at Tor Vergata University. She is facedown. Scarpetta moves the laser's red dot over the back, over the purplish-red areas and blanching caused by lividity. The shocking wounds that look like dark red craters she has yet to address.

"Now, if you'll put the scene up, please. The one that shows her being placed into the body bag," she says.

The three-dimensional photograph of the construction site fills the wall again, but this time there are investigators in white Tyvek suits, gloves, and shoe covers lifting Drew's limp, naked body into a sheet-lined black pouch on top of a stretcher. Around them, other investigators hold up additional sheets to block the view from the curious and the paparazzi at the perimeter of the scene.

"Compare this to the photograph you just saw. By the time she was autopsied some eight hours after she was found, her lividity was almost completely set," Scarpetta says. "But here at the scene, it's apparent that lividity was in its early stages." The red dot moves over pinkish areas on Drew's back. "Rigor was in its early stages as well."

"You rule out the early onset of rigor mortis due to a cadaveric spasm? For example, if she strenuously exerted herself right before death? Maybe she struggled with him? Since you've not mentioned this phenomenon so far?" Captain Poma underlines something on his legal pad.

"There's no reason to talk about a cadaveric spasm," Scarpetta says. *Why don't you throw in the kitchen sink?* she's tempted to ask.

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"Whether she strenuously exerted herself or not," she says, "she wasn't fully rigorous when she was found, so she didn't have a cadaveric spasm. . . ."

"Unless rigor came and went."

"Impossible, since it became fully fixed in the morgue. Rigor doesn't come and go and then come again."

The translator suppresses a smile as she relays this in Italian, and several people laugh.

"You can see from this"—Scarpetta points the laser at Drew's body being lifted onto the stretcher—"her muscles certainly aren't stiff. They're quite flexible. I estimate she'd been dead less than six hours when she was found, possibly considerably less."

"You're a world expert. How can you be so vague?"

"Because we don't know where she'd been, what temperatures or conditions she was exposed to before she was left in the construction site. Body temperature, rigor mortis, livor mortis can vary greatly from case to case and individual to individual."

"Based on the condition of the body, are you saying it's *impossible* she was murdered soon after she had lunch with her friends? Perhaps while she was walking alone to Piazza Navona to join them?"

"I don't believe that's what happened."

"Then once again, please. How do you explain her undigested food and point-two alcohol level? They imply she died soon after she ate lunch with her friends—not some fifteen, sixteen hours later."

"It's possible not long after she left her friends, she resumed drinking alcohol and was so terrified and stressed, her digestion quit."

"What? Now you're suggesting she spent time with her killer, possibly as much as ten, twelve, fifteen hours with him—that she was drinking with him?"

"He might have forced her to drink, to keep her impaired and easier to control. As in drugging somebody."

"So he forced her to drink alcohol, perhaps all afternoon, all night, and into the early morning, and she was so frightened her food didn't digest? That's what you're offering us as a plausible explanation?"

"I've seen it before," Scarpetta says.

. . .

The animated construction site after dark.

Surrounding shops, pizzerias, and ristoranti are lit up and crowded. Cars and motor scooters are parked on the sides of the streets, on the sidewalks. The rumble of traffic and the sounds of footsteps and voices fill the theater.

Suddenly, the lighted windows go dark. Then silence.

The sound of a car, and the shape of it. A four-door black Lancia parks at the corner of Via di Pasquino and Via dell'Anima. The driver's door opens and an animated man gets out. He is dressed in gray. His face has no features and, like his hands, is gray, from which everyone in the theater is to infer that the killer hasn't been assigned an age, race, or any physical characteristics. For the sake of simplicity, the killer is referred to as male. The gray man opens the trunk and lifts out a body wrapped in a blue fabric with a pattern that includes the colors red, gold, and green.

"The sheet wrapped around her is based on silk fibers collected from the body and in the mud under it," Captain Poma says.

Benton Wesley says, "Fibers found all over the body. Including in the hair, on the hands, the feet. Certainly an abundance of them were adhering to her wounds. From this we can conclude she was completely wrapped from head to toe. So, yes, obviously we have to consider a large piece of colorful silk fabric. Perhaps a sheet, perhaps a curtain . . ."

"What's your point?"

"I have two of them: We shouldn't assume it was a sheet, because we shouldn't assume anything. Also, it's possible he wrapped her in something that was indigenous to where he lives or works, or where he held her hostage."

"Yes, yes." Captain Poma's glasses remain fixed on the scene filling the wall. "And we know there are carpet fibers which are also consistent with carpet fibers in the trunk of a 2005 Lancia, which is consistent also with what was described driving away from that area at approximately six a.m. The witness I mentioned. A woman in a nearby apartment got up to see about her cat because it was—what is the word . . .?"

"Yowling? Meowing?" the translator says.

"She got up because of her cat yowling and happened to look out her widow to see a dark luxury sedan driving away from the construction site as if in no hurry. She said it turned right on dell'Anima, a one-way street. Continue, please."