

Body of Evidence Study Guide

Body of Evidence by Patricia Cornwell

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Plot Summary

Body of Evidence is a detective novel in which Dr. Kay Scarpetta and Lt. Pete Marino sift through clues left by two violent murders and two suicides, with Kay almost becoming the fifth death. Instead, Kay kills in self defense and the manuscript she rescues helps bring down a mob lawyer and reunites Kay with her college sweetheart.

Body of Evidence opens in Richmond, VA, where Beryl Madison, a novelist, is found brutally murdered. Dr. Kay Scarpetta has just completed Beryl's autopsy and goes with Lt. Pete Marino to examine the still gory crime scene. Forensics are analyzed thoroughly and a clue found for why Beryl would flee suddenly to Florida, from whence she has just returned: to escape a stalker.

Kay's ex-lover, Mark James, appears, claiming that Beryl had been involved in a legal dispute involving his firm. Clues lead to clues, and Kay follows them doggedly. Meeting Mark in New York leads to greater intrigue and Kay discovering that Mark's cover story is a lie. She is crushed. Mark's erstwhile colleague, Robert Sparacino, drums up trouble for Kay to force her to turn over Beryl's supposedly lost manuscript. Following his own leads, Pete turns up an odd character, Al Hunt, who fits the killer's profile but leads them to other discoveries.

Beryl's estranged mentor, Cary Harper, is found brutally murdered, and his eccentric, bitter sister, Sterling, dies suddenly while Kay is marooned in the house by a snowstorm and dead car. Learning that Sterling has cancer and has remained in touch with Beryl over her brother's objections, Kay traces down additional leads. Al Hunt provides enigmatic clues that are resolved only after Al hangs himself and Kay visits the mental institution in which Al and Frankie once live. Everything points to Frankie as the killer.

When Frankie stalks Kay by phone as he had Beryl—and blows up Pete's car—Kay flees to Key West, FL, where Beryl had fled in identical circumstances. There, Kay manages to obtain Beryl's manuscript and meets up with Mark, who turns out to be an undercover FBI agent working to prove Sparacino is a mobster. Kay flies back to Richmond, refusing to be a victim, and when her lost luggage is delivered by a courier, nearly perishes, but suddenly realizes the ploy and manages to evade and kill Frankie in self defense. After Christmas, Kay will meet Mark in Aspen.



Chapters 1-2

Chapters 1-2 Summary

Dr. Kay Scarpetta, Chief Medical Examiner of Virginia, takes another look at the savaged body of Beryl Madison, showing she puts up a fight before receiving nine stab wounds in the chest and being nearly decapitated. Picturing the attack, Kay knows that the terrified woman had just returned from Florida and wonders why she let someone into her house. Lt. Pete Marino picks Kay up for her first visit to the murder scene in well-to-do Windsor Farms. Pete is puzzled that Beryl does not log or tape threatening phone calls, but xeroxes two personal letters to "M." The yard is unkempt and the house, up for sale, is an expensive waste of space.

There are no signs of forced entry, but the living room is a shambles. They follow a trail of blood, speculating about the struggle upstairs on the way to the guest room where Beryl dies and is found nude with no seminal fluid to prove rape. Pete tells what they learn from the taxi driver about Beryl's ride home from the airport; she arrived at 9 PM. The alarm sounds at 11 and a neighbor calls 911 after 30 minutes. Pete is sure Beryl knows her attacker, who is left-handed, and kills only when the chase is no longer fun. Scarpetta refuses to speculate.

In the kitchen, Kay notes Beryl's .380 automatic and well-stocked liquor cabinet. Autopsy shows she has neither eaten nor drunk recently. Kay assumes she is about to have a nightcap when someone arrives. Beryl leaves her gun behind because she is not a practiced marksman. The garage housing Beryl's mint-condition Honda Accord EX is paneled and empty. Pete waits for Kay to study the interior before summarizing Beryl's actions on 12 July: tennis, grocery shopping, bank, and sudden flight, and the clear motivation: a heart and "BERYL" scratched into the passenger door of the Honda.

Mark James, an ex-lover, calls and visits Kay, saying he is moving to Virginia for work and segueing into Beryl's murder. His firm is involved in contract disputes between Beryl and author Cary Harper. Mark recalls Beryl in February as witty, distant, and a heavy drinker. Pete recalls she was nervous about threatening phone calls.

Pete and Kay meet with FBI profiler Benton Wesley to review police contacts with Beryl on 11 and 12 March and 6 July. Officer Jim Reed offered routine suggestions, but does not wholly believe Beryl's fears. Wesley puts the killer in his mid-20s to 30s, white, bright, abused, a loner, obsessive-compulsive, and voyeuristic. When Kay mentions her conversation with Mark, they see a motive, but doubt Harper will talk without a warrant, and see making it look like a psychopath's work would divert attention from Harper. The manuscript in Beryl's bedroom is not a memoir and only partially complete.



Chapters 1-2 Analysis

Chapter 1 introduces two characters, the late Beryl Madison and Lt. Pete Marino, who heads the investigation into Beryl's brutal murder. Dr. Kay Scarpetta, who narrates the story in the first person, says very little about herself at this point. The reader can infer that she is Chief Medical Examiner for the Commonwealth of Virginia and has often worked with Pete. Each has foibles that bother the other. Kay second guesses his police work, and Pete plays theatrical show-and-tell. He shows a fatherly concern for her, although he is only slightly older.

The chapter establishes the chronology of Friday, 12 July, and deals heavily—and graphically—with forensics as the investigators walk through Beryl's blood-spattered house. The discovery of the graffiti carved in the passenger door both shows Pete's flair for the dramatic and provides motivation for Beryl's sudden disappearance to Florida and tragic return. It and the two letters to "M" from Beryl (quoted in the Prologue) are the most consistent elements in the developing story.

Chapter 2 introduces Mark James, ostensibly a lawyer and Kay's ex-lover. As she looks herself candidly in the mirror in anticipation of seeing Mark, Kay shows concerns about growing older and hints at pains in their relationship years ago. Mark's character morphs several times in the course of the novel, providing tension and mystery. Here, he uses discussing Beryl's murder as a pretext for seeing his old love. Mark's law firm and particularly its sleazy New York member are involved in litigation over an old contract preventing Beryl from writing her memoirs. Note Kay's concern for how close Mark is to breaching legal ethics.

The scene shifts to a meeting with FBI profiler Benton Wesley to review police contacts with Beryl on 11 and 12 March and 6 July. They argue about victim's rights and the futility of hindsight in police work. When Kay finds herself being stalked at the end of the novel, she reminds Pete of how the system failed to protect Beryl. Pete insists on walking Kay to her car and lecturing her on safety. The advise about going to a fire house because they are always open seems an obvious hint of a plot element to come. It never does.



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

Kay goes to the public library to research Beryl's work. She finds a rare newspaper announcement of a lecture to the Daughters of the American Revolution in November and calls the DAR contact, Mrs. J. R. McTigue. The elderly lady agrees to a visit at the Chamberlayne Gardens retirement home. Over port and cheese biscuits Mrs. McTigue tells Kay about her late husband, Joe, doing construction work on Cary Harper's Cutler Grove estate and getting her in touch with a young novelist, Beryl Madison. Mrs. Grove recalls Beryl being charming, gracious, and modest at the annual luncheon. She seems to write for the joy of writing and shuns attention. Harper seems shy, unhappy, and conceited. Seeing Mrs. McTigue's sadness, Kay offers to visit again and at home phones her own mother, whose health is declining. Mention of Mark brings a reminder that he once nearly killed "Katie."

Chapter 3 Analysis

Short Chapter 3 deepens the background on Beryl as a writer and a person when Kay visits the elderly Mrs. McTigue, probably Beryl's greatest fan. Kay reflects on the necessity and unpleasantness of retirement homes, doing a fine job of eliciting their atmosphere, and worries about her own elderly mother in Florida. Mrs. McTigue shows Kay a photograph preserved on expensive stationary. She returns to Mrs. McTigue in Chapter 11, when mention of the late Mr. McTigue is too coincidental. After this first visit, Kay phones her mother but during the call mentions Mark and her mother turns icy, reminding her cryptically that he nearly killed her. Being called "Katie" brings Kay uncomfortably back to childhood. Kay's relationship to her mother and the incident mentioned with Mark are not developed in this novel.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

Lab worker Joni Hamm gives Kay an oral report on trace evidence in a week. It is such a "nightmare" that one could think Beryl is murdered elsewhere and dragged to her house. There are at least ten fibers and bits of debris found nowhere in her house but at the crime scene. They suggest the killer gets in and out of many cars each day. Textile manufacturers guard their secrets and the FBI's expert is too busy to get involved.

Back at her office, Kay finds an urgent message to call Mark. He asks her to come to New York to talk about new developments he has learned from Beryl's lawyer, Robert Sparacino. Kay hurries out. Flying first class, she cautions herself about Mark and reads some of Beryl's wooden prose. From La Guardia, Mark takes her to the Omni Park Central and to dinner at nearby Gallagher's, on Sparacino's recommendation.

Sparacino also knows about their personal past and is after Kay. Sparacino has played fast and loose in a couple of situations not unlike this one, muckraking and slandering, and building free publicity through threats of litigation. Ironically, Harper introduces Beryl to Sparacino, guides her lackluster career, and now plays them off against one another. At that February lunch, Mark is suspicious. He sees Harper capable of killing Beryl or hiring someone to do it. Sparacino wants Beryl's manuscript from Kay's office and does not believe it is missing. She refers him to Pete and wonders why Sparacino does not have a current cop—and if he had known Beryl is out of town for a month. Mark worries about Kay, sensing that Sparacino, who is also Beryl's executor, is up to something. If he spins it as the CME stealing a manuscript, it will be a bestseller and movie. Just then, Mark sees Sparacino, who politely introduces himself to Kay.

Chapter 4 Analysis

Chapter 4 begins with some complex technical fiber and debris analysis, first mentions the psychology of color, and provides a digression on textile manufacturers' "proprietary blackouts." The novel is filled with such digressions, some more meaningful to the plot than others.

Disturbingly, Mark insists that Kay fly to New York City, and Kay is too emotionally vulnerable to resist. Over dinner they talk about the case and how the dangerous, viperous lawyer Robert Sparacino wants to make it look like Kay has stolen a valuable manuscript. Sparacino has a knack for publicity and putting his own spin on things. Mark offers examples from sports and entertainment of how Sparacino creates victims and suggests that the law partners are concerned about the firm's reputation because of Sparacino. Note the handsome young man drinking beer by himself and reading the newspaper. He is later shown to be the key to Sparacino showing up at Mark and Kay's table and introducing himself.



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

Kay and Mark drink with Sparacino for an hour as he feigns drunkenness. Mark invites himself into Kay's room for a nightcap and asks her to stay until the afternoon so they can confront Sparacino. Recalling how Mark never spends the night in the old days, hating the vicious debates, and feeling empty, Kay yearns for Mark. He knows she would never duck a fight.

Having rehearsed at breakfast how to handle Sparacino, Kay comes to Orndorff & Berger in the afternoon. The lobby is a heartless black space, but the empty offices are spacious. Sparacino's is double the size of the others and done up in black. Kay declares that the items receipted to the forensic labs (not her office) do not include the manuscript he needs. Sparacino doubts her word and says it is worth a lot of money to at least two people. He cannot believe she would not have the manuscript with her after returning to town from wherever she had been.

When Sparacino asks point-blank how much Harper is paying to turn it over to him, Kay terminates the meeting and rises, but Sparacino pulls out copies of old stories from Richmond newspapers alleging theft from corpses. Kay points out the incidents are investigated and the OCME exonerated, but Sparacino is willing to cause a new stink. Exiting, Mark apologizes and claims not to have anticipated the ambush. Kay is disappointed when he hails her a cab but does not ride along. While killing time at La Guardia, she calls Orndorff & Berger and asks for Mark. Receptionists in New York and Chicago deny knowing him.

Chapter 5 Analysis

Chapter 5 begins by suggesting Sparacino is difficult to shake after dinner, but Mark and Kay finally make it to Kay's room for a nightcap. Kay's inner strife over Mark continues, as she considers that he never stayed the night when they were together and she is left feeling like a kid cleaning up the Christmas wrappings.

More details are given on how the police and OCME handle evidence and past examples of bad publicity for Kay's office comes out when she and Mark meet Sparacino in his office. Kay points out that every office has minor problems, stresses that both incidents to which Sparacino points result in her being vindicated, and fundamental facts of the case have to be overlooked to draw Sparacino's conclusions. Problems seem to arise more through the machinations of survivors than members of the staff. She explains why she cuts checks in both cases, but Sparacino sees this only as an admission of guilt.

When Mark fails to accompany her to the airport, Kay is hurt and phones the law office to talk to him. Mark is unknown in the New York and Chicago offices. Kay is left

wondering more than ever what she knows about her ex-lover and how much she can trust him.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

Mark is unlisted in Chicago, and the Chicago CME, who Mark claims to know, has not heard of Mark. It is the Saturday of a three-day state holiday and Kay is lethargic. When Pete calls, wanting to drop off a videotape, she invites him to dinner. Pete has tracked down where Beryl gets her car washed : Masterwash on Southside and zeros in on Al Hunt, white, 28 years old, clean-cut, out of place in this job. Hunt recognizes Beryl's picture but not her name. Before managing the car wash he was a male nurse at Metropolitan Hospital. His old man is a major slumlord and this is training. The videotape shows an interrogation in which Hunt recalls Beryl because she does not supervise the work and gives off "arctic" colors as her signals; by contrast, Pete's are pale red. Kay calls this astute and explains the psychology of colors. Annoyed, Pete continues with the tape: Beryl is aloof but neither passive nor fragile. They proclaim she needs her space. She is intelligent and complicated. He can tell from what is missing in her car that she has no boyfriend.

Pete pushes Hunt to admit he has a thing for Beryl and then asks if that sounds like Old Man Hunt, ashamed of him for being a pansy. Recovering, Hunt claims to have talked to her only the last time she came in, to help Beryl. Kay is upset at such brutal questioning, which Pete says is all acting and a tool to get people to say things they would not otherwise recall. The tape continues: Beryl asks if they can get leaked orange juice out of the trunk and Hunt supervises the extra work and seems friendly, but when Hunt points out damage to the passenger's door, she goes white, uses a pay phone, and speeds away. That could have been 12 July. The tape ends.

Pete has found that Beryl withdrew \$10,000 from her bank in cash before flying to Florida and never uses her credit card again. Kay is skeptical of how vividly Hunt remembers Beryl and recalls that Mark terms her "memorable." Pete breaks into Kay's reverie about how Mark could not be what he claims and rejects the idea that she is just tired. He has figured out she went to New York to see Sparacino, who phones his home phone the other night and acts like King Tut ordering the papers turned over. Pete does not mention Kay's name or say anything about receipting evidence. Kay tells Pete everything and sees fear in his eyes and is determined to find out what is going on. She wonders about illegal activities and coincidences. Mark phones, claiming to be in Chicago, but gives her no time to ask questions.

Chapter 6 Analysis

Chapter 6 introduces Al Hunt through a videotaped session in which Pete bullies him mercilessly. Al works for his father, managing the car wash that Beryl frequents. Before this job, Al earned a master's degree in psychology and works briefly but successfully in a hospital. Al talks to Pete about color psychology and the auras that people give off.



Pete rejects such nonsense, but Kay validates it. The theme of color recurs throughout the novel.

Pete also makes his first offhand comments about homosexuality, a topic that surrounds him so regularly that at one point Kay wonders if Pete's "tough love" attitude has driven his own son into the lifestyle. Kay does not in this first instance make a big deal of the comment, but increasingly challenges the attitude. It is odd that, having partnered with Pete many times over the years, she would not already have had it out with him. The story line needs the homophobia, however, and Kay needs to show she is without prejudice or fear (see Chapter 15 in particular).

When Kay is appalled at the brutality of the interrogation, Pete explains how he acts the role to elicit answers the subject might not otherwise think of. Kay sees it as pure demoralization. Pete shrugs off the criticism because he learns from Al about the moment Beryl first sees the door graffiti and panics. Her distraught movement thereafter have been documented. Kay sees that Sparacino is playing Pete and herself off against one another. Mark, who has been keeping Kay off-balance and distracted all day, phones and when challenged with Kay's findings at his law firm, hangs up after a "pregnant pause."



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

After sleeping through Sunday, Kay is called to Cutler Grove, where Cary Harper has been found brutally murdered, his throat cut like Beryl. The local ME and Detective Poteat have preserved the crime scene. Harper is lying in a pool of blood beside his old white Rolls-Royce by the mansion's back entry. His face and skull have been beaten in with a blunt object and his throat cut ear-to-ear. Bird shot has been scattered over his body. Kay carefully collects trace elements likely to be disturbed en route to the morgue, including a blob of Play-Doh. As Pete and Detective Poteat approach, a woman looks out with terrified eyes and ducks back inside. Sterling Harper has a friend coming to be with her. Pete had been driving home from questioning Harper at Culpeper's Tavern when he hears the dispatch and returns. After Pete leaves, Kay discovers her state car won't start.

The Harper library is richly furnished, focusing on an oil portrait of a young girl on a bench. Over wine, Kay and Sterling talk about her 911 call, Sterling's ignored warnings to Cary against going to Culpeper's every evening, Cary's ability to offend people, and how Sterling moves in to take care of him so he can write, but he has but one good book in him. Dried up thereafter and hollow, he burns various false starts at writings and grows angry. They are the end of the Harper line and Sterling has nowhere else to go. Lonely Cutler Grove is at least familiar. Sterling and Beryl have remained close, despite Cary's prohibition, and Sterling knows that Sparacino has been agitating matters between Cary and Beryl over her new book. Sterling understands that the manuscript has disappeared but doubts Cary has it.

Cary had been afraid of life and Beryl is the only person he ever loved. When she seems to betray him, he grows a little crazy and imagines nonsense. Burning to write, Beryl found them years ago through Cary's publisher, corresponds, and is invited to move in, bringing a touch of magic but also complications. Her talent needs nurturing, but Cary seeks to imprison her. Saying that she learned about Beryl's death on the radio, Sterling can talk no more. With her car towed, the police who were to drive her home forgetting her, and the snow storm having knocked out phones, Kay apologizes for having to spend the night, but Sterling declares it is kind of her to come.

Chapter 7 Analysis

Chapter 7 shifts to a new crime scene, as Cary Harper, thus far a shadowy, reclusive character, is brutally murdered in ways both similar and different from his protégé Beryl. The chapter is again heavy on forensics and crime scene politics. A surprising twist is the revelation that Pete and the victim have a tête-a-tête at a tavern shortly before the killing. Pete is returning to Richmond when the radio report comes in and follows Kay to

the scene in a passage that is spooky in its depiction. Pete's meeting late in the novel brings up key information when Kay begins to be stalked.

Kay is clearly thrown by recent events. When her car dies, Kay is forced to spend the night in the elegant Harper home, which she describes in some detail: beautifully appointed but cold, drafty, and isolated. She begins studying an unusual oil painting whose importance grows in the chapters ahead. She also listens at length to Miss Sterling Harper's bitter life story, which casts unfavorable light on her late brother and continuing love for Beryl.



Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

At midnight chimes, Kay reflects on the situation. Sterling is too weak to have killed Beryl and Cary and may also be a target. Kay's .38 is at home and there is too much snow for the police to stake out the house. Kay thinks about her warm house and queen-sized bed but claims to be comfortable in the drafty Harper house. Sterling insists she sleep upstairs. On the way, she says finding and punishing the killer is unimportant, as it will not bring Beryl back. Kay understands her loneliness and promises to visit in the spring.

Sterling shows Kay to the guest room, and Kay goes to bed but is frightened by noises, and follows Sterling downstairs. She finds her in front of the fire, cheeks covered with tears and with no pulse. Resuscitation fails and Kay sits, stunned, watching the embers and thinking about her father's lingering death, which inspires her to study medicine and specialize in pathology. Stiff as dawn approaches, Kay wonders if it is coincidental that she is here when Sterling dies and whether Sterling is looking at the painting at the end. Kay takes it down to examine it closely and notes the framer's address before rehanging it. She then studies the ash and melted plastic in the fireplace.

Pete remarks that Kay looks like hell in the morning, when he arrives to drive her home after Sterling's body is removed. First, she visits The Village Frame Shoppe & Gallery to talk about the painting. Tweedy Mr. Hilgeman says no one knows Cary Harper but he recalls the painting being framed 15 years earlier by Clara, his assistant. The work is inferior to most of Sterling's canvases at the time when she painting regularly. Kay believes it could be a portrait of Beryl but much younger than when she meets the Harpers, and quiet "Lolita-like." She also has the impression that Hilgeman and perhaps no one else in this small town knows that Beryl lived with the Harpers for years. Angry at the thought of pedophilia, Pete thinks Cary kills Beryl and maybe his "batty sister" kills him. Kay objects that Sterling is too frail and thinks her death may be suicide.

Pete drops Kay off at OCME and heads back to collect evidence. He tells her to go home and sleep, but she goes to the morgue to check on the Harpers' bodies. She discovers a box of film different from the brand used in the office and gets suspicious. Seeing the elevator in use, she takes the stairs and makes her way cautiously toward her office to call security. Kay freezes, seeing a powerfully-built man riffling through files. When he looks up and lunges at her, Kay smashes him in the groin with her medical bag and Maces him for good measure. Security identifies him as Jeb Price, age 34, of Washington, DC. He has a 9-mm automatic pistol in his trousers. Moving like a zombie, Kay drives an huge station wagon home, ignores her messages, and gets into bed. The machine picks up a phone call from Mark, warning her urgently to stay out of the murders. Kay slumps back and cries.



Chapter 8 Analysis

Chapter 8 shows Kay being escorted to an upstairs bedroom long unused but, Kay is sure, full of memories. The most shocking come out in Chapter 16. Frightened by noises, Kay goes downstairs again to find Sterling dead on the sofa. When she cannot revive her, Kay sits in the chilling room and thinks about her own early life, particularly about how her father's lingering death turns her to medicine and pathology, and although she now knows all about the mechanisms of death, she can bring neither him nor Sterling back to life.

The story grows dramatic when Kay returns to the OCME and discovers a break-in in the morgue. Kay is drowsy from her sleepless night at the Harpers' and discovers the evidence, she admits, strictly by luck. She is clearly a details-oriented, hands-on administrator to notice a stray film box and draw correct conclusions about it. Contrast that with her failure to take a Polaroid photograph of the painting whose framing she checks out. That investigation reveals that Sterling had been a painter and that no one in town seems to know anything about the Harper household.

Finding the film body, Kay makes her way cautiously to her office to call Security, but, finding someone riffling the files, uses her bag like an "Olympic hammer" to double him up and then Maces him twice for good measure. When police arrive, Price is begging to be taken to the hospital and jokes about Kay turning him into a soprano and the like begin.

Pete reacts strongly to pedophilia, deepening his psychological profile. He does not understand Kay's reference to Vladimir Nabokov's sultry novel *Lolita* in reference to the portrait that Sterling painted long ago and apparently dies looking at. Its significance comes out in Chapter 16. At this point, Kay says merely that the young girl in the painting looks surprisingly experienced. The chapter concludes quickly with Mark's warning to stay away from the murders and Kay's sudden and enigmatic flow of tears.



Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

Attending Cary Harper's autopsy, Pete reports that Price has no record but is clearly a professional. Cary dies of seven blows to the head before his throat is slit as overkill. Pete describes approaching Cary, sitting alone drinking his "usual," pressing him for information about Beryl, and learning only that his sister was out of town that night, destroying his alibi. When Kay describes Cary's personal effects, she omits a gold chain that Pete noticed in the tavern.

Kay's day is ruined by a newspaper headlining her "losing" a manuscript and claiming she "incapacitates" an intruder. Reporters clamor to talk to her. Pete has checked out Beryl's floppy disks but found no memoir or recent letters. Sterling's autopsy is pending but suggest problems with her immune system. The melted plastic in the fireplace could be from prescription drugs. Cary is hit with a metal pipe filled with bird shot for weight, plugged with Play-Doh.

Kay is not surprised when Attorney General Thomas Ethridge IV summons her to talk about the growing crisis that he wants to nip in the bud. She has nothing concrete to back up her suspicion that Sparacino is behind it. She feels isolated. Ethridge notes that Kay sometimes places herself in jeopardy and insists that she refer all questions to his office and "be like an iceberg" in public—showing little and being a non-issue.

Ethridge and Sparacino are law school classmates, and Sparacino still resents being edged out for a Supreme Court clerkship and has since boyhood sought revenge on the "elitist world." He is now feared by writers, editors, and publishers. Sparacino doubtless expects Ethridge to be a lightning rod. Kay must have no contact with him, swallow her pride and emotions, and find the manuscript to clear her name.

They determine that the ashes collected from the Harper fireplace are from expensive rag stock, which is inconsistent with the draft of a novel. They painstakingly compile a list of letters and words. One of the most interesting is "bor Co," along with several instances of the words Sterling and Cary.

Chapter 9 Analysis

Chapter 9 witnesses Cary Harper's autopsy. It is filled with jargon about circulatory system and analysis of a skull fractured like a hardboiled egg. Readers can thank Peter for his many requests to "say it in English," allowing for thorough explanations by Kay. The operative word is "overkill," as with Beryl, which Pete points out from the criminal's point of view is necessary: never chance letting a victim survive to tell his or her story. Later in the novel, Pete reverses the theme, talking from a "good guys" point of view, that of needing to stop an assailant with sufficient firepower to avoid injury. This plays into the final chapter's action.

Pete first mentions having seen a gold chain on Cary at the tavern, which is missing when the body and effects are sent to the morgue. They conveniently summarize the similarities and differences in the crimes and the phenomenon of criminals' taking souvenirs. Much of the focus shifts to the headlines about the missing manuscript and Kay's assaulting a burglar generate. They cannot determine Sterling's cause of death without advanced toxicology reports. Clearly, however, she is suffering cancer. When Kay meets with the Attorney General, she gets additional background on Sparacino, is told to keep a low profile, and to find the missing manuscript.



Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

Friday morning, Kay and Pete go to the FBI National Academy in Quantico, VA, to meet Wesley and Roy Hanowell, the fiber expert. Kay reports that Sterling had chronic myelocytic leukemia and dextromethorphan in her bloodstream. That is the cough-suppressant in Robitussin, a half bottle of which they find in her bathroom. Drinking that could not have killed her.

Hanowell says that the hodgepodge of fibers are most consistent with automobile carpeting; Dynel is often used in wigs and fake furs, and the unusual trilobal orange acrylic fiber has shown up in an airline hijacking in Athens, Greece, a year before, where its presence cannot be explained. There must be a common denominator with Beryl's case. Kay leaves them speechless by suggesting someone check Sparacino's connections with the U.S. Ambassador who had been the target. Hanowell leaves. Pete reports that Price is out on bond. Wesley is worried that Kay may be the next target and asks her to exercise extreme personal caution. No one in the OCME is surprised when Kay announces she is taking annual leave. From home she checks with the airlines and Amtrak on Sterling's travels.

Coming to talk about Beryl's killer, Al Hunt is nervous when Kay answers her door, pistol in hand. He hopes that Kay, as a woman and a scientist, can understand things he knows are true but cannot prove. Trained in psychology, Al leaves the profession because he relates to people too readily and loses himself. While researching his master's thesis, he talks to Frankie, a paranoid schizophrenic, who obeys voices and beats his mother to death. Al believes that Beryl's killer loves her and admits that he and the killer are similar, both "out of sync." Beryl is guarded, unapproachable, and wounded, and Al wants to reach out to her.

The killer is reasonably intelligent and wants to possess Beryl's freedom and fame. Al has seen mental images that he cannot tell the police. The killer will not remember doing it. Much time elapses between the killer's first contact with Beryl and the murder. Frustration and obsession drive him to her door. The killer has planned it in detail. He inspires trust and she lets him in, but when she runs, he sees rejection. He knows what he is doing is horrible and feels contempt for himself. He takes her death as the ultimate in human closeness, and now watches investigators jealously. He kills Cary out of hatred. Al wants to tell the police, but they will think him crazy.

When Kay asks the killer's name, Al mumbles "Jim Jim," a name he hears in conjunction with the Valhalla Hospital. Kay realizes that ten years ago Al was too young to be working on a thesis; he had been a patient. Al breaks down and runs away. The phone startles Kay: it is Amtrak confirming Sterling's trip 27-31 October to Baltimore. That evening, Pete reports that Al has hanged himself, leaving a note saying he can take it no more.



Chapter 10 Analysis

Chapter 10 has a change of venue to the FBI National Academy in Quantico, VA. Kay has undergone training there in the past and being back leaves her edgy. She describes the military atmosphere at some length before quipping about how the Behavioral Science Unit is built closer to hell than to heaven and throws in that while profilers are now confusingly dubbed "CIAs," they still deal with criminal lowlife.

The meeting deals first with the latest findings about Sterling: she had leukemia, probably in remission, and is taking Robitussin, found on a bathroom counter. Its active ingredient is dextromethorphan; the significance comes out in almost excruciating technical detail in the chapters ahead. The fiber expert's report leads Pete into a hypothesis that Beryl feels safe admitting someone in drag, another homophobic cut at her that no one wants to share. Much detail is given on the automobile carpeting industry and the mystery of a rare fiber found at Beryl's murder scene showing up earlier at a hijacking in Athens, Greece.

Price getting out on bail allows for an excursus (short anecdote) on that part of the criminal justice system and an outline of how they are attempting to document his background. Price's continuing threat leads directly to Kay taking a working vacation during which Wesley oddly turns into another protective father figure alongside Pete.

As the vacation begins, Al Hunt visits Kay's house. He hopes that as a woman and a scientist Kay can understand him in ways that the closed-minded police will not try. Kay wonders rather absentmindedly about the color of her own aura, but does not ask. She then puts on her professional demeanor to listen to Al's lucid if mysterious tale, which provides all the elements for the final determination of the murderer's identity. The chapter ends with chilling news that Al goes home and hangs himself.



Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

Al Hunt's words are still replaying in Kay's head and his death causing guilt as she and Pete ride the pre-dawn train to Baltimore, MD. She feels calmer as they leave Richmond behind. Al's psychiatrist, Dr. Masterson, had been reserved on the phone about Al's teenage treatment for severe depression. The police have found nothing to link Al to the murders. Kay is delivering Sterling's frozen samples to Johns Hopkins for special testing for an isotope of dextromethorphan, levomethorphan, that is a powerful, potentially deadly narcotic, but cannot be distinguished in normal testing.

Hearing about Sterling's trips to Baltimore, Kay suspects and confirms cancer treatment and arranges with Dr. Ismail to use the polarimeter. Ismail explains to Pete how the tests look for bending light. Ismail is sad about the suicide, noting that Sterling had been doing well, and remarking how lovely her daughter is. She had been with her for all but the last visit, 28 October. Ismail believes they stay at a harbor hotel. Kay quickly finds a "bor Co"—Harbor Court Hotel—and she and Pete head there. En route, she explains that Sterling finds "death with dignity" by taking all her available pills while Kay is in the house, so her body will be found intact.

At the fancy hotel, T. M. Bland cites guest confidentiality until Pete pulls his badge. He then documents Sterling and Beryl's stay at two-month intervals, usually coming and leaving separately. They occupy a double room facing the water, gratis, thanks to the late Joseph McTigue. Heading back to the train station, Kay describes her meeting with McTigue's widow. Pete feels Sterling and Beryl are "fags," which explains why Beryl runs away to Key West, AIDS capital of the world. When conducting interviews with Beryl's possible acquaintances, police wear gloves and masks. Kay is not surprised they get no cooperation.

Kay finds many messages at home, including one from a breathy white male asking if she bleaches her hair. He has left a gift on her back porch. Armed, Kay checks cautiously and phones Pete. Police are soon combing the woods as Pete and Kay examine an unusual gold medallion on a chain, now inside an evidence envelope. Pete is sure Cary had been wearing it at the tavern. Pete cures Kay's nervous babbling with brandy, offers to spend the night, advises that she modify all normal routines and report anything unusual on the street. Anything is possible. Pete offers to obtain a permit for her to carry a concealed weapon.

Chapter 11 Analysis

Having determined in Chapter 10 that Sterling suffers from cancer and recently visited Baltimore, MD, Kay in Chapter 11 takes the train down to her alma mater, Johns Hopkins University, home to the premier U.S. oncology facility. She takes along



Sterling's frozen autopsy samples and Pete as her "guardian angel." His homophobia flares again, tarnishing his halo. Kay is already certain that Sterling has been taking a powerful narcotic that appears identical in normal testing with dextromethorphan. Pete again helps the reader by questioning what the extensive chemical jargon means.

They also discover, through Kay's memory of a particular scrap of paper found unburnt in the Harper fireplace, the Baltimore hotel where Sterling and Beryl meet during Sterling's bimonthly treatments. It also provides a link to Mrs. McTigue's late husband, mentioned in Chapter 3, setting up a return visit and confrontation. The chapter's big surprise comes when Kay returns home late that night, exhausted, and learns the killer is now stalking her.



Chapter 12

Chapter 12 Summary

Kay is terrified to go out but has a breakfast meeting with the attorney general. She tells Ethridge about how Wesley is barely profiling and will not look her in the eyes. Kay admits to being paranoid. Kay thinks Sparacino's machinations could distract them from facts in the case, is no closer to finding the manuscript, and dislikes being interrogated. What Sterling burns and why is unknown, but more likely letters than the manuscript. Sparacino has sued Kay, the police, and the governor, and Kay is growing notorious.

Ethridge confides that someone privy to Justice Department matters has mentioned Mark James to him and Ethridge wants to know about their meeting at Gallagher's. Sparacino is under investigation and Mark has done time for racketeering and fraud. Mark is disbarred and Orndorff & Berger have never heard of him. Ethridge worries that Mark may harm Kay and may be behind the break-in at her office. Their conversation is interrupted when the elderly Senator Partin and his handsome, insolent-looking son, Scott, come to the table. Kay remembers seeing Scott alone at Gallagher's and figures him to be spying and intimidating for Sparacino.

When Kay shares this thought with Pete in the elevator, Pete asks if Scott might have been spying on Mark, but Kay is sure Mark has betrayed her. They go to the firearms range, where Kay waves off a more powerful 9-mm pistol before hitting a manikin solidly with three out of five shots. Pete wants her to have a shotgun at home and reveals how someone on PCP takes four bullets and still manages to attack him with a knife. He hands Kay a new license signed by a judge who owes him a favor.

Kay visits Mrs. McTigue again and after nervous chitchat asks to see the photograph again. She notes that the wrapping paper is high-quality rag, left over, Mrs. McTigue says, from her husband's business. A ladies' man and a man of letters, Joe had written Sterling. The Harpers and Beryl visited around the Christmas before Joe died. Cary is furious that his luggage is lost, and when it is delivered, pulls out and burns papers that Kay suspects are Beryl's autobiography or its outline, which they had discussed in New York with Sparacino. Joe drives Beryl home afterwards. Mrs. McTigue is sure that they are all dead because of the hatred in the room that night.

Chapter 12 Analysis

Chapter 12 features another uncomfortable meeting with Attorney General Eldridge and troubling inside information from an undisclosed Federal source on Sparacino and Mark partnering in criminal activity. During the breakfast meeting at a hotel, Kay recognizes Scott Partin, the handsome son of the fairly homely old Senator. Kay had seen Scott in Gallagher's restaurant in New York and figures that he has been tailing either her or Mark.



Pete next takes Kay to the firing range and tries to convince her to accept a more powerful automatic pistol. Kay is content with her .38 and after saying it only takes one bullet in the head, fires four out of five at a dummy. Pete wants her to get a shotgun for home and promises to get her a permit to carry a concealed weapon. He tells about how a perpetrator high on PCP once attacked him with a knife, despite multiple shots being pumped into him. Kay seems surprised at this rare detail from Pete's unknown life.

Finally, Kay pays a return visit to Mrs. McTigue, where she views the old photograph with new eyes and realizes the stationary in which it is wrapped is consistent with whatever Sterling burned in the fireplace before committing suicide. Mrs. McTigue talks about her late husband as a chivalrous lady's man and man of letters, and Kay says nothing to destroy her deluded memories. Kay learns about a fight between Cary and Beryl after Cary destroys some written materials he deems "trash." These arrive from the airport by courier after being reported lost. This ends up being perhaps the biggest clue in the novel to Beryl and Cary's murderer.



Chapter 13

Chapter 13 Summary

Valhalla Hospital in Albemarle County, VA, is a grand hotel turned into a "Freudian factory" for rich people. Pipe-smoking, aristocratic Dr. Warner Masterson leads Kay to his office to tell about Al as a boy being admitted depressed and unresponsive after a fight with his father and a "suicidal gesture." Al is an intense young man who believes himself clairvoyant and telepathic under stress. He is intuitive but confuses it with a priori knowledge. Around others he is like water taking the shape of whatever it fills. Al does well as an ER nurse but could not have functioned in psychology. His father is abusive, as are those of many homosexual males. Al is too insecure for any intimate relationships. Al comes out of his shell when the therapist has him argue with his father in an empty chair—and then plays the role of father, insulting and criticizing his inadequacies.

Al's social worker, Jim Barnes, died in a car accident 8-9 years ago in circumstances Masterson cannot recall. Masterson says Al had no violent tendencies except towards himself. Kay learns that Valhalla has no forensic unit, but uses a ward, Backhall, for those out of control; Al is never put there. Knowing that Masterson is withholding much, Kay thanks him, reminds him she wants copies of the file and leaves, frustrated over discrepancies in Al's story of Frankie and Jim Jim. Back at the office late, Kay looks up Jim Barnes' case and learns he died in a single-car accident on 21 April, nine years earlier, with alcohol and drugs in his bloodstream. Clearly he has a problem. She finds details in microfilm records that include the names of two witnesses, Masterson and Jeanie Sample.

Dr. Ismail phones to confirm Sterling ingested a massive amount of levomethorphan. Kay watches Sammy the albino squirrel raid her bird feeder and then begins her search for Sample. Learning her married name is Wilson and her husband is Skip, Kay calls various possibilities before finding Jeanie out on errands. Kay appears at Jeanie's door, flashes her badge, and sits with the perky 30-year-old to talk about a man Jeanie says had been a problem long before he is fired. When Jeanie witnesses Jim fondling a young mute, reenacting her rape by a stepfather, she turns him in. He had been accused by female patients before and by a boy called Frankie, who had spent a while in Backhall. Unlike most males, Frankie knits and is obsessively neat. Prodded, Jeanie thinks Al may have been the boy who lodges Frankie's complaint against "Jim Jim." Jeanie believes that Frankie lives with his father after his mother abandons the, but adds that Frankie had been gentle. He is tall, thin, with dark hair, unremarkable, and he stutters when excited.



Chapter 13 Analysis

Chapter 13 begins with Kay driving alone (a rare occurrence lately) to Valhalla Hospital to review Al Hunt's case with the reluctant administrator, Dr. Masterson. Kay reminds Masterson of her statutory right to Al's case file and fills him in on what she learned from viewing Al's videotape and talking with him in person shortly before his suicide. Masterson shares a good deal of information about the unfortunate young man, giving readers a feeling for how non-responsive troubled youth are treated in institutions, but suffers too many convenient lapses of memory—including the tragic, sudden death of Al's case worker, Jim Barnes—for Kay to be satisfied.

Kay runs down a Valhalla employee who is able to connect the dots for her and the reader. Nine years ago, Al was friends at Valhalla with a boy named Frankie who stutters whenever nervous. When Frankie is molested, he blames "Jim Jim," but when Al reports this for him, Frankie's inability to corroborate the attack leads to the dropping of charges against Barnes. Later, occupational therapist Jeanie Sample Wilson, who remembers Al and Frankie, sees Barnes fondling an inmate and he is fired.



Chapter 14

Chapter 14 Summary

Pete drives Kay back to Valhalla. Masterson ushers them in reluctantly. Pete says he is present to help massage the doctor's memory about Al's friend Frankie. After a confrontation with Pete, Masterson leaves to fetch files on the boys, fitting the description Jeanie has given. Pete has a feeling Sparacino is behind all the deaths, but Kay sees all the other factors not yet coming together. Masterson returns and prefers to preserve patient confidentiality by presenting the cases. If one proves of keen interest, they may examine it. The first three do not fit, but an 18-year old admitted for unfocused anger, anxiety, and gender doubts interests Pete. Masterson explains the case and hands Kay the file.

Frank Ethan Aims—Frankie— leaves Valhalla in July 1979, and promptly runs away from home. Jim Barns had been his social worker and alleged attacker, as reported by Al Hunt. Sounding defensive, Masterson explains that Frankie is too distraught to corroborate, so the case is dropped. Frankie's father last called to tell him his mother had died in Freeport, ME. Pete quickly learns that on 15 January 1983, Wilma Aims was beaten to death by a "burglar" in an unsolved case.

Over coffee at Kay's house, she and Pete try to link Frankie to the car wash. Only three of 36 employees are white males under 20 and two do not fit Frankie's size and coloring. Kay changes the subject to the manuscript and jokes about addressing Frankie directly if he phones again. Pete warns her not to kid about it. As he is leaving, Pete's beloved LTD bursts into flames and explodes. Kay sends him home soon after the wreckage is hauled away, refusing to let him spend the night or to move into a hotel for safety. Kay is undressing when the phone rings and a voice warns her against having other men in her house. Kay wonders if the fear she feels is the same as Beryl's after she sees the graffiti. After booking reservations, Kay calls Wesley to tell him where she will be. She refuses to be talked out of it and asks him not to interfere. She must find the manuscript. Finding Sammy the squirrel's incinerated body breaks Kay's heart. After burying him, she packs, including her gun, and bolts out the door, reaching the airport at 5 AM.

Chapter 14 Analysis

In Chapter 14, Kay returns to Valhalla but with Pete along to butt heads with Masterson. Pete is always amazed how one thing always seems to lead to another. Masterson eventually produces for review five files of former patients who more or less match the profile Kay presents of Frankie. The chapter is heavy with psychological jargon as the professionals read and go back-and-forth. Once again, Pete rescues the the reader by demanding clarifications. Frank E. Aims—Frankie—is identified (how Masterson could have been dense enough to miss that is remarkable, but Kay and Pete say nothing), the

meaning of "Jim Jim" deciphered, and the source of Al's supposed clairvoyance demystified a bit. Final clarity is achieved only in the last chapter.

Pete drives Kay home and after more warnings, watches his beloved, new LTD explode in her front yard. In a panic, Kay arranges to flee, despite arguments from Wesley with whom she consults. No destination is given to heighten the drama at the end of the chapter.



Chapter 15

Chapter 15 Summary

Kay lands at Miami International Airport, reads about Pete's car in the Miami Herald, puts off calling her mother, rents a car, and begins to relax on the way to Key West. She thinks about trips here with Mark and resents his deteriorating from the man she once respected and adored. Kay checks into La Concha, a tall, pink Holiday Inn filled with same-sex couples, and sleeps for 14 hours before starting to look for PJ and Walt, who are mentioned in Beryl's letters.

Kay starts at Louie's, a white-frame restaurant, immaculate, fragrant, and crowded. When she approaches the bartender for cigarettes, she finds PJ's green eyes unfriendly and suspicious. He responds to the nickname Straw only after Kay says she is Beryl's doctor and lightens up only when Kay requests Beryl's favorite Barbancourt Rhum and tonic. PJ is impressed that they would send a forensic pathologist down from Virginia and is more impressed when she says no one sends her anywhere. PJ lets slip that he knows Straw as Meryl and describes her as secretive and terrified of dying. PJ is convinced about Kay when she mentions Zulu the dog from Beryl's letters. PJ describes a stranger out of GQ who has been poking around but getting nowhere.

PJ takes Kay to his tiny house, apologizes for the junkyard furniture and general disarray, and tells how he met Beryl at Louie's and rescues her from overpaying at the Ocean Key Hotel. It had been very hard to strike up a conversation with Beryl at first, but they eventually form a trio with Walt, PJ's partner, walking around Old Town and drinking beer. PJ has never met anyone like Beryl. A few people have shown interest in Beryl's manuscript, but PJ had promised never to give it away. They talk about catching the "asshole" that hassles Beryl and is now hassling Kay. The manuscript might help tie all the strings together. Apologizing to Beryl, PJ hands over the knapsack containing 1,000 typed pages and computer disks. The letters to "M" are written therapeutically to "Myself." Beryl burns all but the two, which she xeroxes, as mementos for PJ and Walt. For the first time in weeks, Kay walks happily back to the hotel, carrying the knapsack.

Chapter 15 Analysis

Chapter 15 begins the two-chapter saga of Kay's sojourn in Key West, FL. The colorful town, which reminds Kay of New Orleans French Quarter, not only helps her unwind and forget Frankie's deadly anger, but shows how Beryl's letters capture the ambiance and make clear why Beryl does not want to return home to Richmond. Kay wishes Beryl had not returned home.

From Beryl's letters, Kay has two names, PJ and Walt, and two haunts to check out, Louie's and Sloppy Joe's. She is fortunate that the key figure in this chapter, the handsome, but initially aloof, bartender, PJ, has worked at Louie's for five years. After



condemning homophobia and police insensitivity (if not outright brutality), PJ espouses his philosophy of "live-and-let-live" and is amused by a doctor who smokes rather than delivering sanctimonious lectures and making him feel like a social outcast.

This and Kay's knowledge of Beryl's life (including her favorite rum) slowly convinces PJ of Kay's link to Beryl and PJ takes Kay to his house, in which Beryl had lived as a boarder while writing. PJ reveals that others have been nosing around and probably getting nothing from the closed-mouth locals. One of these is clearly the evil Scott Partin. Before and after entrusting the manuscript to Kay, PJ fills Kay in on Beryl's difficult but shining personality.



Chapter 16

Chapter 16 Summary

Mark is sitting in Kay's room, checked in as Kay's husband and sent, he claims by Wesley, his former teacher at the Academy. Mark is an undercover agent, which he proves by dialing Wesley. Mark stopped practicing law when Janet died, worked in the field, and then goes under deep cover. Sparacino is a federal target, he's been laundering money for the mob. Claiming to be Paul Barker in the Federal Protected Witness Program, Mark has been infiltrating for two years. In New York, Mark pretends to dig information out of Kay and brings her to Sparacino. Only in the restaurant does he realize Sparacino is onto him, using Partin's brat as a snitch. Mark has found nothing to connect Sparacino with Beryl or Cary's murders; the lawsuit and vendetta are for publicity (but the hatred of Ethridge is genuine), and Ethridge is not privy to the truth. Sparacino would probably kill Kay and Mark if he could get away with it.

Kay and Mark awaken with the sun, make love again, sleep entangled until 10, and spend the afternoon reading the moving manuscript together. Beryl talks about taking up writing because her home life is unendurable, losing her virginity to Cary at 16, and watching Sterling in denial for weeks. After growing impotent. Cary drinks and does drugs, and Joe McTigue pulls strings to restore Carey's wealth. After Beryl moves out, Sterling paints her as a girl robbed of innocence and Cary frequents the tavern, which gives Beryl and Sterling time to talk by phone. Finally, Beryl violates her contract to reclaim her life and preserve Sterling's, once her cancer is diagnosed. Kay sees why Cary would be frightened and Sparacino want to publish it.

When Mark points out a photocopy of one page, they wonder if the whole has been copied—and whether Sparacino has it. Mark has turned over Sparacino's office and house looking for it. They find PJ drunk at Sloppy Joe's, and he says only Beryl could have copied it with the memento letters. If Frankie stole it during Beryl's murder and reads about Cary raping Beryl and going daily to Culpeper's, he has motive and opportunity for another murder.

Mark is returning to Washington, DC, to be debriefed, reprogrammed, and sent somewhere. He knows that Kay cannot leave Richmond. Kay refuses to be intimidated. They kiss goodbye at the Miami airport, and physically and emotionally drained, Kay sleeps flying home. Pete meets her at the gate and hears her story while waiting for her luggage, which is lost. Pete warns her that Frankie is still loose, and checked the house when a "Mayday" code for officer shot draws him from the house. Kay has neglected to tell Pete that her .38 is in the lost suitcase. While reading Beryl's manuscript, which she carries on the plane, Kay hears the doorbell. Delighted that it is her suitcase brought by a pale young man from Omega Courier Service, Kay unlocks the door, and then remembers that the airport has her office address.



Chapter 16 Analysis

Chapter 16 continues the Key West saga, but with the surprising return of Mark, who is waiting for Kay in her hotel room. Assuming that he is the fraud that Ethridge has painted, Kay is leery, particularly because she is carrying Beryl's manuscript that Sparacino so covets. The chapter gradually unfolds, as did the previous one, this time with Kay needing to be convinced that Mark is an undercover FBI agent working to bring Sparacino down. The Virginia Attorney General is not privy to the federal secrets needed to decode Mark's apparent turn to the dark side. The long-estranged lovers are blissfully reunited and Kay daydreams about living together forever in Key West.

Long passages in Chapter 16 extol Beryl's wonderful writing and the tragic events that inspire that writing. Kay, as a reader, notes passages about Beryl's earlier novels that get dreary—interesting in light of the frequent diversions into triviality in this novel. A clear picture emerges of why Sparacino would want Beryl dead and the manuscript in his hands.

Kay refuses to be a victim and flies home to Richmond, taking the precaution of having Pete pick her up. Her suitcase is missing, so she fills out a claim form. Pete is attentive to details in determining that Kay's house is safe but races away when an officer shot emergency call is broadcast. Kay has failed to mention to him that her .38 is in the lost luggage. The chapter ends with Kay overjoyed at seeing the suitcase in the hands of a courier and without thinking lets him in. As an afterthought, she remembers the suitcase should have been delivered to her office.



Chapter 17

Chapter 17 Summary

Stuttering, the courier asks Kay to sign as she flashes through scenes from the murders. She confuses him by asking him to open her suitcase so she can verify the contents, hits him in the throat with the clipboard, and runs. She sprays him in the face with the fire extinguisher and smashes him with a cast iron skillet, but it scarcely slows him. Fleeing to the front door, she digs out her Ruger, jams in two cartridges, and fires. Kay falls apart, wailing.

Kay stays away from her office until Frankie's body is released and his blood washed away. She is sorry not that she kills him—but that he was ever born. Kay has a mountain of paperwork on her desk. Pete says that Frankie had been delivering lost bags for months. While his car is broken, he works for Al Hunt. Old Man Hunt's phone bills allow them to track Frankie from Butler, PA, to Hagerstown, MD, to Dover, DE, and then Richmond in January. Al probably gives him money to fix his car. Pete guesses that Frankie first sees Beryl while delivering Cary's lost bags to McTigues, then perhaps a few times at the car wash and the airport when she files to and from Baltimore. Being delusional, Kay notes, Frankie ascribes great importance to every sighting. Pete scoffs that Frankie hears God talking to him.

Frankie's car is dark blue, which makes it inconspicuous at night. The upholstery on the driver's seat is rotted out and covered with an airline blanket whose orange pinstripes are probably the source of the "terrorist" fibers. Frankie is obviously all over the airport, picking up debris on his uniform, which is made of Dynel. Kay remembers only Frankie's bloodied face. He probably uses airline computers when unattended, gets Beryl's phone number and flight information. He probably scratches the graffiti on her door when she flies to see Sterling in July, and keeps monitoring for her name on a return flight from Florida. He arranges for Beryl's tote bag to be missing.

In Frankie's apartment, police find Beryl's bloody blouse and underwear in her tote bag, violent pornography, small-gauge pellets used in Cary's murder, and the stolen manuscript and diskettes. Frankie probably read it while fondling the clothes. Kay realizes that Beryl never stood a chance because Kay fell for the same ploy. She opens the door, relieved and grateful. Pete believes that Beryl resets the alarm as an obsessive reflex.

Kay's bustling around makes Pete crazy. He reminds her how competent her staff is but she is still indispensable. Kay claims not to be thinking. Pete is distracted and depressed that Christmas is approaching. She tells Pete about Beryl's book, joyful and heartbreaking. They hope it will be published to keep her alive. Mark is working on it. Sparacino is finished as her agent, who was been shown to be in league with McTigue. Fearing that details on this may be in the manuscript, Sparacino has a double reason



for getting his hands on it to "doctor" it before making a fortune publishing it. Kay recommends that Pete take up reading.

Rose brings in a box of roses with a note from Mark, inviting Kay to meet him in Aspen after Christmas. He loves her.

Chapter 17 Analysis

The final chapter begins with very brisk coverage of Frankie's knife attack on Kay and her resourceful reactions. Had she not thought about the address issue, Kay would not have made the first move to defend herself. Again, she is seen thinking swiftly and clearly at the same time as she is dully reacting to events. Recall that in the first walk-through of Beryl's house, Kay remarks how Beryl has no defensive reflexes other than flight. Kay incapacitates Frankie in several painful ways before racing to find her pistol and shooting him dead. Pete's experience being knifed by a perpetrator and advise are not lost on Kay. Work at the pistol range has paid off in cool accuracy. Kay says somewhat enigmatically that she regrets not killing Frankie, but that Frankie is ever born. One might expect that from the redneck Pete, but it seems odd coming from Kay.

The scene shifts to Kay's office, as she talks with Pete while nervously organizing a desk piled high with paperwork. She cannot sit still. Pete in essence debriefs the the reader, summarizing the evidence at Frankie's house, connecting the dots on how he makes his way to Virginia from Pennsylvania, surmises about how Frankie comes to obsess about Beryl and plots the murders so carefully that Beryl does not stand a chance. An important element is having Kay now able to understand from first-hand experience how victims become victims. The ending is brief and touching, as Mark invites Kay to Aspen.



Characters

Dr. Kay Scarpetta

The Chief Medical Examiner of Virginia, Kay is the narrator of this detective story. She is an Italian-American Catholic, born in Florida, brought up poor; Kay will "never see thirty-nine again." Her hair has become more ash than blond and her eyes hazier. It would take a frontal lobotomy for her to quit smoking. Kay is a perfectionist and a workaholic, who loves to cook Italian food from scratch, and frequently gets over-involved in her cases. That is definitely the case in *Body of Evidence*.

Watching her father die of leukemia, Kay early on begins to study hard, reads Gray's *Anatomy* before age 15, leaves home determined not to enter a woman's profession but medicine. After graduating Cornell on scholarship, Kay studies medicine at Johns Hopkins, law at Georgetown, and pathology at Johns Hopkins. She masters the intricacies of death but continues to grieve as a little girl that she cannot bring her father back. At Georgetown she meets and falls madly in love with wealthy, argumentative Mark James, but they break up over another woman. Kay marries and divorces Tony Benedetti, and has no children.

In this novel, Mark returns, claiming to work for a Chicago-based law firm that has an interest in Kay's latest case, Beryl Madison. Kay recalls both the good and the bad of their old relationship but longs for companionship. Mark disappoints her for most of the novel. Kay is sued and publicly attacked by Mark's erstwhile colleague, Robert Sparacino, and told to lay low by the Attorney General. Kay identifies strongly with the first victim, Beryl, far less with Beryl's estranged mentor, Cary Harper, who also dies a grisly death, tries to revive Cary's sister, Sterling, when she finds her dead at night, and feels guilty for not being able to prevent the troubled Al Hunt from hanging himself after they talk about the murderer he is sure he knows about.

When Kay begins getting threatening phone calls like those that drive Beryl to Florida, Kay also heads there, for refuge and to hunt for the lost manuscript. She makes friends with Beryl's best friend in Key West, and learns that Mark is an undercover FBI agent seeking to link Sparacino with the mob. They make love and Kay thinks of settling down in Key West. Both know, however that they have work to do and go their separate ways. The night Kay gets home, she, without thinking, opens her door for an airport courier bringing her lost luggage and narrowly escapes a death like Beryl's. Years of developing defensive reflexes, including shooting to kill, pay off. As she eases back into work, Kay gets an invitation from Mark to join him in Aspen after Christmas.

Beryl Madison

A 35-year-old Richmond, VA, novelist who has used the pen names Adair Wilds, Emily Stratton, and Edith Montague, Beryl is already dead at the opening of the novel. She is



remembered for her honey blond, sun-streaked hair, petite figure, and refined features, but Dr. Kay Scarpetta has seen her only dead in the morgue and on her driver's license. Kay receives months of telephone threats before seeing graffiti scratched into the passenger's door of her mint-condition Honda Accord EX, and flees incognito to Key West, FL, having withdrawn \$10,000 in cash and avoiding traceable credit cards. The two letters forming the Prologue capture the fear she feels if she returns home, but return she does and is stabbed to death in her home within hours. It next develops that Beryl is writing an exposé of her early life as the protégé of a legendary novelist Cary Harper. Beryl's lawyer and the executor of her estate, Robert Sparacino, accuses Kay of losing the now-valuable manuscript.

Beryl lives and dies in the well-to-do Windsor Farms neighborhood on a cul-de-sac in a large International style-house—modern, stark, and expensive. The yard is unkempt with a "Fore Sale" sign. On a walk-through, Kay notices Beryl's .380 automatic in the kitchen and a well-stocked liquor cabinet. Kay assumes that Beryl leaves her gun when the doorbell rings because she is not a practiced marksman. The garage housing Beryl's car is paneled, in preparation for becoming her office, but the threats make her use it for her car.

A native of Fresno, CA, Beryl is forgotten when her widowed father remarries, and Beryl takes to writing to create worlds in which she is content. She contacts Pulitzer Prize-winning author Cary Harper through an agent and is soon invited to move in with him and his sister Sterling, who says that Beryl brings magic and complications. With Cary's help, Beryl publishes her first novel, *Flag of Honor*, a "quasiliterary romance" at age 22 under the pen name Stratton. Beryl signs a contract not to write anything about either sibling while either is alive. This precludes memoirs. Harper lets her publish only under pseudonyms. Mary James describes Beryl to Kay as memorable: witty, distant, nervous, and a heavy drinker.

Pete Marino

A burly, rotund, balding man in his early fifties, Pete has recently been promoted to lieutenant in the Richmond Police Department, but has long worked well with Dr. Kay Scarpetta. Marino annoys her by playing dramatic show-and-tell on cases and lecturing her on street safety. She, in turn, often tells him how to do his job. As the novel opens, Pete is the lead investigator on the Beryl Madison murder case and proudly picks Kay up at the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner in his brand new LTD Crown Victoria, which comes with the promotion. Pete's old beat up old car is more in keeping with his rumpled appearance.

Kay and Pete clash often over Pete's homophobia. At one point, as she discusses a patient, she realizes that Pete's son who lives across the country could have been driven to homosexuality by Pete's tough love approach, but never brings up the subject. She regularly chides him, however, for his prejudice. When Pete brings over a videotape of his interview with Al Hunt, Kay is shocked at how he systematically



demoralizes the sensitive young man. Calling him Attila the Hun, she suggests he should get an Academy Award if it is truly just acting on his part.

Pete becomes Kay's "guardian angel" when attorney Robert Sparacino causes trouble for her. Pete drives her around, pressuring reluctant witnesses, and asking the meaning of medical and chemical jargon in plain English—a great boon to the reader and clever way of providing both technical material and plain explanation. Pete's beloved LTD is blown up in Kay's front yard while they are discussing Frankie, the suspected killer, and Kay flees to Florida. Pete picks her up when she returns, but is lured away from the house by a radio dispatch alarm when Frankie comes, disguised as a courier from the airport. Kay shoots to kill, as Pete warns her one must do when facing a crazed individual. Pete has the scars to prove it.

Frank Ethan (Frankie) Aims

Frankie is a fellow patient with Al Hunt at Valhalla Hospital in 1979. Both have Jim Barnes as their social worker. Frankie, who stutters when he is upset, alleges to Al that Barnes has sexually attacked him, but is too distraught to corroborate, and the case is dropped. Frankie runs away after leaving Valhalla, and his father calls, trying to locate him, the last time to inform him that his mother has died in Freeport, ME. Lt. Pete Marino quickly learns that on 15 Jan. 1983, Wilma Aims is beaten to death by a "burglar" in an unsolved case. The story matches exactly what Al claims Frankie has done.

Moving from Butler, PA, to Hagerstown, MD, to Dover, DE, and finally to Richmond, VA, in January, Frankie keeps contact with Al. Frankie delivers lost baggage for Omega Courier Service until his car breaks, gets money from Al to fix it and resumes. Frankie probably first sees victim Beryl Madison while delivering Cary Harper's lost bags to the McTigues' house, then perhaps a few times at the car wash and the airport when she files to and from Baltimore. Being delusional, Frankie ascribes great importance to every sighting. When Frankie scratches graffiti into Beryl's car door, she panics and flies to Key West. Accessing airline terminals, Frankie determines when she returns, misplaces her baggage, and delivers it to her door. Excited, she lets him in, and Frankie brutally murders her. He is carrying out the same pattern on Dr. Kay Scarpetta when she figures out the ploy and kills him in self defense. She wishes Frankie had never been born.

Jim Barnes

A 31-year-old, unmarried social worker at the Valhalla Hospital, Barnes dies when he drives his 1973 BMW off of I-64 at a high rate of speed, on the afternoon he is fired for inappropriate sexual behavior with patients. Barnes is Al Hunt's social worker during his stay. Stuttering victim Frankie Aims refers to Barnes as "Jim Jim," a connection discovered only after Al hangs himself in despair.



Thomas Ethridge IV

Virginia's Attorney General, Ethridge has a Winston Churchill face and fiddles nervously while talking. He calls Dr. Kay Scarpetta after newspapers claim she has mislaid murdered novelist Beryl Madison's manuscript and also assaulted a robber in her building. Ethridge and New York attorney Robert Sparacino, who is causing trouble for Kay, were classmates at Columbia in the Class of 1951, and Sparacino still resents being edged out for a Supreme Court clerkship. Ethridge insists on handling Sparacino, and Sparacino expects Ethridge to be a lightning rod. At a second uncomfortable meeting, Ethridge warns Kay that ex-lover Mark James has been disbarred and served time in prison. In fact, Mark is an undercover FBI agent, information to which Ethridge is not privy.

Dr. Fielding

Dr. Kay Scarpetta's deputy chief, Fielding handles the initial forensics at murder victim Beryl Madison's home and takes custody of the body, evidence, and effects. He has orangutan arms because he works out whenever frustrated at work. Kay sees signs of burnout, but Fielding does a good job standing in for Kay while she is laying low and on vacation.

Joni Hamm

A Ph.D. candidate and mother of two, Hamm works in the forensic science labs in Kay Scarpetta's building and provides her with oral reports on Beryl Madison's trace evidence weeks before a written report could be produced. Hamm is very serious and misses Kay's attempts at banter.

Roy Hanowell

Hanowell is the gray-haired, -eyed, -complexioned, and -suited FBI specialist in fiber analysis, who links Beryl Madison's murder with an unsolved airplane hijacking in Athens, Greece.

Cary Harper

A Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist, for *The Jagged Corner*, about the "Gothic South," Cary Harper is washed-up in his mid-50s, living in seclusion with his older sister, Sterling, on an 18th-century plantation, Cutler Grove, in Williamsburg, VA. Years earlier, they take in a promising novelist, Beryl Madison, still in her mid-teens, as his protégé on condition she never write anything about either of them until after they are dead. Cary introduces Beryl to a sleazy lawyer, Robert Sparacino, who plays one of against the other.



When Beryl is brutally murdered and her manuscript disappears, Cary is briefly a suspect, but he is subsequently murdered just as brutally. Cary dies of seven blows to the head before his throat is slit. Hours earlier, he answered none of the questions asked by Lt. Pete Marino at Culpeper's Tavern. When Kay describes Cary's personal effects, she omits a gold chain that Pete notices in the tavern. This item shows up hanging on Kay's back door when she begins to receive death threats.

Sterling Harper

Cary Harper's never-married older sister, Sterling Harper lives with her famous but washed-up brother in isolation at Cutler Grove in Williamsburg, VA. An elegant, silver-white haired patrician, lithe but shapely, and hardly a "spinster," Sterling has been receiving cancer treatments for several years at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, MD, and uses the trips as an opportunity to stay in touch with Cary's estranged protégé, Beryl Madison, whom she dearly (but platonically) loves. When Beryl and Cary are both brutally murdered, Sterling takes an overdose of levomethorphan, which she hopes will appear during autopsy as cough syrup. She wants to die with dignity.

Al Hunt

A weak-chinned, pasty-faced, clean-cut, 28-year-old white man who clearly looks out of place managing the Masterwash car wash in Richmond, VA. Al, is the son of a major slumlord who is disappointed in his son, who he presumes is gay because he earlier worked as a male nurse at Metropolitan Hospital. When Lt. Pete Marino visits the car wash, Hunt recognizes murder victim Beryl Madison's picture but not her name. Pete videotapes a session with Al in interrogation and plays it for Dr. Kay Scarpetta, who is far more understanding of Al than Pete is. She admires some of his psychological insights. Al visits Kay unexpectedly at home and presents his vision of Beryl's murder, identifying the killer as "Jim Jim," somehow associated with Valhalla Hospital. When Kay asks if Al had been a patient there, he leaves hurriedly, goes home, and hangs himself in the basement, leaving a note that he cannot take any more.

Mark James

Dr. Kay Scarpetta's lover 15 years ago, Mark calls Kay out of the blue early in the investigation into the brutal murder of novelist Beryl Madison, to say that he is moving from Chicago to Washington, DC, and that his law firm, Orndorff & Berger, has dealings with the victim. Their first meeting at Scarpetta's home is tense, but all the feelings that Kay had for Mark as a law student Georgetown return. Mark studied law because his father and grandfather did. Ethnically, religiously, and financially, Mark and Kay are opposites.

Mark reveals he has been widowed in a DUI accident and knows about Kay's divorce. He disappoints Kay when he does not kiss her goodnight. Mark arranges for Kay to meet him in New York for dinner and then a meeting with colleague Robert Sparacino,



Madison's executor. When Kay tries later to phone James at Orndorff & Berger, no one in the New York or Chicago offices has heard of him. Mark tries to warn Kay off the case and then disappears for several chapters. Attorney General Thomas Ethridge IV, warns Kay that Mark has been disbarred and done time in prison.

When Kay flees death threats to Key West, FL; Mark shows up in her hotel room, claiming to be her husband. He provides proof that he is an FBI undercover agent working to prove Sparacino's mob connections. He flies back to Washington, DC, for debriefing, reprogramming, and assignment somewhere, having blown his cover. He sends Kay flowers and invites her to meet him in Aspen, saying he loves her.

Peter Jones (PJ)

The green-eyed, initially suspicious bartender at Louie's in Key West, FL, PJ admits to being murder victim Beryl Madison's friend during her stay. To help her conserve money PJ and roommate Walt let her share their tiny house. PJ's philosophy is strictly "live and let live," and Kay believes he is a good steward of Beryl's manuscript, giving it to Kay when she proves that she has Beryl's best interests at heart.

Mrs. McTigue

A wealthy, retired widow living in the Chamerlayne Garden assisted living complex in Richmond, VA, Mrs. McTigue offers Dr. Kay Scarpetta port and cheese biscuits while telling her about how her late husband, Joe, did construction work on Cary Harper's Cutler Grove estate and tells her about a young novelist, Beryl Madison. Mrs. McTigue's apartment looks like a scene from *Aida*. After learning about complimentary nights that a Baltimore hotel offered Beryl and Sterling Harper during Sterling's cancer treatments at Johns Hopkins, Kay goes back to talk to Mrs. McTigue again, but does not destroy her illusions about her late husband.

Scott Partin

An unforgettably handsome young man, the physical opposite of his wrinkled father, the ancient Senator, Scott works for attorney Robert Sparacino as a spy and intimidator to support himself between acting gigs. Scott is tailing Mark James at Gallagher's Restaurant the night Mark and Dr. Kay Scarpetta meet in New York. Kay recognizes him during a business breakfast with Attorney General Thomas Ethridge IV. Sparacino later sends Scott to Key West, FL, to look for Beryl Madison's lost manuscript, but locals do not tell the man who looks like he walked out of GQ anything.

Jeb Price

A professional thug hired by New York attorney Robert Sparacino, Price has taken pictures of the Harper sibling's dead bodies in the morgue and is riffling Dr. Kay



Scarpetta's files when she smashes him in the groin with her medical bag and Maces him for good measure. He is carrying a loaded 9-mm automatic pistol and has a trunk load of others weapons, but is released on \$50,000 bond..

Officer Jim Reed

An officer in the Richmond Police Department, Reed fields a number of panicky phone calls from Beryl Madison, but chalks them up to hysteria and/or loneliness. Dr. Kay Scarpetta sees this as police insensitivity to the plight of female victims, but the male officers caution that hindsight is dangerous in police work.

Robert Sparacino

The novel's chief villain, Sparacino is a sleazy but powerful New York entertainment lawyer with a checkered history of cooking up publicity headlines before joining the staid firm of Orndorff & Berger. He is in his late 50s or early 60s, fleshy, with small blue eyes, shortness of breath, and formidable weight. After his client, novelist Beryl Madison Sparacino is murdered, Sparacino accuses Dr. Kay Scarpetta of losing a manuscript that supposedly deals with her early life as the protégé of legendary novelist Cary Harper, another Sparacino client. Sparacino is executor of Madison's estate. When Sparacino causes trouble for Kay, Attorney General Thomas Ethridge IV, Sparacino's classmate and rival at Columbia, becomes her shield. Sparacino always signs contracts at New York's Algonquin Hotel, where as a boy he is humiliated by novelist Dorothy Parker in front of her Round Table.

Benton Wesley

An FBI Profiler, Wesley is "as Prussian as the rest of them," but Dr. Kay Scarpetta respects him as a human worth knowing. A collector of macabre weapons, Wesley is energetic, dapper, fit, and handsome "in a hard way," with premature silver-gray hair. Early in the investigation of novelist Beryl Madison's brutal murder, Wesley meets with Kay and Lt. Pete Marino and offers a preliminary profile of the killer: in his 20s or 30s, probably working a 9-5 job, good at covering his dual life, playful in his stalking of victims. He acts only when the fun ends. As the novel progresses, Wesley becomes increasingly protective of Kay. When, against his advice, she flees to Key West, FL, Wesley sends his former student at the FBI Academy—and Kay's ex-lover—Mark James down to protect her.

Jeanie Sample Wilson

A petite, 30-year-old occupational therapist at Valhalla Hospital, Wilson is the mother of two rambunctious children. Dr. Kay Scarpetta visits her home to learn details about the firing and death of Jim Barnes nine years earlier. Jeanie had witnessed Barnes improperly touching a patient. Jeanie recalls a male patient named Frankie also

complaining, who is too upset to come forward, but his friend Al Hunt tells the story about "Jim Jim." Frankie, Jeanie remembers, stutters under stress.



Objects/Places

Baltimore, MD

Home to Dr. Kay Scarpetta's renowned alma mater, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore is the destination for a quick trip by Kay and her "guardian angel," Lt. Pete Marino. They bring tissue samples from a potential suicide, Sterling Harper, for special polarimeter testing. Sterling has been an outpatient for several years in the oncology clinic. Kay and Pete also visit the luxurious Harbor Court Hotel where they learn that Sterling and murder victim Beryl Madison—ostensibly her daughter—visit several times and stay gratis.

Chamberlayne Gardens

An expensive but grimly depressing retirement home in Richmond, VA, Chamberlayne Gardens is home to the widow Mrs. McTigue, who works as a volunteer for the Daughters of the American Revolution. Mrs. McTigue books a speaking engagement for novelist Beryl Madison, whose books she adores, having learned her true name from her late husband, a contractor for famed novelist Cary Harper.

Cutler Grove

An 18th-century plantation in Williamsburg, VA, Cutler Grove is home to the reclusive, washed-up former Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist, Cary Harper, and his unmarried older sister, Sterling. Harper rebuilt the mansion years earlier, using the contracting services of J. R. McTigue, when his teenage protégé, Beryl Madison, moves in. Cary repeatedly rapes Beryl in her second-floor bedroom, in which years later Dr. Kay Scarpetta, investigating Cary's brutal murder, spends the night. Kay becomes friendly with Sterling on the last night of her life, sitting before a roaring fireplace and looking at a framed oil painting of a young girl rendered too sensually for her age. Before dawn, Kay discovers Sterling dead by the fire, fails to revive her, and waits until dawn. Authorities recover ashes of burnt letters, from which they reconstruct a frustrating few words. Sterling painted the "Lolita-like" canvas to irritate her brother.

FBI National Academy

The institution in Quantico, VA, at which police officers, DEA, FBI, and elitist Hostage Teams are trained, the Academy is also Dr. Kay Scarpetta's alma mater. Kay travels there with Lt. Pete Marino to meet FBI agents Benton Wesley and Roy Hanowell, the fiber expert. As always, Kay feels lost in the maze before they descend to the Behavioral Science Unit. She seems uncharacteristically ill at ease in this militaristic milieu.



Key West, FL

The idyllic site of novelist Beryl Madison's last sanctuary from a stalker in Richmond, VA, Key West allows Beryl to do some work on an autobiographical novel at Louie's. Beryl makes friends with several members of the gay community, PJ and Walt, and writes about her anguish over the AIDS epidemic. Several times, with and without judgment, it is mentioned that Key West is the AIDS capital of the U.S. The night that Beryl flies home to Virginia, she is brutally knifed to death.

Months later, stalked by the same madman, Dr. Kay Scarpetta, who has been investigating Beryl's death, also flees to Key West in search of Beryl's manuscript. Places mentioned includes Louie's, a white-frame restaurant on the corner of Vernon and Waddell, where Kay meets and eventually hits it off with bartender Peter Jones (PJ); the ramshackle house that PJ once shares with partner Walt and Beryl; La Concha Hotel on Duval, "a tall, pink Holiday Inn of open spaces and gaudy tropical plants," where Kay stays, and Sloppy Joe's.

New York, NY

Home to one of the law offices of Orndorff & Berger, New York is the backdrop for Dr. Kay Scarpetta's first confrontation with sleazy lawyer Robert Sparacino, whose clientèle are sports and entertainment figures wanting to be stars. Scarpetta is flown there by her former lover, Mark James, ostensibly a member of the firm. She stays in the Omni Park Central Hotel at 55th and 7th and they dine at Gallagher's Restaurant. Several mentions are made in the novel of the Algonquin Restaurant, in conjunction with Sparacino, who as a boy, embarrasses himself meeting Dorothy Parker, a famous novelist.

Orndorff & Berger

A prestigious, conservative law firm headquartered in Chicago, IL, with established offices in New York, Atlanta, and Houston, and ostensibly looking to open one in Washington, DC, Orndorff & Berger is concerned that its New York "asshole" partner, who deals with sports and entertainment figures, is a potential liability. Dr. Kay Scarpetta's ex-lover, Mark James, shows up after fifteen years, claiming to work for the firm, but Scarpetta soon learns that no one knows him there.

Earlier, however, Kay visits Orndorff & Berger at Mark's request. She finds the lobby is a heartless black space, but the empty offices are spacious. Sparacino's is double the size of the others—and done up in black. Kay denies ever seeing the manuscript that Robert Sparacino demands and finds herself getting bad publicity—a Sparacino specialty. Towards the end of the novel, Mark returns to reveal that he is an FBI agent working undercover to reveal Sparacino's mob connections, which have nothing to do with the firm.



Richmond, VA

The primary locale for *Body of Evidence*, Richmond is the capital of the Commonwealth of Virginia. It houses the Chief Medical Examiner's Office, morgue, and testing facilities conveniently in a single building. The local FBI office is discretely hidden. Murder victim Beryl Madison lives in the well-to-do Windsor Farms neighborhood and is a member of Westwood, an exclusive tennis club. Somewhat oddly, she has her car regularly washed and detailed on the Southside, Masterwash, whose manager, Al Hunt, lives and dies in his parents' brick colonial in Ginter Park. Old Man Hunt is a notorious slumlord, owning most of Northside Richmond.

Valhalla Hospital

Valhalla Hospital in Albemarle County, VA, is a grand hotel turned into a "Freudian factory" for rich people. Pipe-smoking, aristocratic Dr. Warner Masterson leads Dr. Kay Scarpetta to his office to tell about Al, Hunt, a boy admitted as depressed and unresponsive who nearly undergoes electroshock therapy before coming out of his shell. Kay learns that Al's social worker, Jim Barnes, died in a car accident at that time, but Masterson conveniently cannot recall enough facts so Kay returns with pugnacious Lt. Pete Marino to improve his memory. They determine that Frank Ethan Aims—Frankie—in 1979 through Al Hunt charges Barnes with molesting him. Frankie is too distraught to corroborate, so the case is dropped. Occupational therapist Jeanie Sample Wilson later witnesses molestation and Barnes is fired. Drunk and on drugs, Barnes drives his car off the road and files are purged of references to him for fear of legal and financial repercussions.

Williamsburg, VA

A secondary crime scene in the novel, Williamsburg is home to the 18th-century plantation, Cutler Grove, where the reclusive, washed-up former Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist, Cary Harper, lives with his unmarried older sister, Sterling. Cary is brutally murdered at his back door and Sterling commits suicide. After these events, Dr. Kay Scarpetta visits the Village Frame Shoppe & Gallery on Merchants' Square on the edge of the historic district to ask about a painting in the Harper home. The owner makes it clear that he does not know the Harpers and doubts many people in Williamsburg do either. Finally, Culpeper's Tavern is frequented every evening by Cary Harper. Richmond Police Lt. Pete Marino tries to talk to Harper about Beryl Madison just minutes before the novelist drives home to his Cutler Grove mansion and is brutally murdered.



Social Sensitivity

At first glance, Patricia Cornwell's second novel seems to employ the milieu of the classical detective school.

The murder victims are reclusive writers; they live in old and fashionable homes at far remove from the world of everyday crime; they guard unpleasant secrets from their past; their deaths seem to involve a missing manuscript.

These trappings are staples of many novels; Cornwell's American (and Southern) contemporaries Carolyn G. Hart and Joan Hess populated their debut mystery novels with literary types. Cornwell places her work in the genre, then stretches generic boundaries, bringing to this traditional material a hard-boiled mentality, evident in at least six contrasting features. First, Cornwell lingers over the horror of the crime. Agatha Christie and Dorothy Sayers, two of the most renowned classical detective writers, seldom describe death throes or gaping wounds and almost never present graphic struggle. The first victim in Cornwell's book, a woman who wrote historical romances, desperately raced through her home as her attacker repeatedly pummeled her with a knife; Scarpetta and Marino trace her flight from the spray of blood over several rooms and a staircase. The violence of the attack and the grisly crime scene are very unclassical. Second, in a classical story, authors may present adultery or a mentor's liaison with a protegee as dark secrets, but the victims in Cornwell's book shield a much more disturbing offense, repeated sexual abuse of a young woman by an older man. Cornwell offers a secret that is not merely embarrassing, but evil.

Third, in classical stories the motive for the crime is rational; the killer needs to end a blackmail scheme or claim an inheritance or preserve a secret. Cornwell delves into the twisted psychology of someone who kills just because he wants to kill; his animus for his victims defies rational explanation.

(Again, Cornwell appeals to the pioneering research of Robert K. Ressler.)

Fourth, the classical novel almost always presents sleuthing by amateur detectives whose chief tool is their intelligence. The Scarpetta series presents up-to-date technology and psychology as employed by highly trained professionals. Each of the Scarpetta novels highlights a different investigative technology; this time, readers learn about using fibers to trace killers. Fifth, in the classical story the crime is a momentary disruption in a happy place. Cornwell adopts the hard-boiled mentality that the crime indicates the much wider corruption of a sick society; indeed, in this novel Scarpetta discovers a deeply-entrenched contamination that may reach government officials. Sixth, the classical mystery usually avoids social commentary, whereas Cornwell inserts Scarpetta into current controversies. In each Scarpetta novel, a key issue is the status of women, especially in the still male-dominated South. This novel adds treatment of homosexuality, offering benign characters who have chosen the gay lifestyle contrasted with the killer, whose psychological history involves homosexual experiences. In summary, in *Body of Evidence*, Cornwell makes her version of the detective genre

unique and contemporary by moving the basic material of a classical story into a violent and controversial modern social context.



Techniques

Cornwell improves in this novel in her sense of place. Her thumbnail sketches of locales quickly capture their spirit. To interview a friend of Beryl's, Scarpetta visits Chamberlayne Gardens, a high-rise retirement community. The expensively furnished lobby reveals the high social class of the residents, but the decrepitude of the lobby sitters reveals the true condition of the residents. "No matter how lovely it was," Scarpetta explains, "no one really wanted to be there." She provides equally good paragraphs on Beryl's up-scale neighborhood, the posh hotel-turned expensive hospital where Aims met his friend Hunt, and the Harpers' ghostly mansion.

Cornwell uses description not only as commentary but as psychological insight. The book opens with letters in which Beryl employs the pathetic fallacy, remaking natural events as reflections of her mood: "This morning it's dark and there's a fierce wind . . . Palm trees are struggling against the wind .

. . The world moans outside my window like something wounded, and when the rain hits the glass it sounds as if a dark army has marched in"

She makes the trees and wind reflective of her own anxiety. She feels threatened, by her stalker and maybe by Cary Harper; she fled to Key West because she felt under attack, and now feels unsafe anew after a mysterious phone call. The storm represents the unknown menace she is sure is out there. As the series moves forward, Cornwell will put passages and outlooks such as this into Scarpetta's own narration.



Themes

Homophobia

Hardboiled Lt. Pete Marino is a dyed-in-the-wool homophobe, within the context of hating all forms of "perversion," particularly pedophilia. He cannot conceive of any difference. At every opportunity he speaks contemptuously about "fags," looking for any evidence to assign the label. Throughout the novel, Pete is Dr. Kay Scarpetta's "guardian angel," but his homophobia clearly annoys her. She argues with Pete rarely, for they have known one another for years. Nothing changes by arguing with him.

Pete labels Al Hunt a "fag" because he formerly worked as a male nurse. Hunt's father, a tough slumlord, treats Al no differently; he is ashamed to have produced such a son. Watching Pete intimidate Al on videotape, Kay considers how often tough men like Pete and Mr. Hunt drive their sons into homosexuality, and then recalls that Pete's only son lives far away, out of touch. Al, it turns out, is homosexual, and while in a psychiatric institution as a teen, tries to help another patient, Frankie, who is molested by a male staff member, having earlier been traumatized by another male assailant.

As they mull over the complex evidence in Beryl Madison's murder, Pete seizes on the fact that a certain textile found at the scene is often used in wigs. He hypothesizes that her killer dresses in drag to gain admission to her house. He then decides that she earlier hides out in Key West, FL, "the AIDS capital" of America, because she is herself homosexual. None of Pete's colleagues even acknowledge such drivel. Police in Key West, however, when looking for people who had been close to Beryl, wear surgical gloves and masks during interviews, antagonizing the "live and let live" community and getting no answers. When Kay, fleeing the same terror as Beryl before, reaches Key West, she admits to being surprised to see so many same-sex couples living unself-consciously and hastens to add that she is not prejudiced and has learned that love takes many legitimate forms.

Loneliness

Body of Evidence is filled with lonely characters. Perhaps the loneliest and most pathetic is Mrs. McTigue, left financially well-off when widowed earlier in the year, so she can afford an apartment in the pricey Chamerlayne Garden assisted living complex, but when Dr. Kay Scarpetta visits, she sees it is no less grimly depressing than other such facility. Mrs. McTigue clearly receives few guests and admits she writes few letters any more. Her great thrill has been arranging for the writer Beryl Madison to lecture for the Daughters of the American Revolution and seems to pick up the DAR's phone at any hour.

Sterling Harper's loneliness, living at isolated Cutler Grove and sacrificing her own creativity to her brother, Cary's, long after he has lost his muse and sunk into an



existence of alcohol and drugs, is as profound as Mrs. McTigue's. Kay meets Sterling while investigating Cary's brutal murder and quickly understands her. Sterling asks Kay to return in spring to see the forget-me-nots in bloom, and Kay sincerely promises. Within hours, Sterling, who has nowhere else to go and is fighting cancer, takes her own life, determined to die with dignity.

Police Officer Reed, responding to panicky phone calls from Beryl, chalks them up to loneliness, a need for attention. Kay sees this as police insensitivity to the plight of female victims. Al Hunt and Frankie, who met nine years earlier in Valhalla Hospital, each has such intense feelings of inadequacy that they cannot form meaningful relationships with anyone. Each becomes obsessed with women they see at a distance. Al so empathizes with others' pain that he cannot work as a psychologist, for which he is trained. In the end, he hangs himself because he cannot go on. Frankie turns to murder.

Kay does not dwell on loneliness only because she is a workaholic and normally has no time for idle thoughts. When ex-lover Mark James shows up out of the blue after 15 years, however, Kay wrestles with memories both good and bad. She longs for even the flawed closeness they had enjoyed. Her emotions go up and down as Mark appears to be different people in different circumstances, but when he reveals his true identity as a FBI undercover agent, she immediately pictures life with him in idyllic Key West, FL. Both, however, are dedicated to their careers, and part with a kiss, not looking back. Mark remains on Kay's mind, however, and in the end, he sends her roses and invites her to meet him at Aspen, CO. The note says that he loves her.

Preparedness

From the evidence in murder victim Beryl Madison, Chief Medical Examiner Dr. Kay Scarpetta sees that she has not developed the reflexes necessary for survival. Beryl leaves a loaded .38 caliber pistol lying on her kitchen counter when she answers the doorbell. Had she prepared herself to use it and not just bought a permit, she would have taken it with her to answer the door. Kay sees signs of struggle in the living room but no indication that Beryl thinks to grab the fire irons by the fireplace. Her only survival skill is to run, and as she is repeatedly slashed, blood loss renders that impossible. Finally, she can only face her fate and die.

By comparison, Kay goes regularly to the firing range to practice with her .38. She is so comfortable and confident using it that she declines the offer of a more powerful 9-mm. She also ignores Lt. Pete Marino's suggestion that she get a shotgun for her home. When Frankie pulls the same trick on Kay he did on Beryl, Kay, once she realizes the situation, reacts instantly and instinctively, smashing Frankie in the throat, spraying with the fire extinguisher to cloud his vision, smashing him in the face, not the the unwieldy extinguisher, but with a heavy pan she can swing like a tennis racket, and finally shooting him twice, point-blank, in the chest. By keeping her wits, she stays alive while Beryl dies.



Significant Topics

In this novel, relationships are precarious, incomplete, open to abuse — an observation that seems to unite the book's various plot strands. The first victim, historical romance writer Beryl Madison, entered the literary world under the sponsorship of established writer Cary Harper. But the investigation of her death reveals that Harper had repeatedly molested her when, as a teen-ager, she became his protegee and stayed at his home. Sterling, Cary's sister, learned of the abuse, but did nothing. Sterling and Beryl became ironically close — a disturbing connection of a victim with her victimizer's protector. What seems to the literary world to be the Harpers' generous support of a new author is only a mask for sexual misconduct.

Finally to break from the psychological hold the Harpers have over her, Beryl writes her memoirs, exposing the Harpers in the manuscript. She has gone with the manuscript to Key West as a respite from problems in Richmond, her hometown. There she bonds with a gay couple and writes in her letters that she hopes they will always be inseparable. But soon after her death, her friends break up. Again what appears to outsiders to be perfect is really fragile.

In Richmond, Beryl had received harassing telephone calls and finally decided to flee when a heart was scratched into her car door — the use of a symbol of love as a signal of threat. The night she returns to Richmond from Key West, she is murdered.

Her killer, the investigation reveals, from afar has created a relationship with her. Al Hunt, his only friend in Richmond, whom he met in a mental hospital, confesses to Scarpetta, "When he [the killer] loves, he has to possess because he feels so insecure and unworthy, is so easily threatened. When his secret love is not returned, he becomes increasingly obsessed." What could be a harmless attraction for a stranger turns into a destructive drive.

He kills her because he loves her so much, a horrid perversion of affection.

As a tribute to her, he assassinates her earlier tormentor Cary Harper. Her killer is also her knight errant. Most of the relationships in this novel are either unstable or destructive.

Scarpetta also experiences the trials of relationships when her law school lover, Mark James, returns to Richmond. A lawyer who is involved in the case, Mark tempts Scarpetta into resumption of their romance. Yet distrust hovers over their meetings, as Scarpetta wonders if he has ulterior motives or if he really still cares for her. His role in the culmination of the investigation allows her to overcome her doubts about his sincerity. And the book ends with Mark's assertion of his love through a gift of roses. The unresolved question (at least until the next book) is whether this relationship can somehow succeed, can escape the fate of the other connections in the novel.

Beryl's murder seems to touch the fringes of a larger governmental investigation of Robert Sparacino, a powerful entertainment lawyer suspected of wide-scale extortion.



He wants Beryl's allegedly salacious manuscript and thus tries to intrude into Scarpetta's efforts to find the killer. Sparacino has allied himself with the family of a U.S.

senator and seems, therefore, to enjoy protection. As Cary Harper represents a domestic brand of evil, Sparacino represents a potentially more malevolent evil because he can reach so far.

Typical of hard-boiled writing, Cornwell allows the original crime to imply a vast network of corruption.

In *Body of Evidence* Cornwell continues the feminist critique of Southern society begun in *Postmortem*. Again Scarpetta cannot win support from her superiors when Sparacino accuses her of losing Beryl's manuscript and generally bungling the investigation. Cornwell stresses that as a woman in a male-dominated arena, Scarpetta can rely only on herself (and sometimes Marino and Wesley). Cornwell offers Scarpetta as an object lesson in the challenges professional women must overcome. Another aspect of Cornwell's critique is the discussion of how seriously the Richmond police took Beryl's complaints of harassment. The male officer gave Beryl standard advice — change her telephone number, get a dog for protection — but was quizzical of her reticence to answer certain questions and of her near hysterical attitude. A lively debate ensues over the officer's reports, with Marino and Wesley defending the officer while Scarpetta attacks him as unsympathetic to a plainly desperate woman who needed help. (This short section would be an interesting starting point for a discussion of how Cornwell presents the misunderstandings between the sexes.)

Style

Point of View

Body of Evidence by Patricia Cornwell is narrated by Dr. Kay Scarpetta, Chief Medical Examiner of Virginia, in the first-person past tense. Long passages of dialog are also, of course, primarily in the first person. Kay is trained as a physician, lawyer, and pathologist, and has risen to the upper levels of her profession. She writes with professional acumen and a heavy larding of sympathy for the unfortunate characters who come across her stainless steel table in the morgue. She is in a sense their advocate and is sorry that her knowledge cannot bring them back to life. Kay is always somehow the grieving child of a father who dies too young.

Kay accepts criticism that she gets too involved in cases and that she is a workaholic. In this novel, there is little she can do to avoid involvement, as the initial homicide victim, Beryl Madison, appears to have been represented by a law firm that is opening an office in Washington, DC. The lawyer is Kay's ex-lover, Mark James. For much of the book, Kay is in a tizzy over her feelings, past and present, about Mark, even after she catches him in a lie, and the Attorney General informs her he is a felon.

Kay is drawn further into the story when Sterling Harper, the eccentric sister of the second violent homicide victim, Cary Harper, dies while Kay is forced to spend the night at her house. Kay suspects that Sterling has timed her "death with dignity" to correspond with Kay's presence, so the investigation of this aspect is personal. Kay also feels responsible when Al Hunt hangs himself after giving her the final clues needed to identify the murderer. Her attention to the case forces Frankie to stalk her, and Kay both flees to Florida and returns precisely as Beryl had, fortunately with different results—but only by a hair.

Body of Evidence is the second of Cornwell's Scarpetta novels. Cornwell builds up the recurring characters Kay Scarpetta, Pete Marino, and Benton Wesley in great detail in the first novel, Postmortem. Unfortunately, readers will appreciate their nuances fully only by reading the novels in sequence.

Setting

Body of Evidence by Patricia Cornwell is prefaced by two personal letters from someone named Beryl to someone nicknamed "M," written 13 August and 30 September of an undisclosed year from idyllic Key West, FL. They show Beryl afraid to go home to Richmond, VA, but lacking anywhere else to go. Internal references suggest that the story takes place in 1985 or 1991.

Months after the letters are written, copies are found in the bedroom of novelist Beryl Madison when she is found brutally murdered. After performing her autopsy, Dr. Kay Scarpetta, Chief Medical Examiner of Virginia, begins a long investigation—fittingly on



Halloween night. Beryl is found to have contacted the police on 11 and 12 March and 6 July to complain about threatening phone calls. Receiving little help and growing increasingly panicky, Beryl flees to FL on Friday 12 July, where she pays cash for everything, keeps to herself, and writes. She flies back, arriving by taxi at 9 PM. The alarm sounds at 11 and a neighbor calls 911 after 30 minutes.

During the investigation, which rolls along for weeks, Kay spends a night in New York City and makes fact-finding trips to Williamsburg, VA (where the second homicide and first suicide occur), Baltimore, MD, and Valhalla Hospital in Albemarle County, VA. She and Pete also visit the FBI National Academy in Quantico, VA. Scared for her life, Kay flees—like Beryl—to Key West, where she meets Beryl's lone friend, visits the places she remembers, and collects Beryl's lost manuscript. Kay flies home, files a claim for lost luggage, and nearly dies when she—like Beryl—gratefully opens her door for a courier returning it.

Language and Meaning

Body of Evidence by Patricia Cornwell is narrated by Dr. Kay Scarpetta, Chief Medical Examiner of Virginia, a well-known and self-admitted workaholic. She deals with two brutal murders and two suicides, all interrelated, and as usual becomes over-involved, another admitted weakness. Scarpetta speaks in jargon during autopsies and discussions with colleagues, but is also empathetic with survivors and witnesses.

Readers have their champion in Richmond Police Lt. Pete Marino, Kay's long time colleague and friend, despite the fact that their personalities abrade each other and Pete's views on homosexuality in particular and social issues broadly are rednecked while Kay's are liberal. Whenever Pete does not understand something, he asks for an explanation in plain English. Once Kay's life is determined to be in danger, Pete is her constant companion, so the "translation" is always readily available. Pete also uses a lot of street slang, including his favorite words, "crib," "drone," and "squirrel." Written in 1991 and purporting to show contemporary events, there is remarkably little cursing for a cop story.

Some of the most interesting passages are when failed psychologist Al Hunt is describing people's auras and how he is able to understand their thoughts, motivations, and actions. Again, Kay and Pete view Al from opposite sides. Pete wants to break him emotionally to elicit information and scorns him as a "pansy" and "fag," while Kay appreciates Al's insights and wonders how Al sees her aura, but never asks.

Structure

Body of Evidence by Patricia Cornwell consists of seventeen numbered but untitled chapters. The investigation of two murders and two suicides, all interrelated, proceeds chronologically, but much of the evidence points back to earlier events. A Prologue sets the stage for the novel by giving the text of two personal letters from someone named Beryl to someone nicknamed "M," written from idyllic Key West, FL. Beryl does not want



to go home to Richmond, VA, but has nowhere else to go. She is clearly scared for her life.

For fourteen chapters the action shifts north to Virginia and New York, as Beryl, a novelist, is found brutally murdered in her home. Dr. Kay Scarpetta, and Lt. Pete Marino study the still gory crime scene and discover why Beryl suddenly flees to Florida months before. She is killed the night of her return. Kay's long lost lover, Mark James, appears, claiming that Beryl had been involved in a legal dispute involving his firm. Clues lead to clues, and Kay follows them doggedly, being accused of stealing Beryl's manuscript. Mark appears to turn out to be a fraud.

A new turn occurs when Beryl's estranged mentor, Cary Harper, is also brutally murdered and his eccentric sister, Sterling, dies suspiciously overnight after burning unknown items. Kay traces leads relating to Sterling's cancer and continued contact with Beryl over her brother's objections. She investigates enigmatic clues from Al Hunt that are resolved only after Kay, while investigating Al's suicide, visits the mental institution in which he once lived. She determines that someone named Frankie is the killer.

The next turn occurs when Frankie's stalking sends Kay in a panic to Key West to find Beryl's manuscript. Kay manages to obtain it, discovers that Mark is an undercover FBI agent, and flies back to Richmond, refusing to be a victim. When her lost luggage is returned by a courier, Kay realizes she has admitted Frankie, and kills him in self defense.



Quotes

"She left her glasses case and other items on the seat,' I continued. 'Plus, the radio and air conditioning were left on, the sunroof partially open. Looks like she drove into the garage, cut the engine, and hurried into the house with her sunglasses on. Makes me wonder if something happened while she was out in the car driving home from tennis and her errands...'

'Oh yeah. I'm pretty damn sure it did. Walk around, take a look at the other side—specifically at the passenger's door.'

I did.

What I saw scattered my thoughts like marbles. Gouged into the glossy black paint right below the door handle was the name BERYL enclosed in a heart.

'Kind of gives you the creeps, don't it?' he said.

'If he did this while her car was parked at the club or the grocery store,' I reasoned, 'it seems someone would have seen him.'

'Yo. So maybe he did it earlier.' He paused, casually perusing the graffiti. 'When's the last time you looked at your passenger's door?'" Chapter 1 , pgs. 27-28.

"How are you profiling him?' I asked Wesley.

'White, mid-twenties to mid-thirties. Bright, from a broken home in which he was deprived of a father figure. He may also have been abused as a child, physically, psychologically, or both. he's a loner. This doesn't mean he lives alone, however. He could be married because he's skilled at maintaining a public persona. He leads a double life. There is the one man the world sees, then this darker side. he's obsessive-compulsive, and he's a voyeur.'

'Yo,' Marino muttered sardonically. 'Sounds like half the drones I work with.'" Chapter 2 , pgs. 55-56.

"He didn't smile. 'Think about it. A controversial autobiography written by a reclusive woman who ends up brutally murdered. Then the manuscript disappears and the medical examiner is accused of stealing it. The damn thing's disappeared from the morgue. Christ. When the book finally comes out, it will be a runaway bestseller and Hollywood will be fighting over the movie rights.'

'I'm not worried,' I said unconvincingly. 'It's all so farfetched, I can't imagine it.'

'Sparacino's a whiz at making something out of nothing, Kay,' he warned. 'I just don't want you ending up like Leon Jones.' he looked around for the waiter, his eyes freezing in the direction of the front door. Quickly looking down at his half-eaten prime rib, he mumbled, 'Oh shit.'

It took every bit of my self-restraint not to turn around. I didn't look up or act the least bit aware until the big man was at our table." Chapter 4, pgs. 103-104.

"Marino hit the Stop button again. He said, 'This is the important part...' He paused and looked closely at me. 'Hey, you all right?'



'Was it really necessary to be so brutal?' I answered emotionally.
'You ain't been around me much if you think that was brutal,' Marino said.
'Sorry. I forgot I was sitting in my living room with Attila the Hun.'
'It's all acting,' he said, hurt.
'Remind me to nominate you for an Academy Award.'
'Come off it, Doc.'
'You absolutely demoralized him,' I said.
'It's a tool, okay? You know, a way to shake things loose, make people say things maybe they wouldn't have thought of otherwise.' He turned back toward the set and added, as he hit the Play button. 'The entire interview was worth what he tells me next.'"
Chapter 6, pgs. 134-135.

"'I wish I could tell you something that would help,' she answered. 'But perhaps it doesn't matter. Whoever it is, what's done is done.'
'Don't you want him punished?'
'There has been enough punishment. It won't undo what has been done,' she said.
'Wouldn't Beryl want him caught?'
She turned to me, her eyes wide. 'I wish you had known her.'
'I think I did. I do know her in a way,' I said gently.
'I can't explain.'
'You don't need to, Miss Harper.'
'It could have been so nice...'
I saw her grief for an instant, her face contorted, then controlled again. She didn't need to finish the thought. It could have been so nice now that there was no one to keep Beryl and Miss Harper apart. Companions. Friends. Life is so empty when you are along, when there is no one to love." Chapter 8, pg. 163.

"'Kay, the Code reads that the medical examiner shall make an investigation into the cause and manner of death and reduce his findings to writing. This is very broad. It gives you full investigative powers. The only thing you can't do is actually arrest somebody. You know that. The police are never going to find that manuscript. you're the only person who can find it.' He looked levelly at me. 'It's more important to you, to your good name, than it is to them.'
There was nothing I could do. Ethridge had declared war on Sparacino, and I had been drafted." Chapter 9, pg. 201.

"'In other words, without this contraption you can't tell the difference between the two drugs,' Marino concluded.
'Not in tox tests routinely done,' I answered. 'Levomethorphan comes up as dextromethorphan because the compounds are the same. The only discernible difference is they bend light in opposite directions, just as d-sucrose and l-sucrose bend light in opposite directions even though they're both structurally the same disaccharide. D-sucrose is table sugar. L-sucrose has no nutritional value to humans.'
'I'm not sure I get it,' Marino said, rubbing his eyes. 'How can compounds be the same



but different?'

'Think of dextromethorphan and levomethorphan as identical twins,' I said. 'They're not the same people, so to speak, but they look the same—except one is right-handed, the other left-handed. One is benign, the other strong enough to kill. Does that help?'"

Chapter 11, pgs. 246-247.

"'Would your hospital have any photographs of him on file?'

'No.'

Silence again. Then she looked at me with surprise.

'He stuttered,' she said slowly, then again with conviction.

'Pardon?'

'Sometimes he stuttered. I remember. When Frankie got extremely excited or nervous, he stuttered.'

'Jim Jim.'

Al Hunt had meant exactly what he had said. When Frankie was telling Hunt what Barnes had done or tried to do, Frankie would have been upset, agitated. He would have stuttered. He would have stuttered whenever he talked to Hunt about Jim Barnes. Jim Jim!

I hit the first pay phone after leaving Jeanie Wilson's house. Marino, the dope, had gone bowling." Chapter 13, pgs. 316-317.

"'There,' he said. 'I swore to God I would never do this. I'm sorry, Beryl,' he muttered.

'I'm sorry.'

Opening the canvas flap, I carefully pulled out what must have been close to a thousand typed pages scribbled with handwritten notes, and four computer diskettes, all of it bound in thick rubber bands.

'She told us never to let anybody have it should something happen to her. I promised.'

'Thank you, Peter. God bless you,' I said, and then I asked of him one last thing.

'Did Beryl ever mention anyone she referred to as "M"?''

He stood very still and stared at his beer.

'Do you know who this person is?' I asked.

'Myself,' he said.

'I don't understand.'

' "M" for "Myself." She wrote letters to herself,' he said.

'The two letters we found,' I said to him. 'The ones we found on the floor of her bedroom after she was murdered, the ones that mentioned you and Walt, were addressed to "M."'

'I know,' he said, shutting his eyes.

'How do you know?'

'I knew it when you mentioned Zulu and the cats. I knew you'd read those letters. That's when I decided you were all right, that you were who you said you were.'" Chapter 15, pgs. 361-362.

"Beryl was a songbird born in a storm, a ragged bit of beautiful color clinging to the branches of a terrible life. Her mother had died, and her father had replaced her with a



woman who treated Beryl with scorn. Unable to endure the world she lived in, she learned the art of creating one of her own. Writing was her way of coping, and it was a talent enhanced like artistry by the deaf and music by the blind. She could fashion from words a world I could taste, smell, and feel." Chapter 16, pgs. 377-378.

"Just before midnight my doorbell rang, startling me out of my chair. Looking through my front door peephole and expecting the officers Marino had promised, I saw a pale young man wearing a dark slicker and some sort of uniform cap. He looked cold and wet as he hunched against the blowing rain, a clipboard held against his chest.

'Who is it?' I called out.

'Omega Courier Service from Byrd Airport,' he answered. 'I've got your suitcase, ma'am.'

'Thank God,' I said with feeling, deactivating the alarm and unlocking the door. Incapacitating terror seized me as he put down my suitcase in side the foyer and I suddenly remembered. I had written my office address on the lost baggage claim I had filled out at the airport, not my home address!" Chapter 16, pg. 387.

"I did not return to my office until Frankie Aims's body had been released from the morgue, his blood rinsed off the stainless-steel table, washed out pipes, and diffused into the fetid waters of the city's sewers. I was not sorry I had killed him. I was sorry he had ever been born. Chapter 17, pg. 390.

Adaptations

In early 1993 MGM released a film starring Madonna entitled *Body of Evidence*, but it in no way relates to Cornwell's novel. Titles cannot be copyrighted, but a federal law (the Lanham Act) does prohibit use of a title in a way that could cause confusion of products. In an artful application of this law, Cornwell's lawyers procured from MGM the placement of a disclaimer on advertisements for the film stating that it was not based on Cornwell's novel. (For more on this topic, see the article by Esther B. Fein in the "Resources" list in the biography section on Cornwell.)



Key Questions

As the opening section for this article indicates, this novel can serve as a means to define Cornwell's place in the mystery genre as she uses the accouterments of a classical murder in a hardboiled way. Fans of detective stories can differentiate (and debate) the pleasures of reading both styles of mystery and can explain if readers often enjoy one or the other or both. Carolyn G. Hart sets her classical detective tale *Death on Demand* (1987) in a mystery bookshop and comments on the crossing on styles in describing the shelving of books: "Cozy readers would never dream of picking up a horror story.

Hard-boiled enthusiasts would prefer the Yellow Pages to romantic suspense." Do such boundaries of taste apply for the *Scarpetta* series?

Yet generic questions alone do not give Cornwell justice, as the chief reward of reading her is to see what she does beyond generic borders. Readers can easily accept *Body of Evidence* as a mainstream novel (that happens to be about crime) that involves issues such as feminism, relationships, and administrative politics. For example, regarding each novel, readers can ponder how representative *Scarpetta* is of professional women, as *Scarpetta* has broken the glass ceiling yet still encounters chauvinism. Readers can also discuss how the novel portrays the frustrations of romance, of hopes, of ambitions and ask whether the novel offers any mitigations for its dark view of human behavior.

1. What is the novel's view of personal relationships? How do you take the last line, Mark's profession of love?

Does it seem to promise hope, or do you read it ironically?

2. Why does Cornwell make both Beryl and Frank Aims victims of sexual abuse? How and why does Cornwell connect these characters?

3. Given that he is irrational, how can you explain the obsessions of Frank Aims? Why does he choose Beryl? Why does he avenge Beryl after he kills her? What connection does he have with famous real-life stalkers, such as John Hinckley or Mark Chapman?

4. What does the Sparacino subplot add to the novel?

5. What is the danger of writing an autobiography? Why does Beryl write hers? Why does it have such value for her? for Sparacino? for Frank Aims?

6. What comment does Cornwell, a genre writer herself, make on genre writing by killing off a character who is a genre writer?

7. Why do so many of the characters seem to have failed expectations? Al Hunt neither did what he wanted nor what his father wanted him to do.



Beryl remained a genre writer (Scarpetta senses that she has talent beyond the formula stuff she wrote). Cary Harper did not follow-up his early literary success with another book.

8. What do you make of Cornwell's references to homosexuality? Beryl befriends a gay couple in Key West.

Both Beryl and Scarpetta comment on the open lifestyle of Key West. Both Al Hunt and Frank Aims manifest homosexual anxieties. Marino frequently uses anti-gay epithets.



Topics for Discussion

How do Miss Sterling Harper and Mrs. McTigue compare and contrast as characters?

What roles do flowers play in this novel?

What functions do Sammy the squirrel and Zulu the black Labrador occupy in this novel?

How do Miss Sterling Harper and Al Hunt's suicides compare and contrast? How do they each affect Kay Scarpetta?

Is PJ morally justified in handing over Beryl Madison's manuscript to Kay Scarpetta? Why or why not?

Do any of scientific and technical passages in the novel throw you or has Patricia Cornwell done an adequate job of explaining the jargon? Which of the technical parts do you find the most useful? Why?

How would you describe Kay Scarpetta in midlife? What do her reactions to Mark James reveal about her?



Literary Precedents

Genre writing becomes an issue in the novel, because Beryl had gained a favorable reputation by writing historical romances, although Scarpetta dismisses her fiction as "the sort of pulp that was written almost to formula."

Reading the eventually discovered autobiographical manuscript, in contrast, leaves Scarpetta deeply moved.

Readers may wonder at the irony that Cornwell, a genre writer, opens her novel with the gruesome murder of a genre writer. A further irony is that Cornwell, a genre writer who earlier wrote a biography, treats an autobiography as Beryl Madison's best work.

Raymond Chandler's *The Long Goodbye* (1953) is another example of a genre novel that employs a besotted genre writer as a key character and thus offers a striking comparison to *Body of Evidence*. A less ironic and biting, more humorous and classical approach to murder among genre writers is Carolyn G. Hart's *Death on Demand* (1987).

Related Titles

Please see the analysis of Postmortem.

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