

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

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

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

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

"What's your point?"

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

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

"Yowling? Meowing?" the translator says.

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

The animation resumes. The gray man lifts the colorfully wrapped body out of the car trunk and carries it to a nearby aluminum catwalk that is barricaded only by a rope, which he steps over. He carries the body down a wooden plank that leads into the site. He places the body to one side of the plank, in the mud, and squats in the dark and quickly unwraps a figure that turns into the dead body of Drew Martin. This is no animation, but a three-dimensional photograph. One can see her clearly—her famous face, the savage wounds on her slender, athletic, naked body. The gray man balls up the colorful wrapping and returns to his car. He drives off at a normal rate of speed.

“We believe he did carry the body instead of dragging it,” Captain Poma says. “Because these fibers were only on the body and on the soil beneath it. There were no others, and although this isn’t proof, it certainly does indicate he didn’t drag her. Let me remind you, this scene has been mapped with the laser mapping system, and the perspective you’re seeing and the position of objects and the body are completely precise. Obviously, only people or objects that weren’t videotaped or photographed—such as the killer and his car—are animated.”

“How heavy was she?” the minister of the interior asks from the back row.

Scarpetta replies that Drew Martin weighed one hundred and thirty pounds, then converts that to kilograms. “He had to be reasonably strong,” she adds.

Animation resumes. Silence and the construction site in early-morning light. The sound of rain. Windows in the area remain dark, the businesses closed. No traffic. Then the whine of a motorcycle. Getting louder. A red Ducati appears on Via di Pasquino, the rider an animated figure in a rain slicker and a full-face helmet. He turns right on dell’Anima and suddenly stops, and the bike drops to the pavement with a loud thud, and the engine quits. The startled rider steps over his bike and hesitantly steps onto the aluminum catwalk, his boots loud on metal. The dead body below him in the mud looks more shocking, more gruesome, because it’s a three-dimensional photograph juxtaposed to the motorcyclist’s rather stilted animation.

“It’s now almost half past eight, the weather, as you can see, overcast and raining,” Captain Poma says. “Please move ahead to Professor Fiorani at the scene. That would be image fourteen. And now Dr. Scarpetta, you can, if you will, examine the body at the scene with the good professor, who isn’t here this afternoon, I’m sorry to say, because, can you guess? He’s at the Vatican. A cardinal died.”

Benton stares at the screen behind Scarpetta, and it knots her stomach that he is so unhappy and won't look at her. New images—video recordings in 3-D—fill the screen. Blue lights strobing. Police cars and a midnight-blue Carabinieri crime scene van. More Carabinieri with machine guns guarding the perimeter of the construction site. Plainclothes investigators inside the cordoned-off area, collecting evidence, taking photographs. The sounds of camera shutters and low voices and crowds on the streets. A police helicopter thud-thuds overhead. The professor—the most esteemed forensic pathologist in Rome—is covered in white Tyvek that is muddy. Close on, his point of view: Drew's body. It's so real in the stereoscopic glasses, it's bizarre. Scarpetta feels as if she can touch Drew's flesh and her gaping dark red wounds that are smeared with mud and glistening wet from the rain. Her long blond hair is wet and clings to her face. Her eyes are tightly shut and bulging beneath the lids.

"Dr. Scarpetta," Captain Poma says. "You may examine her, please. Tell us what you see. You have, of course, studied Professor Fiorani's report, but as you look at the body itself in three-dimension and are placed at the scene with it, please give us your own opinion. We won't criticize you if you disagree with Professor Fiorani's findings."

Who's considered as infallible as the Pope he embalmed several years earlier.

The laser's red dot moves where Scarpetta points, and she says, "The position of the body. On the left side, hands folded under the chin, legs slightly bent. A position I believe is deliberate. Dr. Wesley?" She looks at Benton's thick glasses looking past her, at the screen. "This is a good time for you to comment."

"Deliberate. The body was positioned by the killer."

"As if she's praying, perhaps?" says the chief of the state police.

"What was her religion?" asks the deputy director of the Criminal Police National Directorate.

A peppering of questions and conjectures from the barely lit theater.

"Roman Catholic."

"She didn't practice it, I understand."

"Not much."

“Perhaps some religious connection?”

“Yes, I wonder that, too. The construction site is so close to Sant’Agnese in Agone.”

Captain Poma explains, “For those unfamiliar”—he looks at Benton—“Saint Agnes was a martyr tortured and murdered at the age of twelve because she wouldn’t marry a pagan like me.”

Peals of laughter. A discussion about the murder having a religious significance. But Benton says no.

“There’s sexual degradation,” he says. “She’s displayed, and she’s nude and dumped in plain view in the very area where she was supposed to meet her friends. The killer wanted her found, he wanted to shock people. Religion isn’t the overriding motive. Sexual excitement is.”

“Yet we found no evidence of rape.” This said by the head of the Carabinieri forensic labs.

He goes on to say through the translator that it appears the killer left no seminal fluid, no blood, no saliva, unless it was washed away by rain. But DNA from two different sources was collected from under her fingernails. The profiles have proved useless so far because, unfortunately, he explains, the Italian government doesn’t allow DNA samples to be taken from criminals, as it’s considered a violation of their human rights. The only profiles that can be entered into an Italian database at this time, he says, are those obtained from evidence, not from individuals.

“So there’s no database to search in Italy,” Captain Poma adds. “And the most we can say right now is the DNA collected from under Drew’s fingernails doesn’t match the DNA of any individual in any database outside Italy, including the United States.”