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Cambridge, Massachusetts
Wednesday, December 19
4:02 a.m.

The clangor of the phone violates the relentless roll of rain beating the roof like drumsticks. I sit straight up in bed, my heart leaping in my chest like a startled squirrel as I glance at the illuminated display to see who it is.

“What’s up?” There is nothing in my voice when I greet Pete Marino. “It can’t be good at this hour.”

My rescued greyhound Sock presses closer to me and I place my hand on his head to calm him. Switching on a lamp, I retrieve a pad of call sheets and a pen from a drawer as Marino starts in about a dead body discovered several miles from here at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, MIT.

“Out in the mud at one end of the athletic fields, what’s

called Briggs Field. She was found about thirty minutes ago,” he says. “I’m on my way to where she probably disappeared from, then heading to the scene. It’s being secured until you get there.” Marino’s big voice is the same as if nothing has happened between us.

I almost can’t believe it.

“I’m not sure why you’re calling me.” He shouldn’t but I know his reason. “Technically, I’m not back to work. Technically, I’m still out sick.” I sound polite enough and calm, just a little hoarse. “You’d be better off calling Luke or . . .”

“You’re going to want to take care of this one, Doc. It’s going to be a PR nightmare and you sure as hell don’t need another one.”

He’s wasted no time alluding to my weekend in Connecticut that was all over the news and I’m not going to discuss it with him. He’s calling me because he can and he’ll probe where he wants and do as he wishes to make sure I know that after a decade of taking orders from me the roles suddenly are reversed. He’s in charge. I’m not. That’s the world according to Pete Marino.

“Whose PR nightmare? And PR’s not my job,” I add.

“A dead body on the MIT campus is everybody’s nightmare. I’ve got a bad feeling about this. I would have gone with you if you’d asked. You shouldn’t have gone by yourself.” He’s talking about Connecticut again and I pretend I don’t hear it. “Really, you should have asked me.”

“You don’t work for me anymore. That’s why I didn’t ask.”
It’s as much as I’m going to say to him.

“I’m sorry about what it must have put you through.”

“I’m sorry about what it put the entire world through.” I cough several times and reach for water. “Do we have an ID?” I rearrange pillows behind me, Sock’s narrow head finding my thigh.

“Possibly a twenty-two-year-old grad student named Gail Shipton.”

“A grad student where?”

“MIT computer engineering. Reported missing around midnight, last seen at the Psi Bar.”

My niece’s favorite hangout. The thought disconcerts me. The bar is located near MIT and caters to artists, physicists, and computer wizards like Lucy. Now and then she and her partner Janet take me there for Sunday brunch.

“I’m familiar with the place” is all I offer this man who has abandoned me and I know I’m better off.

If only it felt like it.

“Apparently Gail Shipton was there late yesterday afternoon with a girlfriend who claims that at around five-thirty Gail’s phone rang. She went outside so she could hear better and never came back. You shouldn’t have gone to Connecticut alone. At least I could have driven you,” Marino says, and he’s not going to ask how I’m doing after what he’s caused by walking off the job so he could start over.

He’s a cop again. He sounds happy. The hell with how I feel

about the way he did it. All he wants to know about is Connecticut. It's what everyone wants to know about and I didn't give a single interview and it's not the sort of thing to talk about. I wish to hell he hadn't brought it up. It's like something hideous I'd filed in a back drawer and now it's in front of me again.

"The friend didn't think it was unusual or reason for concern that this person she was with went out to talk on the phone and never came back?" I'm on autopilot, able to do my job while I try not to care about Marino anymore.

"All I know is when Gail quit answering her phone or texts, the girlfriend got worried something bad happened." Already he's on a first-name basis with this missing woman who may be dead.

Already they've bonded. He's sunk his hooks into the case and he's not about to let go.

"Then when it got to be midnight and still no word she started trying to find her," he says. "The friend's name is Haley Swanson."

"What else do you know about Haley Swanson and what do you mean by *girlfriend*?"

"It was a very preliminary call." What he's really saying is he doesn't know much at all because what Haley Swanson reported likely wasn't taken very seriously at the time.

"Does it bother you that she wasn't worried earlier?" I ask. "If Gail was last seen at five-thirty, some six or seven hours passed before her girlfriend called the police."

“You know how the students are around here. Drinking, they go off with someone, they don’t keep track or notice shit.”

“Was Gail the type to go off with someone?”

“I got a lot of questions to ask if it turns out the way I suspect it will.”

“It sounds like we don’t know a whole hell of a lot.” Even as I say it I know I shouldn’t.

“I didn’t talk to Haley Swanson very long.” He’s starting to sound defensive. “We don’t officially take missing-person reports by phone.”

“Then how is it you talked to her?”

“First she called nine-one-one and was told to come to the department and fill out a report, and that’s standard. You come in and do it in person.” He’s gotten loud enough that I have to turn the volume down on my phone. “Then she calls back a little later and asks for me by name. I talked to her for a few minutes but didn’t take her all that seriously. If she was so worried, come fill out the report ASAP. We’re open twenty-four-seven.”

Marino’s been with the Cambridge police but a few weeks and it strikes me as almost unbelievable that a stranger would request him by name. Instantly I’m suspicious of Haley Swanson but it won’t do any good to say it. Marino’s not going to listen if he thinks I’m trying to tell him how to do his job.

“Did she sound upset?” I ask.

“A lot of people sound upset when they call the police but it doesn’t mean what they’re saying is true. Ninety-nine times out of a hundred missing students aren’t missing. These types of calls aren’t exactly uncommon around here.”

“Do we have an address for Gail Shipton?”

“Those really nice condos near the Charles Hotel.” He gives me the details and I write them down.

“Very expensive real estate.” I envision gracious brick buildings close to the Kennedy School of Government and the Charles River, not far from my headquarters as a matter of fact.

“Probably her family’s paying the bills, the usual around here in Ivy Leagueville.” Marino is typically snide about the people of Cambridge, where police will give you a ticket for being stupid he likes to say.

“Has anybody checked to see if she might be home and simply isn’t answering her phone?” I’m making copious notes, more focused now, distracted by a different tragedy, the latest one.

But as I sit up in bed and talk on the phone it’s exactly as it happened and I can’t block out what I saw. The bodies and the blood. Brass cartridge cases were bright like pennies scattered over floors inside that red brick elementary school, all of it indelibly vivid as if I’m still there.

Twenty-seven autopsies, most of them children, and when I pulled off my bloody scrubs and stepped into the shower I refused to think about what I’d just done.

I switched channels. I compartmentalized, having learned long years ago not to see destroyed human flesh after I've had my hands in it. I willed the images to stay where I left them at the scene, in the autopsy room and out of my thoughts. Obviously I failed. By the time I got home this past Saturday night I had a fever and ached all over as if something evil had infected me. My usual barriers had been breached. I'd offered my help to Connecticut's Office of the Chief Medical Examiner and no good deed goes unpunished. There's a penalty for trying to do what's right. The dark forces don't like it, and stress will make you sick.

"She claimed she went over to make sure Gail wasn't there," Marino is saying, "and then got security to check inside the condo but there was no sign of her or that she'd ever come home from the bar."

I comment that she must be familiar to people who work at Gail Shipton's apartment building because security wouldn't open up a door for just anyone, and as I'm saying all this my attention drifts to the ridiculous mountain of FedEx packages still unopened by the sofa on the other side of the bedroom. I'm reminded why it's not a good thing if I'm isolated for days and too sick to work or cook or leave the house and afraid to be alone with my thoughts. I will distract myself and I did.

A vintage Harley-Davidson leather riding vest and skull belt buckle are for Marino, and there's Hermès cologne and Jeff Deegan bracelets for Lucy and Janet, and for my husband Benton a titanium watch with a carbon-fiber face that Breguet

doesn't make anymore. His birthday is tomorrow, five days before Christmas, and it's very hard to shop for him and there's not much he needs or doesn't have.

There is an abundance of gifts to wrap for my mother and my sister, and for our housekeeper Rosa and members of my staff, and all sorts of things for Sock and also for Lucy's bulldog and my chief of staff's cat. I'm not sure what the hell got into me when I was sick in bed, ordering like mad off the internet, and I'll blame it on my fever. I'm sure to hear all about the typically sensible and reserved Kay Scarpetta and her wild holiday spending spree. Lucy in particular won't let me live it down.

"Gail's not answering her cell phone, emails, texts," Marino continues as rain slashes the windows, clicking loudly against glass. "Nothing posted on Facebook, Twitter, or whatever, and her physical description is consistent with the dead lady and that's the bigger point. I'm thinking she might have been abducted, was held somewhere, her body wrapped in a sheet and dumped. I wouldn't bother you under the circumstances but I know how you are."

He does know how I am and I'm not driving myself to MIT or anywhere, not when I've been in virtual quarantine for the past five days. I tell him that. I'm stubborn and all business with my former lead investigator. Yes, *former*, I think.

"How you feeling? I told you not to get a flu shot. That's probably why you got sick," he says.

“You can’t get sick from a dead virus.”

“Well, the only two times I had a flu shot I came down with the flu, was sick as a damn dog. I’m glad you sound better.” Marino pretends to care because he has a purpose for me.

“I suppose it’s all relative. I could be better. I could be worse.”

“In other words, you’re pissed at me. We may as well put it on the table.”

“I was talking about my health.”

To say I’m pissed would trivialize what I feel right now. Marino hasn’t seemed to consider what his walking off the job might say about me, the chief medical examiner of Massachusetts and director of the Cambridge Forensic Center, the CFC. For the past ten years he’s been my head of investigations and suddenly he professionally divorces me. I can imagine what cops in particular will say or already are saying.

I anticipate being doubted at scenes, at my office, in the autopsy room, and on the witness stand. I imagine being second-guessed when in fact none of this is about me. It’s all about Marino and a mid-life crisis he’s been afflicted with for as long as I’ve known him. Let’s be clear, I would tell the world, if I were indiscreet, that Pete Marino has suffered poor self-esteem and identity confusion since the day he was born to an abusive alcoholic father and weak, submissive mother in a bad part of New Jersey.

Patricia Cornwell

I'm a woman out of his reach and the one he punishes, possibly the love of his life and for sure his best friend. His motivation is neither fair nor rational for ringing me up at this hour when he knows I've been home with the flu, so sick that at one point I worried I was dying and it began drifting through my mind, *This is it, what it's like.*

2

During a feverish epiphany I saw the meaning of everything, life the colliding of God particles that make up all matter in the universe and death the absolute reverse of it. When I spiked a temperature of 103.8 it became even clearer, explained simply and eloquently by the hooded man at the foot of my bed.

If only I'd written down what he said, the elusive formula for nature giving mass and death taking it away, all of creation since the Big Bang measured by the products of decay. Rust, dirt, sickness, insanity, chaos, corruption, lies, rot, ruin, shed cells, dead cells, atrophy, stench, sweat, waste, dust to dust, that at a subatomic level interact and create new mass, and this goes on infinitely. I couldn't see his face but I know it was compelling and kind as he spoke to me scientifically, poetically, backlit by fire that gave off no heat.

During moments of astonishing clarity I realized what we mean when we talk of forbidden fruit and original sin, and walking into the light and streets paved in gold, of extra-

terrestrials, auras, ghosts, and paradise and hell and reincarnation, of being healed or raised from the dead, of coming back as a raven, a cat, a hunchback, an angel. A recycling crystalline in its precision and prismatic beauty was revealed to me. The plan of God the Supreme Physicist, who is merciful, just, and funny. Who is creative. Who is all of us.

I saw and I knew. I possessed perfect Truth. Then life reasserted itself, pulled Truth right out from under me, and I'm still here, held down by gravity. An amnesiac. I can't recall or share what at last I could explain to devastated people after I've taken care of their dead. I'm clinical at best when I answer the questions they ask, always the same ones.

Why? Why? Why!

How could someone do something like this?

I've never had a good explanation. But there is one and I knew it fleetingly. What I've always wanted to say was on the tip of my tongue, then I came to and what I knew was replaced by the job I'd just done. The unthinkable images no one should ever see. Blood and brass in a hallway lined with bulletin boards decorated for the holidays. And then inside that classroom. The children I couldn't save. The parents I couldn't comfort. The reassurances I couldn't give.

Did they suffer?

How quick would it have been?

It's the flu doing this, I tell myself. There's nothing I haven't seen and can't deal with and I feel the anger stir, the sleeping dragon within.

“Trust me, you don’t want anybody else taking care of this. There can’t be even one damn thing that gets screwed up,” Marino perseverates and if I’m honest with myself, I’m glad to hear his voice.

I don’t want to miss his company the way I just did. There was no one else I would take to a frenzied media carnival on a scale that was incomprehensible, the streets overwhelmed for miles by TV vans, production trucks, and pole-mounted satellites, the thudding of helicopters incessant, as if a movie were being filmed.

Were the shots close range?

The anger again and I can’t afford to rouse it, the dragon within. It was better Marino wasn’t with me. I just didn’t feel like it. I know what he can handle and he would have blown apart like glass shattered by vibrations too intense to hear.

“All I can tell you is I got a gut about it, Doc,” his familiar voice says but he sounds different, stronger and more sure of himself. “Some sick fuck out there just getting started. Maybe got the idea from what just happened.”

“From what happened in Newtown, Connecticut?” I don’t see how he can possibly leap to such a conclusion and he needs to stop bringing it up.

“That’s the way it works,” he says. “One sick fuck gets the idea from some other sick fuck who shoots up a movie theater or a school for attention.”

*

I imagine him driving the dark streets of Cambridge in this weather. No doubt he doesn't have his seat belt on and it will be a waste of breath for me to tell him now that he's a cop again. How quickly he returns to his old bad habits.

"She wasn't shot, was she?" I ask him pointedly to derail an inappropriate and awful subject. "You're not even sure she's a homicide, isn't that right?"

"It doesn't appear she was shot," Marino verifies.

"Let's not confuse things by comparing it to what just happened in Connecticut."

"I'm sick and tired of assholes getting rewarded by the media."

"Aren't we all?"

"It makes it worse and more likely to happen again. We shouldn't release their names and should bury them in a damn unmarked grave."

"Let's stick with the case at hand. Do we know if she has obvious injuries?"

"Nothing at a glance," he says. "But she sure as hell didn't wrap herself up in a sheet and walk out there on her own two bare feet and lay down and die in the rain and mud."

Marino's bypassing my deputy chief medical examiner, Luke Zenner, or any of my forensic pathologists at the CFC isn't about my being the most qualified even though I am. It's about Marino stepping back into his earlier life so he can be who he was when we first met. He no longer works for me. He gets to summon me on command. That's

the way he figures things and he'll remind me as often as he can.

"I mean, if you really don't feel up to it . . ." he starts to say and it sounds like a challenge or maybe he's goading me.

I don't know. How can I judge anything right now? I'm worn-out and famished. I can't stop thinking about boiled eggs with butter and coarsely ground peppercorns, and hot fresh baked bread and espresso. I would kill for a chilled glass of freshly squeezed blood orange juice.

"No, no, the worst is past." I reach for the bottle of water on the nightstand. "Let me get myself together here." I don't move beyond taking a big swallow, the thirst no longer unquenchable, my lips and tongue no longer as dry as paper. "I had cough syrup before I went to bed. Codeine."

"Lucky you."

"I'm a little groggy but fine. It's not a good idea for me to drive, certainly not in this weather. Who found her?"

Maybe he already told me that. I press the back of my hand to my forehead. No fever. I'm sure it really is gone, not just Advil suppressing it.

"A girl from MIT, a guy from Harvard out on a date and decided to find a little privacy in her dorm room. You know Simmons Hall? That huge building that looks like it was built out of LEGOs on the other side of the MIT baseball and rugby fields," Marino says.

I can tell he has a police scanner with the squelch turned up loud. In his element, I'm sure. Armed and dangerous with a

detective's badge on his belt, driving an unmarked police vehicle equipped with lights and a siren and God knows what else. In the old days when he was a cop, he used to trick out his police vehicles like he does his Harleys.

"They noticed what they thought at first was a manikin in a toga lying in the mud at the far end of the field inside the fence that separates it from a parking lot," says the Marino from my past, Marino the detective. "So they walked inside an open gate to get a closer look and when they realized it was a female wrapped in a sheet with nothing on under it and that she wasn't breathing they called nine-one-one."

"The body is nude?" What I'm really asking is if it's been disturbed and by whom.

"They claim they didn't touch it. The sheet's soaking wet and I think it's pretty obvious she's naked. Machado talked to them and says he's confident they've got nothing to do with whatever happened to her but we'll swab them for DNA, do backgrounds, the whole nine yards."

He goes on to say that Cambridge detective Sil Machado suspects the woman is a drug overdose. "Which may be related to the weird-ass suicide from the other day," Marino adds. "As you know there's some bad stuff on the streets and it's causing huge problems around here."

"Which suicide?" Unfortunately there have been a number of them while I was out of town and ill.

"The fashion-designer lady who jumped off the roof of her Cambridge apartment building and splattered the plate-glass

windows of the first-floor health club while people were inside working out,” he says. “It looked like a spaghetti bomb went off. Anyway, they’re thinking it could be related.”

“I don’t know why.”

“They think it could be drugs, some bad shit she got into.”

“Who’s *they*?” I didn’t work the suicide of course and I reach down for the stacks of cases on the floor by the bed.

“Machado. Also his sergeant, his lieutenant,” Marino says. “It’s gone straight up the chain to the superintendents and the commissioner.”

I set files on the bed, what must be at least a dozen folders, printouts of death reports and photographs my chief of staff Bryce Clark has been leaving on the sunporch for me daily, along with provisions he’s been kind enough to pick up.

“The concern is it could be the same really bad meth or designer-type shit—in other words, some latest version of bath salts that’s been hitting the streets around here. Maybe what the suicide lady was on,” Marino tells me. “One theory is that Gail Shipton, if it’s her who’s dead, was with someone doing some really bad drugs and she ODeD so he dumped her body.”

“This is your theory?”

“Hell no. If you’re dumping a body why do it in a damn university playing field like you’re displaying it to shock people? That’s my point, the biggest threat we’ve got to watch for these days. Do something sensational enough and it will be all over the news and get the attention of the president of the United States. I think whoever dumped her body at Briggs

Field is a bird of that kind of feather. He's doing it for attention, to be headline news."

"That could be part of it but probably not all of it."

"I'm texting you a few photos that Machado texted me." Marino's deep voice continues in my ear, a rough voice, a rude, pushy voice.

"You shouldn't text while you drive." I reach for my iPad.

"Yeah, so I'll write myself a ticket."

"Any drag marks or other indications of how the body ended up where it is?"

"You can see in the photos it's real muddy and unfortunately any drag marks or footprints probably got mostly washed out by the rain. But I haven't been there yet and looked for myself."

I open the photographs he just emailed and note the soaked grass and red mud inside Briggs Field's fence, then I zoom in closer on the dead woman wrapped in white. Slender, flat on her back, her long wet brown hair neatly arranged around a young pretty face that is tilted slightly to the left and glazed with rain. The cloth is wound around her upper chest like a bath sheet, like the big towels people wrap up in while they're lounging at a spa.

Recognition stirs, and then I'm startled by the similarity to what Benton sent me several weeks ago when he took a considerable risk. Without authorization from the FBI he asked my opinion about the murders he's working in Washington, D.C. But those women had plastic bags over their heads and

this one doesn't. They had designer duct tape around their necks and a bow attached, and that's a pattern unique to the killer and it's absent here.

We don't even know that she's a homicide, I remind myself, and I shouldn't be surprised if she died suddenly and a panicky companion wrapped her in a bedsheet, perhaps one from a dormitory, before leaving her outside, where she'd be found quickly.

"I suspect someone pulled their car into the parking lot close to the fence, opened the gate, and dragged or carried her in," Marino continues as I stare at the image on my iPad, disturbed by it on a level that's out of reach, a deeply intuitive place, and I try to reason away what I'm feeling but I can't, and I can't say a word about it to him.

Benton would be fired if the FBI knew what he's done, sharing classified information with his wife. It doesn't matter that I'm an expert whose jurisdiction includes federal cases and it would have made sense for me to be consulted anyway. Usually I am but for some reason I wasn't. His boss, Ed Granby, has little use for me and would take delight in stripping Benton of his credentials and sending him packing.

"That one gate wasn't locked," Marino says. "The couple that found her said it was shut when they got to it but not locked. The rest of the gates are secured with chains and padlocks so nobody can get in after hours. Whoever's responsible either knew that one wasn't locked or used bolt cutters or had a key."

“The body’s been deliberately posed.” The phantom pain of a chronic headache makes my head feel heavy. “On her back, legs together and straight, one arm gracefully resting on her belly, the other extended, the wrist bent dramatically like a dancer or as if she passed out on a fainting couch. Nothing is disarrayed, the sheet carefully arranged around her. Actually, I’m not sure it’s a sheet.”

I zoom in as close as I can before the image begins to deconstruct.

“It’s a white cloth at any rate. Her positioning is ritualistic, symbolic.” I’m sure of it, and the flutter in my stomach is fear.

What if it’s the same thing? What if he’s here? I remind myself that the D.C. cases are fresh on my mind because they’re why Benton isn’t home right now and it wasn’t that long ago when I went through the scene photographs and autopsy and lab reports. A body wrapped in a white cloth and positioned modestly and rather languidly by no means suggests this case is connected to the other ones, I tell myself repeatedly.

“She was left like that on purpose,” Marino is saying, “because it means something to the sick asshole who did it.”

“How could anyone get the body out there without being seen?” I focus my attention where it belongs. “On a playing field in the heart of MIT apartment buildings and dorms? Start with the idea that we may be dealing with someone familiar with the area, possibly another student, an employee, a person who lives or works around there.”

“Where she was dumped isn’t lit up at night,” he says. “Behind the indoor tennis courts, you know the big white bubble, then the athletic fields. I’ll pick you up in thirty, forty minutes. Pulling up to the Psi Bar now. Closed of course. No sign of anyone, no lights on. I’ll take a look around outside where she might have been using her phone, then head over to your house.”

“You’re alone,” I assume.

“Ten-four.”

“Be careful, please.”

I sit up in bed and sort through files inside the master suite of our nineteenth-century home that was built by a well-known transcendentalist.

I start with the suicide Marino mentioned. Three days ago, on Sunday, December 16, twenty-six-year-old Sakura Yamagata stepped off the roof of her nineteen-story Cambridge apartment building, and her cause of death is what I’d expect in such a violent event. Multiple blunt-force traumatic injuries, her brain avulsed from the cranial cavity. Her heart, liver, spleen, and lungs lacerated. The bones of her face, her ribs, arms, legs, and pelvis extensively fractured.

I sort through 8-by-10 scene photographs that include shocked people gawking, many of them in gym clothes and hugging themselves against the cold, and a distinguished gray-haired man in a suit and tie who looks defeated and dazed. In one of the photographs he’s next to Marino, who’s pointing

and talking, and in another the gray-haired man is crouched by the body, his head bent and tragic and with the same utterly defeated look on his face.

It's obvious he had a relationship with Sakura Yamagata, and I imagine the frightened reaction of people using the fitness center on the first floor, looking out at the exact moment her body struck. It thudded hard, like a heavy sandbag, as one witness described it in a news report included in the case file. Tissue and blood splattered the plate-glass windows, teeth and fragmented parts scattered as far as fifty feet from the site of impact. Her head and face were damaged beyond visual recognition.

I associate such severely mutilating deaths with psychosis or the influence of drugs, and as I skim through the pages of the detailed police report, I'm struck by how strange it feels to see Marino's name and ID number on it.

Reporting Officer, Marino, P. R. (D33).

I haven't seen a police narrative written by him since he left Richmond PD a decade ago, and I read his description of what occurred this past Sunday afternoon at a Cambridge luxury high-rise on Memorial Drive.

... I responded to the above address after the incident had occurred, and I interviewed Dr. Franz Schoenberg. He informed me he is a psychiatrist with a practice in Cambridge and that Sakura Yamagata, a fashion designer, was a patient of his. On the day of the incident at 1556

hours, she texted him, indicating her intention to “fly to Paris” from the roof of her apartment building.

At approximately 1618 hours Dr. Schoenberg arrived at her address and was escorted to the roof area through a rear door. He stated to me that he observed her nude and standing on the other side of a low rail on the ledge, her back to him, her arms spread wide. He called to her once, saying, “Suki, I’m here. Everything is going to be all right.” He stated that she did not answer or make any indication she heard him. She immediately fell forward in what he described as a swan dive that was intentional . . .

Luke Zenner performed her autopsy and submitted the appropriate tissues and fluids to the toxicology lab. Heart, lung, liver, pancreas, blood . . .

I stroke Sock’s lean brindle body, feeling his ribs gently rise and fall as he breathes, and I’m suddenly exhausted again as if talking to Marino took everything I’ve got. Struggling to stay awake, I skim through the photographs again, looking for ones with the gray-haired man who I suspect is Dr. Franz Schoenberg. That’s why the police allowed him near the body. That’s why he’s next to Marino, and I can’t imagine watching your patient jump off a roof. How does anyone ever get over that? I search my thoughts as they fade in and out, wondering if I might have met the psychiatrist somewhere.

You don’t get over it, I think. Some things you won’t get over, not ever, you can’t . . .

Bad drugs, I recall what Marino just suggested to me. Designer ones, bath salts that have hit Massachusetts hard this past year, and we've had a number of bizarre suicides and accidents relating to them. There have been homicides and property crimes, an alarming increase in general, especially in the Boston area where there are Section 8 housing developments or what the police call the projects. People dealing drugs, gang members get a nice roof over their heads for a bargain, and they bring down the neighborhood and cause damage all around them. I go through my mental list of what needs to be done as I log on to my office email. I notify toxicology to put a rush on the analysis in the Sakura Yamagata case and screen for designer stimulants.

Mephedrone, methylenedioxypropylamphetamine or MDPV, and methylenedioxymethamphetamine. Luke didn't think to include hallucinogens and we should test for those, too. LSD, methylergometrine, ergotamine . . .

My thoughts drift and focus.

Ergot alkaloids can cause ergotism also known as ergototoxicosis or Saint Anthony's Fire, with symptoms resembling bewitchment that some believe may have led to the Salem witchcraft trials. Convulsions, spasms, mania, psychosis . . .

My vision blurs and clears, my head nods and jerks up as rain splashes the roof and windows. I should have told Marino to ensure someone makes a tent out of a waterproof tarp or plasticized sheets to protect the body from the weather, from the eyes of the curious. To protect me, too. I don't need to be

out in the elements, getting soaked, chilled, filmed by the media . . .

Television and production trucks were everywhere, and we made sure all of the blinds were drawn. Dark brown carpet. Thick slicks of dark coagulated blood that I could smell as it began to decompose. Sticky on the bottom of my shoes as I moved around inside that room. There was so much blood and I tried so hard not to step in it, to work the crime scene properly. As if it mattered.

But there is no one to punish and no punishment would be enough. And I sit quietly propped up against pillows, the anger tucked in its dark place, perfectly still, looking out with citrine eyes. I see its mighty shape and feel its weight on the foot of my bed.

Marino will have made sure the body is protected.

The anger shifts heavily. The sound and rhythm of the downpour change from fortissimo to pianissimo . . .

Marino knows what he's doing.

Fugue from adagio to furioso . . .