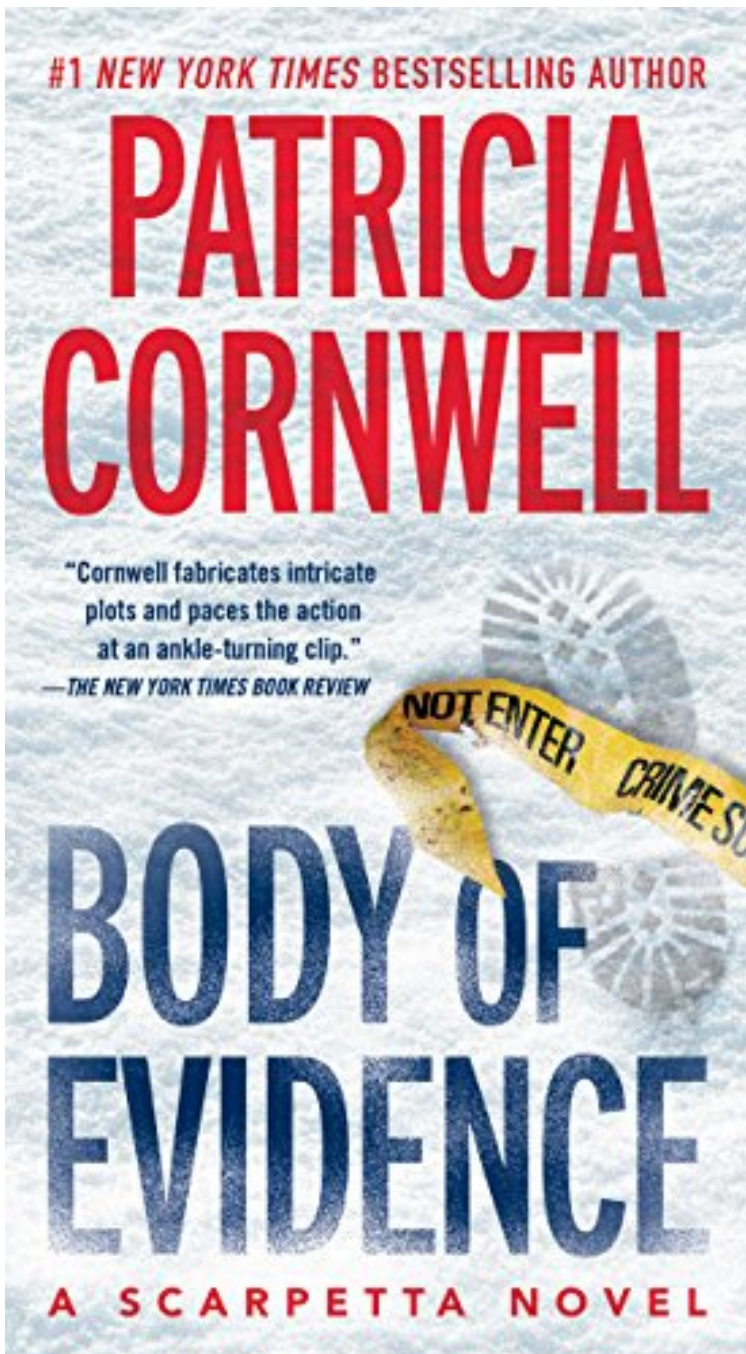


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## Body of Evidence: Scarpetta 2



*Par Patricia Cornwell*  
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**Description :** Description du produitAnother thrilling novel from the bestselling author of Postmortem and Black Notice After months of menacing phone calls and feeling that her every move is being watched, successful writer Beryl Madison flees Key West when a terrifying message is scratched on her car. But the very night she returns to Richmond, she deactivates her burglar alarm and opens her door to someone who nearly decapitates her. Why did she let him in, wonders Chief Medical Examiner Dr. Kay Scarpetta? And,

why is Beryl's latest manuscript missing? Persuing the answers involves Scarpetta in the murder of another writer - Beryl's jealous mentor. While she copes with a variety of personal and professional problems, Scarpetta's high-tech forensic skills enable her to collect a body of evidence - clues that would mean little without her intelligence, compassion, and imagination - that leads her directly into a nightmare all her own.

Prsentation de l'diteur Now in a new premium edition, #1 New York Times bestselling author Patricia Cornwells suspense fiction classic, featuring gutsy medical examiner Kay Scarpetta. A reclusive author, Beryl Madison finds no safe haven from months of menacing phone calls or the tormented feeling that her every move is being watched. When the writer is found slain in her own home, Kay Scarpetta pieces together the intricate forensic evidence while unwittingly edging closer to a killer waiting in the shadows.

Extrait Body of Evidence 1 Returning the Key West letters to their manila folder, I got out a packet of surgical gloves, tucked it inside my black medical bag, and took the elevator down one floor to the morgue. The tile hallway was damp from being mopped, the autopsy suite locked and closed for business. Diagonally across from the elevator was the stainless-steel refrigerator, and opening its massive door, I was greeted by the familiar blast of cold, foul air. I located the gurney inside without bothering to check toe tags, recognizing the slender foot protruding from a white sheet. I knew every inch of Beryl Madison. Smoky-blue eyes stared dully from slitted lids, her face slack and marred with pale open cuts, most of them on the left side. Her neck was laid wide open to her spine, the strap muscles severed. Closely spaced over her left chest and breast were nine stab wounds spread open like large red buttonholes and almost perfectly vertical. They had been inflicted in rapid succession, one right after the other, the force so violent there were hilt marks in her skin. Cuts to her forearms and hands ranged from a quarter of an inch to four and a half inches in length. Counting two on her back, and excluding her stab wounds and cut throat, there were twenty-seven cutting injuries, all of them inflicted while she was attempting to ward off the slashing of a wide, sharp blade. I would not need photographs or body diagrams. When I closed my eyes I could see Beryl Madison's face. I could see in sickening detail the violence inflicted upon her body. Her left lung was punctured four times. Her carotid arteries were almost transected. Her aortic arch, pulmonary artery, heart, and pericardial sac were penetrated. She was, for all practical purposes, dead by the time the madman almost decapitated her. I was trying to make sense of it. Someone had threatened to murder her. She fled to Key West. She was terrified beyond reason. She did not want to die. The night she returned to Richmond it happened. Why did you let him into your house? Why in God's name did you? Rearranging the sheet, I returned the gurney to the others bearing bodies against the refrigerators back wall. By this time tomorrow her body would be cremated, her ashes en route to California. Beryl Madison would have turned thirty-four next month. She had no living relatives, no one in this world, it seemed, except a half sister in Fresno. The heavy door sucked shut. The tarmac of the parking lot behind the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner was warm and reassuring beneath my feet, and I could smell the creosote of nearby railroad trestles baking in the unseasonably warm sun. It was Halloween. The bay door was open wide, one of my morgue assistants hosing off the concrete. He playfully arched water, slapping it close enough for me to feel mist around my ankles. Hey, Dr. Scarpetta, you keeping bankers hours now? he called out. It was a little past four-thirty. I rarely left the office before six. Need a lift somewhere? he added. I've got a ride. Thanks, I answered. I was born in Miami. I was no stranger to the part of the world where Beryl had hidden during the summer. When I closed my eyes I saw the colors of Key West. I saw bright greens and blues and sunsets so gaudy only God can get away with them. Beryl Madison should never have come home. A brand-new LTD Crown Victoria, shining like black glass, slowly pulled into the lot. Expecting the familiar beat-up Plymouth, I was startled when the new Ford's window hummed open. You waiting for the bus or what? Mirrored shades reflected my surprised face. Lieutenant Pete Marino was trying to look blasé as electronic locks opened with a firm click. I'm impressed, I said, settling into the plush interior. Went with my promotion. He revved the engine. Not bad, huh? After years of broken-down dray horses, Marino had finally gotten himself a stallion. I noticed the hole in the dash as I got out my cigarettes. You been plugging in your bubble light or just your electric razor? Oh, hell, he complained. Some drone swiped my lighter. At the car wash. I mean, I'd only had the car a day, you believe it? I take her in, right? Was too busy bitching after the fact, the brushes broke off the antenna, was giving the drones holy hell about that... Sometimes Marino reminded me of my mother. ... wasn't until later I noticed the damn lighter gone. He paused, digging in his pocket as I rummaged through my purse for matches. Yo, Chief, thought you was gonna quit smoking, he said rather sarcastically, dropping a Bic lighter in my lap. I am, I muttered. Tomorrow. \*\*\* The night Beryl Madison was murdered I was out

enduring an overblown opera followed by drinks in an overrated English pub with a retired judge who became something less than honorable as the evening progressed. I wasn't wearing my pager. Unable to reach me, the police had summoned Fielding, my deputy chief, to the scene. This would be the first time I had been inside the slain author's house. Windsor Farms was not the sort of neighborhood where one would expect anything so hideous to happen. Homes were large and set back from the street on impeccably landscaped lots. Most had burglar alarm systems, and all featured central air, eliminating the need for open windows. Money can't buy eternity, but it can buy a certain degree of security. I had never had a homicide case from the Farms. Obviously she had money from somewhere, I observed as Marino halted at a stop sign. A snowy-haired woman walking her snowy Maltese squinted at us as the dog sniffed a tuft of grass, which was followed by the inevitable. What a worthless fuzzi ball, he said, staring disdainfully at the woman and the dog moving on. Hate mutts like that. Yap their damn heads off and piss all over the place. Gonna have a dog, ought to be something with teeth. Some people simply want company, I said. Yeah. He paused, then picked up on my earlier statement. Beryl Madison had money, most of it tied up in her crib. Apparently whatever savings she had, she blew the dough down there in Queer West. Were still sorting through her paperwork. Had any of it been gone through? Don't look like it, he replied. Found out she didn't do half bad as a writerbucks-wise. Appears she used several pen names. Adair Wilds, Emily Stratton, Edith Montague.

The mirrored shades turned my way again. None of the names were familiar except Stratton. I said, Her middle name is Stratton. Maybe accounting for her nickname, Straw. That and her blond hair, I remarked. Beryl's hair was honey blond streaked gold by the sun. She was petite, with even, refined features. She may have been striking in life. It was hard to say. The only photograph from life I had seen was the one on her driver's license. When I talked to her half sister, Marino was explaining, I found out Beryl was called Straw by the people she was close to. Whoever she was writing down there in the Keys, this person was aware of her nickname. That's the impression I get. He adjusted the visor. Can't figure why she Xeroxed those letters.

Been chewing on that. I mean, how many people do you know who make photocopies of personal letters they write? You've indicated she was an inveterate record keeper, I reminded him. Right. That's bugging me, too. Supposedly the squirrels been threatening her for months. What'd he do? What'd he say? Don't know, because she didn't tape his calls or write nothing down. The lady makes photocopies of personal letters but don't keep a record when someone's threatening to whack her. Tell me if that makes sense. Not everybody thinks the way we do. Well, some people don't think because they're in the middle of something they don't want nobody to know about, he argued. Pulling into a drive, he parked in front of the garage door. The grass was badly overgrown and spangled with tall dandelions swaying in the breeze, and there was a FOR SALE sign planted near the mailbox. Still tacked across the gray front door was a ribbon of yellow crime-scene tape. Her rides inside the garage, Marino said as we got out. A nice black Honda Accord EX. Some details about it you might find interesting. We stood on the drive and looked around. The slanted rays of the sun were warm on the back of my shoulders and neck. The air was cool, the pervasive hum of autumn insects the only sound. I took a slow, deep breath. I was suddenly very tired. Her house was International style, modern and starkly simplistic with a horizontal frontage of large windows supported by ground-floor piers, bringing to mind a ship with an open lower deck. Built of fieldstone and gray-stained wood, it was the sort of house a wealthy young couple might build: big rooms, high ceilings, a lot of expensive and wasted space. Windham Drive dead-ended at her lot, which explained why no one had heard or seen anything until it was too late.

The house was cloistered by oaks and pines on two sides, drawing a curtain of foliage between Beryl and her nearest neighbors. In back, the yard sharply dropped off into a ravine of underbrush and boulders, leveling out into an expanse of virgin timber stretching as far as I could see. Damn. Bet she had deer, Marino said as we wandered around back. Something, huh? You look out your windows, think you got the world to yourself. Bet the views something when it snows. Me, I'd love a crib like this. Build a nice fire in the winter, pour yourself a little bourbon, and just look out at the woods. Must be nice to be rich. Especially if you're alive to enjoy it. Aint that the truth, he said. Fall leaves crackled beneath our shoes as we rounded the west wing. The front door was level with the patio, and I noted the peephole. It stared at me like a tiny empty eye. Marino flicked a cigarette butt, sent it sailing into the grass, then dug in a pocket of his powder-blue trousers.

His jacket was off, his big belly hanging over his belt, his short-sleeved white shirt open at the neck and wrinkled around his shoulder holster. He produced a key attached to a yellow evidence tag, and as I watched him open the dead-bolt lock I was startled anew by the size of his hands. Tan and tough, they reminded me of baseball mitts. He would never have made a musician or a dentist. Somewhere in his early fifties, with thinning gray hair and a face as shopworn as his suits, he was still formidable enough to give most people

pause. Big cops like him rarely get in fights. The street punks take one look and sit on their bravado. We stood in a rectangle of sunlight inside the foyer and worked on pairs of gloves. The house smelled stale and dusty, the way houses smell when they have been shut up for a while. Though the Richmond police departments Identification Unit, or ID, had thoroughly processed the scene, nothing had been moved.

Marino had assured me the house would look exactly as it had when Beryl's body was found two nights earlier. He shut the door and flipped on a light. As you can see, his voice echoed, she had to have let the guy in. No sign of forcible entry, and the joints got a triple A burglar alarm. He directed my attention to the panel of buttons by the door, adding, Deactivated at the moment. But it was in working order when we got here, screaming bloody murder, which is why we found her so fast to begin with. He went on to remind me the homicide was originally called in as an audible alarm. At shortly after eleven P.M., one of Beryl's neighbors dialed 911 after the alarm had been going for nearly thirty minutes. A patrol unit responded and the officer found the front door ajar. Minutes later he was on his radio requesting backups. The living room was in shambles, the glass coffee table on its side. Magazines, a crystal ashtray, several art deco bowls and a flower vase were strewn over the dhurrie rug. A pale blue leather wingchair was overturned, a cushion from the matching sectional sofa nearby. On the whitewashed wall left of a door leading into a hallway were dark spatters of dried blood. Does her alarm have a time delay? I asked. Oh, yeah. You open the door and the alarm hums about fifteen seconds, long enough for you to punch in your code before it goes off. Then she must have opened the door, deactivated the alarm, let the person in, and then reset the alarm while he was still here. Otherwise, it would never have gone off later, when he left. Interesting. Yeah, Marino replied, interesting as shit. We were inside the living room, standing near the overturned coffee table. It was sooty with dusting powder. The magazines on the floor were news and literary publications, all of them several months old. Did you find any recent newspapers or magazines? I asked. If she bought a paper locally, it could be important. Anywhere she went after getting off the plane is worth checking. I saw his jaw muscles flex. Marino hated it when he assumed I was telling him how to do his job. He said, There were a couple of things upstairs in her bedroom where her briefcase and bags was. A Miami Herald and something called the Keynoter, has mostly real estate listings for the Keys. Maybe she was thinking of moving down there? Both papers came out Monday. She must've bought them, maybe picked them up in the airport on her way back to Richmond. I'd be interested in what her Realtor has to say... Nothing, that's what he has to say, he interrupted.

Has no idea where Beryl was and only showed her house once while she was gone. Some young couple. Decided the price was too high. Beryl was asking three hundred Gs for the joint. He looked around, his face impervious. Guess someone could get a deal now. Beryl took a taxi home from the airport the night she got in. I doggedly pursued the details. He got out a cigarette and pointed with it. Found the receipt in the foyer there, on that little table by the door. Already checked out the driver, a guy named Woodrow Hunnel. Dumb as a bag of hammers. Said he was waiting in the line of cabs at the airport. She flagged him down. This was close to eight, it was raining cats and dogs. He let her out here at the house maybe forty minutes later, said he carried her two suitcases to the door, then split. The fare was twenty-six bucks, including the tip. He was back at the airport about half an hour later picking up another fare. You're sure, or is this what he told you? Sure as I'm damn standing here. He tapped the cigarette on his knuckle and began fingering the filtered tip with his thumb. We checked out the story. Hunnel was shooting straight with us. He didn't touch the lady. There wasn't time. I followed his eyes to the dark spatters near the doorway. The killers clothing would have been bloody. It wasn't likely a cabdriver with bloody clothes was going to be picking up fares. She hadn't been home long, I said. Got in around nine and a neighbor calls in her alarm at eleven. It had been going for a half hour, meaning the killer was gone by around ten-thirty. Yeah, he answered. That's the hardest part to figure. Based on those letters, she was scared shitless. So she sneaks back to the city, locks herself inside her house, even has her three-eighty on the kitchen countershow you that when we get there. Then, boom! The doorbell rings or what? Next thing you know, she's let the squirrel in and reset the burglar alarm behind him. Had to be somebody she knew. I wouldn't rule out a stranger, I said. If the person is very smooth, she may have trusted him, let him in for some other reason. At that hour? His eyes flicked me as they went around the room. What? He's selling magazine subscriptions, Good Humor bars at ten o'clock at night? I didn't reply. I didn't know. We stopped at the open doorway leading into a hallway. This is the first blood, Marino said, looking at the dried spatters on the wall. She got cut right here, the first cut. I figure she's running like hell and he's slashing. I envisioned the cuts on Beryl's face, arms, and hands. My guess, he went on, is he cut her left arm or back or face at this point. The blood on the wall here's cast off from blood slinging off the blade. He'd already cut her at least once, the blade was bloody, and when he swung again drops flew off and hit the

wall. The stains were elliptical, about six millimeters in diameter, and became increasingly elongated the farther they arched left of the doorframe. The spread of drops spanned at least ten feet. The assailant had been swinging with the vigor of a hard-hitting squash player. I felt the emotion of the crime. It wasn't anger. It was worse than that. Why did she let him in? Based on the location of this spatter, I'm thinking the drone was right about here, Marino said, positioning himself several yards back from the doorway and slightly to the left of it. He swings, cuts her again, and as the blade follows through, blood flies off and hits the wall. The pattern, as you can see, starts here. He gestured toward the highest drops, which were almost level with the top of his head. Then sweeps down, stopping several inches from the floor. He paused, his eyes challenging me. You examined her. What do you think? He's right-handed or left-handed? The cops always wanted to know that. No matter how often I told them it was anybody's guess, they still asked. It's not possible to tell from this blood spatter, I said, the inside of my mouth dry and tasting like dust. It depends entirely on where he was standing in relation to her. As for the stab injuries to her chest, they're slightly angled from left to right. That might make him left-handed. But again, it depends on where he was in relation to her. I just think it's interesting almost all her defense injuries are located on the left side of her body. You know, she's running. He's coming at her from the left instead of the right. Makes me suspicious he's left-handed. It all depends on the victim and assailant's positions in relation to each other, I repeated impatiently. Yo, he muttered shortly. Everything depends on something. Through the doorway was a hardwood floor. A runway had been chalked off to enclose drips of blood leading to a stairway some ten feet to our left. Beryl had fled this way and up the stairs. Her shock and terror were greater than her pain. On the left wall at almost every step was a bloody smear made by her cut fingers reaching out for balance and dragging across the paneling. \*\*\* The black spots were on the floor, on the walls, on the ceiling. Beryl had run to the end of the upstairs hall, where she was momentarily cornered. In this area there was a great deal of blood. The chase resumed after she apparently fled from the end of the hall into her bedroom, where she may have eluded him by climbing over the queen-size bed as he came around it. At this point, either she threw her briefcase at him or, more likely, it was on top of the bed and was knocked off. The police found it on the rug, open and upside down like a tent, papers scattered nearby, including the photocopies of the letters she had written from Key West. What other papers did you find in here? I asked. Receipts, a couple tourist guides, including a brochure with a street map, Marino answered. I'll make copies for you if you want. Please, I said. Also found a stack of typed pages on her dresser there. He pointed. Probably what she was writing in the Keys. A lot of notes scribbled in the margins in pencil. No prints worth noting, a few smudges and a few partials that are hers. Her bed was stripped to the bare mattress, its bloodstained quilted spread and sheets having been sent to the lab. She had been slowing down, losing motor control, getting weak. She had stumbled back out into the hall, where she'd fallen over an Oriental prayer rug I remembered from the scene photographs. There were bloody drag marks and handprints on the floor. Beryl had crawled into the guest bedroom beyond the bath, and it was here, finally, that she died. Me, Marino was saying, I think it wasn't any fun unless he chased her. He could've grabbed her, killed her down there in the living room, but that would've ruined the sport. He was probably smiling the whole time, her bleeding and screaming and begging. When she finally makes it in here, she collapses. The jigs up. No fun anymore. He ends it. The room was wintry, decorated in yellow as pale as January sunshine. The hardwood floor was black near the twin bed, and there were black streaks and splashes on the whitewashed wall. In the scene photographs Beryl was on her back, her legs spread, her arms up around her head, her face turned toward the curtained window. She was nude. When I had first studied the photographs I could not tell what she looked like or even the color of her hair. All I saw was red. The police had found a pair of bloody khaki slacks near her body. Her blouse and undergarments were missing. The cabdriver you mentioned Hunnel or whatever his name was did he remember what Beryl was wearing when he picked her up at the airport? I asked. It was dark, Marino replied. He wasn't sure but thought she was wearing pants and a jacket. We know she was wearing pants when she was attacked, the khaki ones we found in here. There was a matching jacket on a chair inside her bedroom. I don't think she changed clothes when she got home, just tossed her jacket on the chair. Whatever else she was wearing a blouse, her underclothes the killer took them. A souvenir, I thought aloud. Marino was staring at the dark-stained floor where her body had been found. He said, The way I'm seeing it, he has her down in here, takes her clothes off, rapes her or tries to. Then he stabs her and nearly cuts her head off. A damn shame about her PERK, he added, referring to her Physical Evidence Recovery Kit, swabs from which were negative for sperm. Guess we can kiss DNA good-bye. Unless some of the blood we're analyzing is his, I replied. Otherwise, yes. Forget DNA. And no hairs, he said. None except a few consistent with hers. The

house was so quiet our voices were unnervingly loud. Everywhere I looked I saw the ugly stains. I saw the images in my mind: the stab wounds, the hilt marks, the savage wound in her neck gaping like a yawning red mouth. I went out into the hall. The dust was irritating my lungs. It was hard to breathe. I said, Show me where you found her gun. When the police had arrived at the scene that night, theyd found Beryls .380 automatic on the kitchen counter near the microwave oven. The gun was loaded, the safety on. The only partial prints the lab could identify were her own. She kept the box of cartridges inside a table by her bed, Marino said. Probably kept the gun there, too. I figure she carried her bags upstairs, unpacked and dumped most of her clothes in the bathroom hamper, and put her suitcases back in the bedroom closet. At some point during all this, she got out her piece. A sure sign she was antsy as hell. What you wanna bet she checked out every room with it before she started winding down? I know I would have, I commented. He looked around the kitchen. So maybe she came in here for a snack. She may have thought about a snack, but she didnt eat one, I answered. Her gastric contents were about fifty milliliters, or less than two ounces, of dark brown fluid. Whatever she ate last was fully digested by the time she died or better put, by the time she was attacked. Digestion shuts down during acute stress or fear. If shed just eaten a snack when the killer got to her, the food wouldnt have cleared her stomach. Not much to munch on anyway, he said as if this were an important point to make as he opened the refrigerator door. Inside we found a shriveled lemon, two sticks of butter, a block of moldy Havarti cheese, condiments, and a bottle of tonic water. The freezer was a little more promising, but not much. There were a few packages of chicken breasts, Le Menus, and lean ground beef. Cooking, it appeared, was not a pleasure for Beryl but a utilitarian exercise. I knew what my own kitchen was like. This one was depressingly sterile. Motes of dust were suspended in the pale light seeping through slits of the gray designer blinds in the window over the sink. The drainboard and sink were empty and dry. The appliances were modern and looked unused. The other thought is she came in here for a drink, Marino speculated. Her STAT alcohol was negative, I said. Dont mean she didnt think about it. He opened a cabinet above the sink. There wasnt an inch to spare on three shelves: Jack Daniels, Chivas Regal, Tanqueray, liqueurs, and something else that caught my attention. In front of the Cognac on the top shelf was a bottle of Haitian Barbancourt Rum, aged fifteen years and as expensive as unblended Scotch. Lifting it out with a gloved hand, I set it on the counter. There was no strip stamp, and the seal around the gold cap was unbroken. I dont think she got this around here, I told Marino. My guess is she got it in Miami, Key West. So youre saying she brought it back from Florida? Its possible. Clearly, she was a connoisseur of good booze. Barbancourts wonderful. Guess I should start calling you Doctor Connoisseur, he said. The bottle of Barbancourt wasnt dusty, even though many of the bottles near it were. It might explain why she was in the kitchen, I went on. Perhaps she came downstairs to put away the rum. She may have been contemplating a nightcap when someone arrived at her door. Yeah, but what it dont explain is why she left her piece in here on the counter when she answered the door. She was supposed to be spooked, right? Still makes me think she was expecting company, knew the squirrel. Hey, shes got all this fancy booze, right? She drinks the stuff alone? Dont make sense. Makes more sense to think she did a little entertaining from time to time, had some guy in. Hell, maybe its this M she was writing down there in the Keys. Maybe thats who she was expecting the night she was whacked. Youre entertaining the possibility M is the killer, I said. Wouldnt you be? He was getting combative, and his toying with the unlit cigarette was beginning to grate on my nerves. I would entertain every possibility, I replied. For example, I would also entertain the possibility she wasnt expecting company. She was in the kitchen putting away her rum and possibly thinking of pouring herself a drink. She was nervous, had her automatic nearby on the counter. She was startled when the doorbell rang or someone started knocking. Right, he cut me off. Shes startled, jumpy. So why does she leave her piece here in the kitchen when she goes to the damn door? Did she practice? Practice? he said as our eyes met. Practice what? Shooting. Hell... I donno... If she didnt, it wasnt a natural reflex for her to arm herself but a conscious deliberation. Women carry Mace in their pocketbooks. Theyre assaulted and the Mace never enters their minds until after the fact because defending themselves isnt a reflex. I dont know... I did know. I had a Ruger .38 revolver loaded with Silvertips, one of the most destructive cartridges money could buy. The only reason it would occur to me to arm myself with the handgun was I practiced, took it down to the range inside my building several times a month. When I was home alone, I was more comfortable with the handgun than without it. There was something else. I thought of the living room, of the fireplace tools upright in their brass stand on the hearth. Beryl had struggled with her assailant in that room and it never occurred to her to arm herself with the poker or the shovel. Defending herself was not a reflex. Her only reflex was to run, whether it was up the stairs or to Key West. I explained, She may have been a stranger to the gun, Marino. The

doorbell rings. Shes unnerved, confused. She goes into the living room and looks through the peephole. Whoever it is, she trusts the person enough to open the door. The gun is forgotten. Or else she was expecting her visitor, he said again. That is entirely possible. Providing somebody knew she was back in town. So maybe he knew, he said. And maybe hes M. I told him what he wanted to hear as I replaced the bottle of rum on the shelf. Bingo. Making more sense now, isnt it? I shut the cabinet door. She was threatened, terrorized for months, Marino. I find it hard to believe it was a close friend and Beryl wasnt the least bit suspicious. He looked annoyed as he glanced at his watch and dug another key out of a pocket. It made no sense at all that Beryl would have opened the door to a stranger. But it made even less sense that someone she trusted could have done this to her. Why did she let him in? The question wouldnt stop nagging at me. A covered breezeway joined the house to the garage. The sun had dipped below the trees. Ill tell you right off, Marino said, the lock clicking open, I only went in here right before I called you. Couldve busted down the door the night of her murder but didnt see no point. He shrugged, lifting those massive shoulders of his as if to make sure I understood he really could tackle a door or a tree or a Dumpster if he were so inclined. She hadnt been in here since she left for Florida. Took us a while to find the friggin key. It was the only paneled garage I had ever seen, the floor a gorgeous dragon skin of expensive red Italian tile. Was this really designed to be a garage? I asked. Its got a garage door, dont it? He was pulling several more keys out of a pocket. Some place to keep your ride out of the rain, huh? The garage was airless and smelled dusty, but it was spotless. Other than a rake and a broom leaning against a corner, there was no sign of the usual tools, lawnmowers, and other impedimenta one would expect to find. The garage looked more like a car dealership showroom, the black Honda parked in the center of the tile floor. The car was so clean and shiny it could have passed for new and never driven. Marino unlocked the drivers door and opened it. Here. Be my guest, he said. Momentarily, I was settled back in the soft ivory leather seat, staring through the windshield at the paneled wall. Stepping back from the car, he added, Just sit there, okay? Get the feel of it, look around the interior, tell me what comes to mind. You want me to start it? He handed me the key. Then please open the garage door so we dont asphyxiate ourselves, I added. Frowning as he glanced around, he found the right button and cracked the door. The car turned over the first time, the engine dropping several octaves and purring throatily. The radio and air-conditioning were on. The gas tank was a quarter full, the odometer registering less than seven thousand miles, the sunroof partially open. On the dash was a dry cleaning slip dated July eleventh, a Thursday, when Beryl took in a skirt and a suit jacket, garments she obviously never picked up. On the passengers seat was a grocery receipt dated July twelfth at ten-forty in the morning, when she bought one head of lettuce, tomatoes, cucumbers, ground beef, cheese, orange juice, and a roll of mints, the total nine dollars and thirteen cents out of a ten she gave the check-out clerk. Next to the receipt was a slender white bank envelope that was empty. Beside it a pebbly tan Ray Ban sunglasses case also empty. In the backseat was a Wimbledon tennis racket, and a rumpled white towel I reached over the seat to get. Stamped in small blue letters on a terrycloth border was WESTWOOD RACQUET CLUB, the same name printed on a red vinyl tote bag I had noted upstairs in Beryls closet. Marino had saved his theatrics for last. I knew he had looked over all of these items and wanted me to see them in situ. They werent evidence. The killer had never gone inside the garage. Marino was baiting me. He had been baiting me since we had first stepped inside the house. It was a habit of his that irritated the hell out of me. Turning off the engine, I got out of the car, the door shutting with a muffled solid thud. He looked speculatively at me. A couple of questions, I said. Shoot. Westwood is an exclusive club. Was she a member? A nod. You checked out when she last reserved a court? Friday, July twelfth, at nine in the morning. She had a lesson with the pro. Took a lesson once a week, that was about the extent of her playing. As I recall, she flew out of Richmond early Saturday morning, July thirteenth, arriving in Miami shortly after noon. Another nod. So she took her lesson, then went straight to the grocery store. After that, she may have gone to the bank. Whatever the case, at some point after she did her shopping, she suddenly decided to leave town. If shed known she was leaving town the next day, she wouldnt have bothered going to the grocery store. She didnt have time to eat everything she bought, and she didnt leave the food in the refrigerator. Apparently she threw away everything except the ground beef, the cheese and possibly the mints. Sounds reasonable, he said unemphatically. 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. Im pretty damn sure it did. Walk around, take a look at the other sidespecifically at the passengers 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, dont 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. Whens the last time you looked at your passengers door? It could have been days. It could have been a week. She went grocery shopping. He finally lit the damn cigarette. Didnt buy much. He took a deep, hungry drag. And it probably all fit inside one bag, right? When my wifes got just one or two bags, she always sticks them up front, on the floor mat, maybe on the seat. So maybe Beryl went around to the passengers side to put the groceries in the car. Thats when she noticed what was scratched into the paint.

Maybe she knew it had to have been done that day. Maybe she didnt. Dont matter. Freaked her right out, pushed her over the edge. She makes tracks home or maybe to the bank for cash. Books the next flight out of Richmond and runs to Florida. I followed him out of the garage and back to his car. Night was falling fast, a chill in the air. He cranked the engine while I stared mutely out the side window at Beryls house. Its sharp angles were deteriorating in the shadows, the windows dark. Suddenly the porch and living room lights blinked on. Geez, Marino muttered. Trick or treat. A timer, I said. No kidding. From Publishers Weekly This second commanding thriller by the Edgar Award-winning author of Postmortem and featuring forensic sleuth Dr. Kay Scarpetta was a Mystery Guild main selection as well as a Literary Guild and Doubleday Book Club alternate in cloth. \$250,000 ad/promo. Copyright 1992 Reed Business Information, Inc.