

A Newcomer

I was the chief medical examiner of Virginia, first woman to hold that position. I've become Lucy's caretaker after my selfish sister Dorothy decided to unload her on me. What was presented as a short 5 impromptu visit turned into forever and the timing for when it all began couldn't have been worse.

My first summer in Richmond and it was under siege as a serial killer strangled women in their own homes, in their own beds. The murders were escalating and becoming increasingly sadistic. We 10 couldn't catch him. We didn't have a clue. I was new. The press and politicians thundered down on me like an avalanche. I was a misfit. I was chilly and aloof. I was peculiar. What kind of woman would dissect dead bodies in a morgue? [...]

The exhilaration of being one of the first female chiefs in the United States quickly lost its thrill (...). The former chief medical examiner was a misogynistic bigoted alcoholic who died suddenly 15 and left a disastrous legacy. No seasoned board-certified forensic pathologist with a decent reputation wanted to take his place. So a bright idea occurred to the men in charge. What about a woman?

Women are good at cleaning up messes. Why not find a female forensic expert? It doesn't matter if she's young and missing the requisite experience to head a statewide system. As long as she's a 20 qualified expert in court and minds her manners she can grow into the position. How about an overeducated detail-addicted work-obsessed perfectionistic Italian woman who grew up dirt poor, has everything to prove, is turbo-driven and divorced with no kids?

Patricia Cornwell, *Depraved Heart*, 2015

