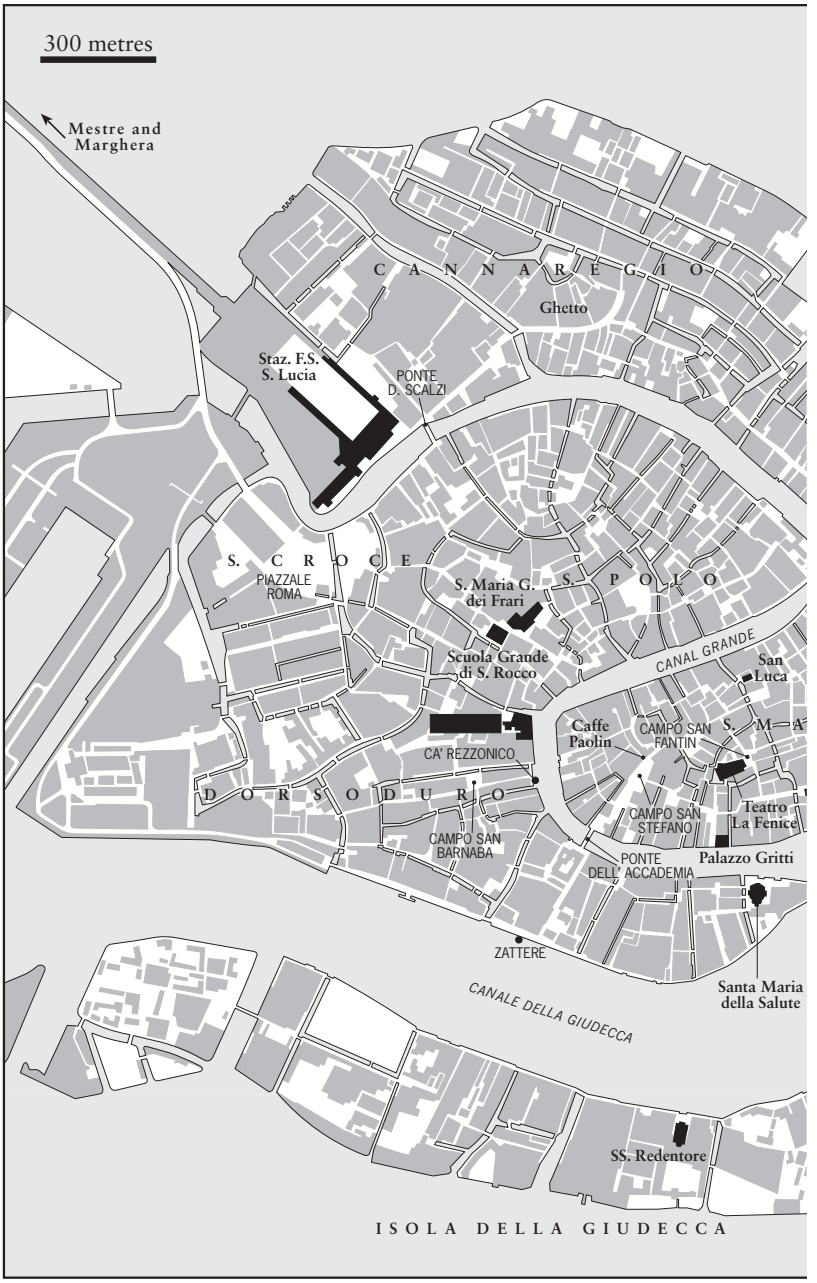
300 metres
Mestre and Marghera
C A N N A R E G I O
Ghetto
Staz. F.S. S. Lucia
PONTE D. SCALZI
S. C R O C E
PIAZZALE ROMA
S. Maria G. dei Frari
S. P O L O
Scuola Grande di S. Rocco
CANAL GRANDE
San Luca
Caffe Paolin
CAMPO SAN FANTIN
CA' REZZONICO
D O R S O D U R O
CAMPO SAN STEFANO
Teatro La Fenice
CAMPO SAN BARNABA
PONTE DELL' ACCADEMIA
Palazzo Gritti
ZATTERE
Santa Maria della Salute
CANALE DELLA GIUDECCA
SS. Redentore
I S O L A D E L L A G I U D E C C A


MURANO
N
Cimiterio
ISOLA DI
S. MICHELE
L A G U N A
Ospedale
Civile
CALLE DELLA TESTA
OSPEDALE
Scuola Grande
di S. Marco
S. Zanipolo
PONTE
DI RIALTO
S. Lorenzo
Questura
Scuola di S. Giorgio
degli Schiavoni
ARSENALE
PONTE DEI GRECI
PIAZZA
SAN
MARCO
S. Zaccaria
Darsena
Arsenale Vecchio
C A S T E L L O
Rio dell'Arsenale
S. ZACCARIA
Palazzo
Ducale
Basilica di
San Marco
ARSENALE
Palazzetto
dello Sport
San
Moise
BACINO DI
SAN MARCO
ZITELLE
Zitelle
ISOLA DI
S. GIORGIO
MAGGIORE
Hotel
Cipriani
Lido

1

The third gong, announcing that the opera was about to continue, sounded discreetly through the lobbies and bars of Teatro La Fenice. In response, the audience stabbed out cigarettes, finished drinks and conversations, and started to filter back into the theatre. The hall, brightly lit between acts, hummed with the talk of those returning to their seats. Here a jewel flashed, there a mink cape was adjusted over a naked shoulder or an infinitesimal speck of dust was flicked from a satin lapel. The upper galleries filled up first, followed by the orchestra seats and then the three rows of boxes.

The lights dimmed, the hall grew dark, and the tension created by an ongoing performance mounted as the audience waited for the conductor to reappear on the podium. Slowly the hum of

voices faded, the members of the orchestra stopped fidgeting in their seats, and the universal silence announced everyone's readiness for the third and final act.

The silence lengthened, grew heavy. From the first gallery, there came a burst of coughing; someone dropped a book, perhaps a purse; but the door to the corridor behind the orchestra pit remained closed.

The first to talk were the players in the orchestra. A second violinist leaned over to the woman next to him and asked if she had made her vacation plans. In the second row, a bassoonist told an oboist that the Benetton sales were starting next day. The people in the first tiers of boxes, who could best see the musicians, soon imitated their soft chatter. The galleries joined in, and then those in the orchestra seats, as though the wealthy would be the last to give in to this sort of behaviour.

The hum grew to a murmur. Minutes passed. Suddenly the folds of the dense green velvet curtain were pulled back and Amadeo Fasini, the theatre's artistic director, stepped awkwardly through the narrow opening. The technician in the light box above the second gallery, with no idea of what was going on, decided to centre a hot white spot on the man at centre stage. Blinded, Fasini shot up his arm to shield his eyes. Still holding his arm raised in front of him, as if to protect himself from a blow, he began to speak: 'Ladies and gentlemen,' and then he stopped, gesturing wildly with his left hand to the technician, who, realizing his error, switched off the light. Released from his

temporary blindness, the man on the stage started again. 'Ladies and gentlemen, I regret to inform you that Maestro Wellauer is unable to continue the performance.' Whispers, questions, rose from the audience, silk rustled as heads turned, but he continued to speak above the noise. 'His place will be taken by Maestro Longhi.' Before the hum could rise to drown him out, he asked, voice insistently calm, 'Is there a doctor in the audience?'

His question met a long pause, then people began to look around them: who would be the one to present himself? Almost a full minute passed. Finally, a hand rose slowly in one of the first rows of the orchestra, and a woman got out of her seat. Fasini waved a hand to one of the uniformed ushers at the back of the house, and the young man hurried to the end of the row where the woman now stood. 'If you would, Dottoressa,' Fasini said, sounding as if he were in pain and needed the doctor for himself. 'Please go backstage with the usher.'

He glanced up into the horseshoe of the still-darkened hall, tried to smile, failed, and abandoned the attempt. 'Excuse, ladies and gentlemen, the difficulty. The opera will now continue.'

Turning, the artistic director fumbled at the curtain, unable for a moment to find the opening through which he had come. Disembodied hands parted the curtain from behind, and he slipped through, finding himself in the bare garret where Violetta was soon to die. From out in front, he heard the tentative applause that greeted the substitute conductor as he took his place on the podium.

Singers, chorus members, stagehands appeared from all around him, as curious as the audience had been but far more vocal. Though the power of his position usually protected him from contact with members of the company as low in standing as these, the director could not now avoid them, their questions, their whispers. 'It's nothing, nothing,' he said to no one in particular, then he waved at them all, trying to clear them, with that gesture, from the stage upon which they flocked. The music of the prelude was drawing to a close; soon the curtain would open on the evening's Violetta, who now sat nervously on the edge of the cot at the centre of the stage. Fasini redoubled the intensity of his gestures, and singers and stagehands began to move off to the wings, where they continued to whisper among themselves. He snarled a furious '*Silenzio*' and waited for it to take effect. When he saw the curtains inching apart to reveal the stage, he hurried to join the stage manager, who stood off to stage right, beside the doctor. A short, dark woman, she stood directly under a No Smoking sign, with an unlighted cigarette in her hand.

'Good evening, Doctor,' Fasini said, forcing himself to smile. She dropped the cigarette into the pocket of her jacket and shook his hand. 'What is it?' she finally asked as, from behind them, Violetta began to read the letter from Germont père.

Fasini rubbed his hands together briskly, as if the gesture would help him decide what to say. 'Maestro Wellauer has been . . .' he began, but he found no satisfactory way to finish the sentence.

'Is he sick?' asked the doctor impatiently.

'No, no, he's not sick,' Fasini said, and then words left him. He returned to rubbing his hands together.

'Perhaps I had better see him,' she said, making it a question. 'Is he here in the theatre?'

When Fasini continued incapable of speech, she asked, 'Has he been taken somewhere else?'

This prodded the director. 'No, no. He's in the dressing room.'

'Then hadn't we better go there?'

'Yes, of course, Doctor,' he agreed, glad of the suggestion. He led her off to the right, past a grand piano and a harp draped with a dull green dust cover, down a narrow corridor. He stopped at the end, before a closed door. A tall man stood in front of it.

'Matteo,' Fasini began, turning back towards the doctor. 'This is Doctor –'

'Zorzi,' she supplied curtly. This hardly seemed a time for formal introductions.

At the arrival of his superior and someone he was told was a doctor, Matteo, the assistant stage manager, was all too eager to step away from the door. Fasini moved past him, pulled the door half open, looked back over his shoulder, then allowed the doctor to precede him into the small room.

Death had distorted the features of the man who was slumped across the easy chair at the centre of the room. His eyes stared out at nothingness; his lips were pulled back in a fierce grimace. His body canted heavily to one side, head thrust against the chair back. A trail of dark liquid stained the

starched and gleaming front of his shirt. For a moment, the doctor thought it was blood. She took a step closer and smelled, rather than saw, that it was coffee. The scent that mingled with the coffee was equally distinctive, the cutting, sour almond smell she had only read about.

She had seen so much of death that it was unnecessary for her to try to find his pulse, but she did place the fingers of her right hand under his upraised chin. Nothing, but she noticed that the skin was still warm. She stepped back from the body and looked around. On the floor in front of him were a small saucer and the cup that had held the coffee that trailed down the front of his shirt. She knelt and placed the back of her fingers against the side of the cup, but it was cold to the touch.

Rising, she spoke to the two men who stood near the door, content to leave her to the business of death. 'Have you called the police?' she asked.

'Yes, yes,' Fasini muttered, not really hearing her question.

'Signore,' she said, speaking clearly and raising her voice so that there could be no question of his hearing her. 'There's nothing I can do here. This is a matter for the police. Have you called them?'

'Yes,' he repeated, but he still gave no sign that he had heard or understood what she said. He stood staring down at the dead man, trying to grasp the horror, and the scandal, of what he saw.

Abruptly the doctor pushed her way past him and out into the corridor. The assistant stage manager followed her. 'Call the police,' she commanded him. When he nodded and moved off

to do as she had ordered, she reached into her pocket for the cigarette she had dropped there, fingered it back into shape, and lit it. She pulled in a deep breath of smoke and glanced down at her watch. Mickey's left hand stood between the ten and the eleven, and his right was just on seven. She leaned back against the wall and waited for the police to arrive.

2

Because this was Venice, the police came by boat, blue light flashing on the forward cabin. They pulled up at the side of the small canal behind the theatre, and four men got out, three in blue uniform and one in civilian clothes. Quickly they walked up the *calle*, or narrow street, alongside the theatre and continued through the stage entrance, where the *portiere*, who had been warned of their arrival, pushed the button that released the turnstile and allowed them to walk freely into the backstage area. He pointed silently to a staircase.

At the top of the first flight of steps, they were met by the still-stunned director. He started to extend his hand to the civilian, who seemed to be in charge, but forgot about the gesture and wheeled around, saying over his shoulder, 'This

way.' Advancing down a short corridor, he stopped at the door to the conductor's dressing room. There he stopped and, reduced to gestures, pointed inside.

Guido Brunetti, a commissario of police for the city, was the first through the door. When he saw the body in the chair, he held up his hand and signalled the uniformed officers not to come any farther into the room. The man was clearly dead, body twisted backwards, face horribly distorted, so there was no need to search for a sign of life; there would be none.

The dead man was as familiar to Brunetti as he was to most people in the Western world, if not because they had actually seen him on the podium, then because they had, for more than four decades, seen his face, with its chiselled Germanic jaw, its too-long hair that had remained raven black well into his sixties, on the covers of magazines and the front pages of newspapers. Brunetti had seen him conduct twice, years before, and he had, during the performance, found himself watching the conductor, not the orchestra. As if in the grip of a demon, or a deity, Wellauer's body had swept back and forth above the podium, left hand clutched half open, as if he wanted to rip the sound from the violins. In his right hand, the baton was a weapon, flashing now here, now there, a thunderbolt that summoned up waves of sound. But now, in death, all sign of the deity had fled, and there remained only the leering demon's mask.

Brunetti turned his eyes away and glanced around the room. He saw the cup lying on the

floor, the saucer not far from it. That explained the dark stains on the shirt and, Brunetti was sure, the horribly twisted features.

Still only a short distance into the room, Brunetti remained still and let his eyes roam, taking note of what he saw, uncertain about what any of it might come to mean, curious. He was a surprisingly neat man: tie carefully knotted, hair shorter than was the fashion; even his ears lay close to his head, as if reluctant to call attention to themselves. His clothing marked him as Italian. The cadence of his speech announced that he was Venetian. His eyes were all policeman.

He reached forward and touched the back of the dead man's wrist, but the body was cold, the skin dry to the touch. He took one last look around and turned to one of the men who stood behind him. He told him to call the medical examiner and the photographer. He told the second officer to go downstairs and speak to the *portiere*. Who was backstage that night? Have the *portiere* make a list. To the third, he said he wanted the names of anyone who had spoken to the Maestro that evening, either before the performance or during the intermissions.

He stepped to the left and opened the door to a small bathroom. The single window was closed, as the one in the dressing room had been. In the closet hung a dark overcoat and three starched white shirts.

He went back into the dressing room and across to the body. With the back of his fingers, he pushed aside the lapels of the dead man's jacket and

pulled open the inner pocket. He found a handkerchief, and holding it by a corner, he pulled it out slowly. There was nothing else in the pocket. He repeated the same process with the side pockets, finding the usual things: a few thousand lire in small bills; a key with a plastic tag attached to it, probably the key to this room; a comb; another handkerchief. He didn't want to disturb the body until it had been photographed, so he left the pockets of the trousers until later.

The three policemen, satisfied that there was a certifiable victim, had gone off to follow Brunetti's orders. The director of the theatre had disappeared. Brunetti stepped out into the corridor, hoping to find him and get some idea of how long ago the body had been discovered. Instead he found a small, dark woman, leaning against the wall, smoking. From behind them came deep waves of music.

'What's that?' Brunetti asked.

'*La Traviata*,' the woman replied simply.

'I know,' he said. 'Does that mean they went on with the performance?'

'Even if the whole world falls,' she said, giving it that heavy weight and emphasis usually reserved for quotations.

'Is that something from *Traviata*?' he asked.

'No; *Turandot*,' she responded, voice calm.

'Yes, but still,' he protested. 'Out of respect for the man.'

She shrugged, tossed her cigarette to the cement floor, ground it out with her foot.

'And you are?' he finally asked.

'Barbara Zorzi,' she answered, then amended it, though he hadn't asked. 'Dr Barbara Zorzi. I was in the audience when they asked for a doctor, so I came back here and found him, at exactly ten thirty-five. His body was still warm, so I'd estimate he had been dead for less than half an hour. The coffee cup on the floor was cold.'

'You touched it?'

'Only with the back of my fingers. I thought it might be important to know if it was still warm. It wasn't.' She took another cigarette from her bag, offered him one, didn't seem surprised when he refused, and lit it for herself.

'Anything else, Doctor?'

'It smells like cyanide,' she answered. 'I've read about it, and we worked with it once, in pharmacology. The professor wouldn't let us smell it; he said even the fumes were dangerous.'

'Is it really that toxic?' he asked.

'Yes. I forget how little is necessary to kill a person; far less than a gram. And it's instantaneous. Everything simply stops – heart, lungs. He would have been dead, or at least unconscious, before the cup hit the floor.'

'Did you know him?' Brunetti asked.

She shook her head. 'No more than anyone who likes opera knew him. Or anyone who reads *Gente*,' she added, naming a gossip magazine he found it difficult to believe she would read.

She looked up at him and asked, 'Is that all?'

'Yes, Doctor, I think so. Would you leave your name with one of my men so that we can contact you if we have to?'

'Zorzi, Barbara,' she said, not at all impressed by his official voice and manner. 'I'm the only one in the phone book.'

She dropped the cigarette and stepped on it, then extended her hand to him. 'Goodbye, then. I hope this doesn't become too ugly.' He didn't know if she meant for the Maestro, the theatre, the city, or for him, so he merely nodded his thanks and shook her hand. As she left, it struck Brunetti how strangely similar his work was to that of a doctor. They met over the dead, both asking 'Why?' But after they found the answer to that question, their paths parted, the doctor going backward in time to find the physical cause, and he going forward to find the person responsible.

Fifteen minutes later, the medical examiner arrived, bringing with him a photographer and two white-jacketed attendants whose job it would be to take the body to the Civil Hospital. Brunetti greeted Dr Rizzardi warmly and explained as much as he had learned about the probable time of death. Together, they went back to the dressing room. Rizzardi, a fastidiously dressed man, pulled on latex gloves, checked his watch automatically, and knelt beside the body. Brunetti watched him as he examined the victim, oddly touched to see that he treated the corpse with the same respect he would give to a living patient, touching it softly and, when necessary, turning it gently, helping the awkward movement of stiffening flesh with practised hands.

'Could you take the things from his pockets, Doctor?' Brunetti asked, since he didn't have

gloves and didn't want to add his prints to anything that might be found. The doctor complied, but all he found was a slim wallet, alligator perhaps, which he pulled out by one corner and placed on the table beside him.

He got to his feet and stripped off his gloves. 'Poison. Obviously. I'd say it was cyanide; in fact, I'm sure it was, though I can't tell you that officially until after the autopsy. But from the way his body's bent backwards, it can't be anything else.' Brunetti noticed that the doctor had closed the dead man's eyes and attempted to ease the corners of his distorted mouth. 'It's Wellauer, isn't it?' the doctor asked, though the question was hardly necessary.

When Brunetti nodded, the doctor exclaimed, '*Maria Vergine*, the mayor's not going to like this at all.'

'Then let the mayor find out who did it,' Brunetti shot back.

'Yes, stupid of me. Sorry, Guido. We should be thinking of the family.'

As if on cue, one of the three uniformed policemen came to the door and signalled Brunetti. When he emerged from the room, he saw Fasini standing next to a woman he assumed was the Maestro's daughter. She was tall, taller than the director, taller even than Brunetti, and to that she had added a crown of blonde hair. Like the Maestro, she had a Slavic tilt to her cheekbones and eyes of a blue so clear as to be almost glacial.

When she saw Brunetti emerge from the

dressing room, she took two quick steps away from the director. 'What's wrong?' she asked in heavily accented Italian. 'What's happened?'

'I'm sorry, Signorina,' Brunetti began.

Not hearing him, she cut him short and demanded, 'What's happened to my husband?'

Though surprised, Brunetti had the presence of mind to move to his right, effectively blocking her entrance to the room. 'Signora, I'm sorry, but it would be better if you didn't go in there.' Why was it that they always knew what it was you had to tell them? Was it the tone, or did some sort of animal instinct cause us to hear death in the voice that bore the news?

The woman slumped to one side, as though she had been struck. Her hip slammed against the keyboard of the piano, filling the corridor with discordant sound. She braced her body with a stiff out-thrust hand, palm smashing more discord from the keys. She said something in a language Brunetti didn't understand, then put her hand to her mouth in a gesture so melodramatic it had to be natural.

It seemed, in this moment, that he had spent his entire life doing this to people, telling them that someone they loved was dead or, worse, had been killed. His brother, Sergio, was an X-ray technician and had to wear a small metallic card pinned to his lapel that would turn a strange color if it was exposed to dangerous amounts of radiation. Had he worn a similar device, sensitive to grief or pain or death, it would have changed colour permanently long ago.

She opened her eyes and looked at him. 'I want to see him.'

'I think it would be better if you didn't,' he answered, knowing that this was true.

'What happened?' She strove for calm, and she achieved it.

'I think it was poison,' he said, though in fact he knew.

'Someone killed him?' she asked with astonishment that appeared to be real. Or practised.

'I'm sorry, Signora. There are no answers I can give you now. Is there someone here who can take you home?' From behind them, he could hear the sudden crash of applause, then wave upon wave of it. She gave no sign that she had heard it or his question, simply stared at him and moved her mouth silently.

'Is there anyone in the theatre who can take you home, Signora?'

She nodded, at last understanding him. 'Yes, yes,' she said, then added in a softer voice, 'I need to sit.' He was prepared for this, the sudden blow of reality that sets in after the first shock. It was this that knocked people down.

He put his arm under hers and led her out into the backstage area. Though tall, she was so slender that her weight was easy to support. The only space he could see was a small cubicle on the left, crowded with light panels and equipment he didn't recognize. He lowered her into the chair in front of the panel and signalled to one of the uniformed officers, who had appeared from the wing, which swarmed now with people in

costume, taking bows and crowding into groups as soon as the curtain was closed.

'Go down to the bar and get a glass of brandy and a glass of water,' he ordered the policeman.

Signora Wellauer sat in the straight-backed wooden chair, hands grasping the seat on either side of her, and stared at the floor. She shook her head from side to side in negation or in response to some inner conversation.

'Signora, Signora, are your friends in the theatre?'

She ignored him and continued with her silent dialogue.

'Signora,' he repeated, this time placing his hand on her shoulder. 'Your friends, are they here?'

'Welti,' she said, not looking up. 'I told them to meet me back here.'

The officer returned, carrying two glasses. Brunetti took the smaller one and handed it to her. 'Drink this, Signora,' he said. She took it and drank it down absently, then did the same with the water when he handed that to her, as though there were no difference between them.

He took the empty glasses and set them aside.

'When did you see him, Signora?'

'What?'

'When did you see him?'

'Helmut?'

'Yes, Signora. When did you see him?'

'We came in together. Tonight. Then I came back after . . .' Her voice trailed off.

'After what, Signora?' he asked.

She studied his face for a moment before she answered. 'After the second act. But we didn't speak. I was too late. He just said – no, he didn't say anything.' He couldn't tell if her confusion was caused by shock or by difficulty with the language, but he was certain she was past the point where she could be asked questions.

Behind them, another wave of applause crashed out at them, rising and falling as the singers continued to take their curtain calls. Her eyes left him, and she lowered her head, though she seemed to have finished with her inner dialogue.

He told the officer to stay with her, adding that some friends would come to find her. When they did, she was free to go with them.

Leaving her, he went back to the dressing room, where the medical examiner and the photographer, who had arrived while Brunetti was speaking to Signora Wellauer, were preparing to leave.

'Is there anything else?' Dr Rizzardi asked Brunetti when he came in.

'No. The autopsy?'

'Tomorrow.'

'Will you do it?'

Rizzardi thought for a moment before he answered. 'I'm not scheduled, but since I examined the body, the *questore* will probably ask me to do it.'

'What time?'

'About eleven. I should be finished by early afternoon.'

'I'll come out,' Brunetti said.

'It's not necessary, Guido. You don't have to

come to San Michele. You can call, or I'll call your office.'

'Thanks, Ettore, but I'd like to come out. It's been too long since I was there. I'd like to visit my father's grave.'

'As you like.' They shook hands, and Rizzardi started for the door. He paused a moment, then added, 'He was the last of the giants, Guido. He shouldn't have died like this. I'm sorry this happened.'

'So am I, Ettore, so am I.' The doctor left, and the photographer followed him. As soon as they were gone, one of the two ambulance attendants who had been standing by the window, smoking and looking at the people who passed through the small *campo* below, turned and moved towards the body, which now lay on a stretcher on the floor.

'Can we take him out now?' he asked in a disinterested voice.

'No,' Brunetti said. 'Wait until everyone's left the theatre.'

The attendant who had remained near the window flipped his cigarette outside and came to stand at the opposite end of the stretcher. 'That'll be a long time, won't it?' he asked, making no attempt to disguise his annoyance. Short and squat, he spoke with a noticeable Neapolitan accent.

'I don't know how long it'll be, but wait until the theatre's empty.'

The Neapolitan pushed back the sleeve of his white jacket and made a business of checking his watch. 'Well, we're scheduled to go off shift at

midnight, and if we wait much longer, we won't get back to the hospital until after that.'

The first one chimed in now. 'Our union rules say we aren't supposed to be kept working after our shift unless we've been given twenty-four hours' notice. I don't know what we're supposed to do about something like this.' He indicated the stretcher with the point of his shoe, as though it were something they'd found on the street.

For a moment, Brunetti was tempted to reason with them. That passed quickly. 'You two stay here, and you don't open the door to this room until I tell you to.' When they didn't respond, he asked, 'Do you understand? Both of you?' Still no answer. 'Do you understand?' he repeated.

'But the union rules –'

'Damn your union, and damn its rules,' Brunetti exploded. 'You take him out of here before I tell you to, and you'll be in jail the first time you spit on the sidewalk or swear in public. I don't want a circus when you remove him. So you wait until I tell you you can leave.' Without waiting to ask if they now understood him, Brunetti turned and slammed out of the room.

In the open area at the end of the corridor he found chaos. People in and out of costume milled about; he could tell by their eager glances towards the closed door of the dressing room that the news of death had spread. He watched as the news spread even further, watched as two heads came together and then one turned sharply to stare down the length of the corridor at that door, behind which was hidden what they could only guess at.

Did they want a sight of the body? Or only something to talk about in the bars tomorrow?

When he got back to Signora Wellauer, a man and a woman, both considerably older than she, were with her, the woman kneeling by her side. She had her arms around the widow, who was now openly sobbing. The uniformed policeman approached Brunetti. 'I told you they can go,' Brunetti told him.

'Do you want me to go with them, sir?'

'Yes. Did they tell you where she lives?'

'By San Moisè, sir.'

'Good; that's close enough,' Brunetti said, then added, 'Don't let them talk to anyone,' thinking of reporters, who were sure to have heard by now. 'Don't take her out the stage entrance. See if there's some way to go through the theatre.'

'Yes, sir,' the officer answered, snapping out a salute so crisp Brunetti wished the ambulance attendants could have seen it.

'Sir?' he heard from behind him, and turned to see Corporal Miotti, the youngest of the three officers he had brought with him.

'What is it, Miotti?'

'I've got a list of the people who were here tonight: chorus, orchestra, stage crew, singers.'

'How many?'

'More than a hundred, sir,' he said with a sigh, as if to apologize for the hundreds of hours of work the list represented.

'Well,' Brunetti said, then shrugged it away. 'Go to the *portiere* and find out how you get through those turnstiles down there. What sort of

identification do you have to have?' The corporal scribbled away in a notebook as Brunetti continued to speak. 'How else can you get in? Is it possible to get back here from the theatre itself? Who did he come in with this evening? What time? Did anyone go into his dressing room during the performance? And the coffee, did it come up from the bar, or was it brought in from outside?' He paused for a moment, thinking. 'And see what you can find out about messages, letters, phone calls.'

'Is that all, sir?' Miotti asked.

'Call the Questura and get someone to call the German police.' Before Miotti could object, he said, 'Tell them to call that German translator – what's her name?'

'Boldacci, sir.'

'Yes. Tell them to call her and have her call the German police. I don't care how late it is. Tell her to request a complete dossier on Wellauer. Tomorrow morning, if possible.'

'Yes, sir.'

Brunetti nodded. The officer saluted and, notebook in hand, went back towards the flight of steps that would take him to the stage entrance.

'And, Corporal,' Brunetti said to his retreating back.

'Yes, sir?' he asked, pausing at the top of the steps.

'Be polite.'

Miotti nodded, wheeled around, and was gone. The fact that he could say this to an officer without offending him made Brunetti newly grateful that