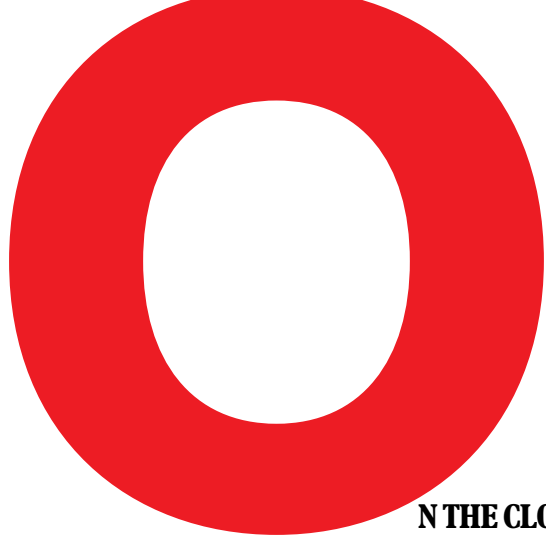


A year after the brutal murder of **MEREDITH KERCHER**, a 21-year-old American student named **AMANDA KNOX** is sitting in a bleak Italian prison, suspected of masterminding the crime. The Italian papers call Knox a cunning devil with an angel's face. But is she being railroaded by an overzealous prosecutor?

THE ACCUSED

By **SARAH HORNE**



IN THE CLOUDY MORNING

of November 6, 2007, Amanda Knox—a 20-year-old American languages student spending her junior year abroad in the sleepy Italian hill town of Perugia—was led from the town’s police headquarters in handcuffs, her pretty, makeup-free face shielded by a pale gray wool hat as photographers swarmed around her.

Just hours later, Perugia’s chief of police, Arturo de Felice, held a press conference that would become the story of the evening on Italian news broadcasts and shock people around the world. Five days earlier, de Felice claimed, this previously unremarkable young girl had been the ringleader in a brutal sexual assault on her British flatmate, Meredith Kercher, culminating in multiple knife slashings to Kercher’s neck. She may have taken several hours to die, alone, choking on her own blood. Knox, he said—along with her boyfriend, a wealthy 23-year-old Italian student named Raffaele Sollecito, and an acquaintance, 44-year-old Congolese bar owner Patrick Lumumba—had killed Kercher because she had refused to participate in the drug-fueled orgy they were having. De Felice lauded his investigators’ “magnificent work” and declared the case closed. “The city needed a result quickly,” he said, so he and his team had “worked around the clock.”

With Amanda Knox, a winsome coed with dark blonde hair and blue eyes, at the center of this gruesome international drama, the story took on a larger-than-life feel. The headlines, pitting a merciless American nymphomaniac against her ill-fated British roommate, wrote themselves. Almost a year later, Giuliano Mignini, the Perugian chief prosecutor, is sticking to the explosive claims about Knox that his team made that morning. While the official case against her is under *segreto istruttorio* (judicial seal), and requests from journalists to review evidence are regularly denied, details about Knox and the case are frequently leaked to certain Italian news outlets. Meanwhile, Knox awaits trial in Capanne prison, a squat, ugly structure on the outskirts of Perugia. But as more information comes to light, it appears that the case against her is disturbingly thin—and that an overzealous prosecutor with a weakness for conspiracy theories may be unfairly targeting her.

EDDA MELLAS, KNOX’S MOTHER, is a vivacious 46-year-old math teacher with shiny, shoulder-length brown hair. Divorced from Amanda’s father, Curt Knox, when Amanda was two years old, she married Christopher Mellas in 2002. She phones from Perugia in mid-August and recalls for me that night in November when her world turned upside down. Mellas awoke in her yellow clapboard house in West Seattle to the sound of a ringing phone. It was 4 a.m. on the morning of November 2. On the other end of the line was Amanda, who normally e-mailed to keep in touch, assuring her mother that she was okay. “But,” her mother remembers her saying, “I think somebody might have been in my house.”

Over the next few minutes, Knox explained how she had come home to shower after spending the night at Sollecito’s flat. Upon arriving back at her own seemingly empty residence, the upper floor of a charmingly dilapidated cottage, she noticed that the door was open; inside some things were out of place. Nothing too alarming, really, “just odd,” she said. For instance: somebody had left a bowel movement in the toilet. Knox later told investigators that she had also noticed some flecks of

blood in the bathroom when she took a shower and had figured one of her roommates was having “menstrual problems.” She lived with two Italian women and Kercher, a slim brunette with olive skin from the outskirts of London. None of them was anywhere to be found.

Knox cut short that call to her mother so that she could return to Sollecito’s apartment—the couple had been all but inseparable since they met at a classical music concert two weeks before. A bespectacled doctor’s son who was completing the final year of his computer science degree in Perugia, Sollecito had reminded Knox of Harry Potter. Over the course of the morning, after trying three times to reach Kercher on her cell phone, Knox and Sollecito went over to the cottage. Kercher’s bedroom door was locked, and Knox phoned her mother again to ask what she should do. “Call the police,” said Mellas, now seriously worried.

As it happened, postal police officers were already headed to the cottage on Via Pergola; a neighbor had called them after finding two cell phones—both Kercher’s—that had apparently been thrown over her garden wall the night before. When the officers arrived at the flat to return the devices, they found Knox and Sollecito, who informed them that Kercher’s door was locked and that the flat had been disturbed. While waiting outside, Knox, with her basic grasp of Italian, heard the police speaking to each other as they broke down the door. They began yelling. “She understood the word ‘foot’ ... in the closet, or near the closet,” Mellas tells me, recalling her daughter’s third phone call of the morning. It was then, says Mellas, that Knox realized a body had been found in Kercher’s room.

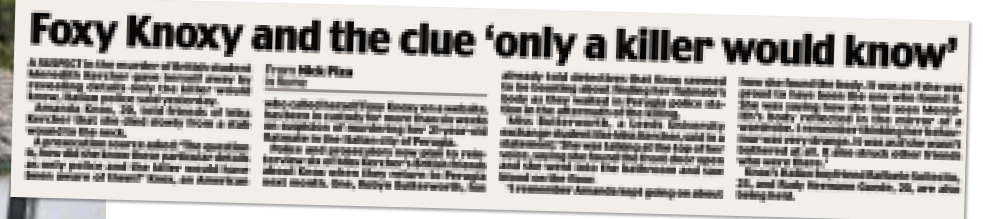
THE SUNDAY PRIOR to the dramatic news briefing and Knox’s arrest, Edda Mellas began what would be a circuitous trip to Italy from Seattle, via Philadelphia and Zurich. She was determined to be with

PREVIOUS PAGE, FROM LEFT: ATLAS PRESS; NICK CORNISH/REX FEATURES

CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT: NI SYNDICATION; STEFANO MEDICI/AP PHOTO; SOLO SYNDICATION/DAILY MAIL; REX USA (2)

If Meredith was seen as the virginal ingenue victimized by this horrendous crime, Amanda was immediately cast as its **HEARTLESS, SEXUALLY VORACIOUS** villain.

Amanda, who was insisting that even though the flat was now a sealed-off crime scene, leaving her “basically homeless,” she wanted to stay in Perugia to at least finish out the quarter and to help the police. Knox had worked several jobs over the summer to defray the cost of her year in Perugia and had chosen to study there, over the more popular Florence, because “it’s not your typical tourist trap.” In Seattle, says Mellas, Amanda maintained high grades at the University of Washington. She describes her daughter as a tomboy, captivated by hiking, yoga, vintage-clothes shopping, and creative writing. Knox had set off for Europe late that summer with her grandmother from Seattle and her younger sister Deanna, traveling through Austria and Germany, visiting her German cousins in Hamburg. As she settled into life in Perugia, Knox came to adore her two Italian roommates—the three girls played the guitar together. After Meredith Kercher arrived, Knox reported that she liked her, too, describing a stroll the two had taken together at Perugia’s famous chocolate festival. It was en route to Italy, Mellas recalls, that she first learned Amanda was a suspect. She describes that moment in a wobbly voice as “awful.” “I was physically sick to my stomach,” she says. “I was just such a wreck.” Mellas, having imagined she was headed to Italy to find a new apartment for her scared daughter, was shaking from head to toe. She arrived in Perugia late at night, stunned, and in the morning set about finding a lawyer.



THE ITALIAN JOB
In the weeks following Kercher’s murder, the Italian and British press leaped on Knox, portraying her as a sex-crazed party girl with a shadowy past.



scene, a classic interrogation tactic. In the long hours following their separation, Sollecito changed his original story, which had matched Knox's, and said that perhaps she could have left his flat, killed Kercher, and then returned as if nothing had happened. He couldn't really remember, he said. They had been smoking pot. Knox also allowed that perhaps Sollecito could have woken in the middle of the night, killed Kercher, and then come back to his bed, where she was reportedly sleeping. Pressed for further possibilities, Knox then made what detectives considered to be an incriminating reversal, admitting that she might have been at her own flat that night and heard screaming. Police said that's when Knox implicated Patrick Lumumba. She and Lumumba, she said, could have gone to the cottage that night, Lumumba heading into Kercher's bedroom while she stayed in the kitchen. "I heard Meredith screaming," she said. "I was afraid and I covered my ears.... I could imagine what was going on." Police submitted a document summarizing Knox's statement in Italian and insisted that she sign it.

Judges have since declared this statement inadmissible, since Knox did not have a lawyer present and was interrogated in Italian. And no recorded audiotapes of the statement have been released. On the evening of November 6, Knox, now in custody, wrote in a statement to police, "In regards to this 'confession' that I made last night, I want to make clear that I'm very doubtful of the verity of my statements because they were made under the pressures of stress, shock, and extreme exhaustion.... These things seem unreal to me, like in a dream, and I am unsure if they are real things that happened to me or are just dreams my head has made to try to answer the questions." Knox has since reverted to her original story, explaining that in the confusion of the interrogation, during which she was allegedly struck by police, she had been asked to imagine who might have been interested in Kercher. According to an inside source, Lumumba, who knew both girls, may have aroused the police's interest because hair belonging to a black man had been found in Kercher's hand. Sources also believe that police raised Lumumba as a possible person of interest during Knox's interrogation. It was only after

that point that she accused him, as she struggled to find an answer to the investigators' angry questions.

IN THE DAYS after Knox was incarcerated, images culled from her MySpace page—which also yielded a catchy nickname, "Foxy Knoxy"—and personal details gathered from students who had briefly known her in Italy were dispersed over the Internet and in tabloid stories, as people in three nations struggled to understand who she was. The Italian press was the most florid and damning, dubbing her "the Dark Lady of Seattle," while speculating whether the damp

Pacific Northwest climate or the suicide of Kurt Cobain might have somehow shaped her apparently sordid nature. Others called her "*una cacciatrice d'uomini, insaziabile a letto*" (a huntress of men, insatiable in bed). Many stories remarked upon her looks, including her "icy" blue eyes. One called her "*la luciferina*"—a devil with an angel's face. If Kercher was seen as the virginal ingenue victimized by this horrendous crime, Knox was immediately cast as its heartless, sexually voracious villain. The *Daily Mail*, a muckraking British tabloid, was characteristically all over the story, which seemed to combine the winning elements of sex, drugs, and a fresh-faced girl who had gone murderously off the deep end. Some reporting picked up on a letter Sollecito had written to his father from jail, in which he said, "I thought [Amanda] was out of this world. She lived her life like a dream, she was detached from reality.... The Amanda I know is an Amanda who lives a carefree life. Her only thought is the pursuit of pleasure at all times." Pleasure, the papers inferred, that led to this apparent orgy gone wrong on the night of November 1. Still, wrote Sollecito, "the thought that she could be a killer is impossible for me." Madison Paxton, Knox's best friend from college, concurred. Quoted in a local Seattle paper in the week of her friend's arrest, she said, "I strongly believe this is a circumstance in which a good person got swept up in something [she] didn't even know was going on. This is not something she would do." Still, leaked documents and insinuations made their way into the Italian and British papers daily, fueling the notion that

the wholesome Amanda her friends and family knew was in fact leading a double life. The tabloids pressed on, with headlines screaming, "The wild, raunchy past of Foxy Knoxy," and "Inside the twisted world of flatmate suspected of Meredith's murder." One story in the *Daily Mail*, citing anonymous police sources, stated definitively that "Kercher was held down by her American flatmate as she was killed in a sex attack." According to the article, Knox had even "left an imprint of her fingers on the skin." Others speculated that Knox's talent for rock climbing would have given her the hand strength needed to force Kercher into submission.

Compounding the image of Knox as a callous vixen was a widely reported story of a shopping trip on November 3, one day after Kercher's body was found. Knox and Sollecito were spotted at a local store buying women's underwear. The store's owner then made claims that Sollecito whispered to Knox, "We can have wild sex tonight! *Sesso selvaggio!*" Amanda's father, Curt Knox, an executive at Macy's in Seattle, says the "underwear story" is ridiculous. He retraced his daughter's steps during one of his visits to Perugia and went to the shop, described in some news accounts as a lingerie store. The reason Amanda was shopping for underwear in the first place, he explains, was that she had no clothes besides the ones on her back, as access to the cottage had been barred by investigators. "The store's called Bubbles," Curt explains gruffly. "It's a discount store that happened to have a bin of underwear in there." You can hear the anger and anguish in his voice as he says, "The whole thing is pretty much a bunch of BS, because the music is so loud in there there's no way you could hear anything that anybody says." He also believes that Carlo Maria Scotto di Rinaldi, the proprietor, was paid for his juicy quotes.

Whether or not the family is able to square these twisted images of Amanda with the daughter they know and love, what emerged last November was a media portrait of Knox that suggested she was unhinged: not only capable of crime but also uncontrollably lured to it—a dark, heartless, sex-crazed monster. A short story about date rape that Knox had penned for a creative writing class and posted on her MySpace page was taken as further evidence of her unnatural proclivities. But her family explains that she had been given an assignment to "visualize a crime." Curt Knox says the media took small details from Amanda's life and "created someone who was 180 degrees from anybody we had ever known. They've created a person who doesn't exist."

ONE OF THE IMAGES from her MySpace page, published countless times, shows Knox clad in black heels, dress pants, and a form-fitting long-sleeved black top, posing with her leg up on a piano bench. Her eyes are smudged with black eyeliner and mascara, and though the overall effect is more elegant than sleazy, the photo appeared alongside many articles to illustrate her supposed promiscuity. Amanda's younger sister, 19-year-old Deanna, took that picture. She says she snapped it for an advanced photography class and asked Amanda to put on makeup "so her features would be more pronounced." There is a clear edge of exasperation in Curt's voice when he says, "So basically the perception that the media is using—that this is a provocative image—that's a school assignment for her sister."

Amanda, as seen through the lens of the tabloids, was also strangely cold-blooded. In shots of her taken outside her flat on the day Kercher's body was discovered, she's bundled in a gray coat, her hair spilling around her shoulders. Her face is pale, almost expressionless, as she leans in to kiss Sollecito.

Knox's lack of demonstrated emotion seems to have incriminated her in the eyes of local authorities. Paul Ciolino, a private investigator from Chicago who reviewed evidence in the case at the behest of CBS's *48 Hours*, says that Knox's problems began when the Italians couldn't make heads or tails of her reaction. He spoke with the lead investigator on the case in March 2008, while he was traveling in Italy. "This guy tells me he knows Amanda committed this murder because three days



LOST IN TRANSLATION
Knox's friends and family describe her as a spirited tomboy, gifted in the arts. Some critics of the investigation believe she has been unfairly targeted by Italian authorities.

later she was eating pizza. He tells me, 'I'd be crying in bed.' I said, 'You're telling me you wouldn't eat a meal?'" Ciolino says he was incredulous. "This is what turns the whole Italian law apparatus against Amanda." Ciolino, who is proud of his Italian-American heritage, says in this case "the Italians are out of their minds." Mellas believes that her daughter was still in shock. "Amanda is a very introverted person," she says. "My daughter wouldn't be wailing in the streets."

Eighteen days after Kercher's body was discovered, the story took another twist: DNA found on the victim's body and in the feces left in the flat's toilet did not match Lumumba. During Lumumba's incarceration, citizens of the university town emerged squarely behind the bar owner, who had never had even a minor brush with the law. One student who knew Lumumba well says the news that Knox had apparently linked this particular man to the crime during her interrogation also contributed to the souring of public opinion against her. "I was outraged that he had been considered a suspect.... Like, 'God, that bitch,'" says Allegra Morosani, an American student who spent a semester in Perugia. "I also thought, *How stupid of her to accuse him, because everyone would know he couldn't have done it.* He was the sweetest guy." Lumumba had an alibi for the night of the murder—receipts from Le Chic as well as several witness accounts to support him—and was a well-loved and upstanding member of the community. It was Amanda Knox who was the outsider. Mignini, the prosecutor, ordered his release.

In fact, said police, the DNA evidence on Kercher's body and in the toilet pointed unequivocally to Rudy Guede, a 20-year-old citizen of both Italy and Côte d'Ivoire—and a well-known local drug dealer whose nickname was "the Baron." Guede had been friendly with the four men who lived on the ground-floor flat below Kercher and Knox and was often seen hanging around on the Piazza Grimana basketball court, a dimly lit spot between the University of Foreigners, where the girls studied, and their flat. Sources say in the weeks before Kercher's murder, a Perugian bar owner who knew Guede found him in his house one night with a knife but chose not to press [Continued on page 92]

THE PRIME SUSPECTS

Four people have been held in connection with the murder of Meredith Kercher. Three are now facing trial. How does the evidence against them stack up?

SUSPECT 1

PATRICK LUMUMBA

Evidence: Police arrested Lumumba after Knox placed him at the cottage.

Defense: DNA at the crime scene was not a match; he has since been released.



SUSPECT 3

RAFFAELE SOLLECITO

Evidence: Prosecutors claim that Sollecito's DNA was found on a bra in Kercher's room.

Defense: More recent reports find the crime scene was contaminated, and test results were inconclusive.

SUSPECT 2

AMANDA KNOX

Evidence: DNA on the bathroom sink and on a kitchen knife were linked to Knox.

Defense: She lived in the flat and cooked with the knife; her lawyers say she's innocent.



SUSPECT 4

RUDY GUEDE

Evidence: Guede's DNA was found on Kercher's body and in her bedroom.

Defense: He claims they had consensual sex but that Sollecito murdered her.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: LEONETTO MEDICI/AP PHOTO; DANIELE LA MONACA/REUTERS; RICCARDO DE LUCA/AP PHOTO; STEFANO MEDICI/AP PHOTO

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: SPLASH NEWS; COURTESY KNOX/MELLAS FAMILIES (2)

The Accused

[Continued from page 79] charges. But when the Perugian police named Guede as a suspect, he was at large, having fled to Germany after Kercher's murder. A disturbing YouTube video surfaced of Guede, apparently out of his head on some illicit substance, repeating the words, "Oh my God. I'm an extraterrestrial." As his eyes roll back in his head the rant continues: "Oh mama, I'm a vampire, I'm Dracula. I'm gonna suck your blood." But Guede was soon picked up by German police for trying to dodge train fare, and on December 6 he was extradited back to Italy.

After Guede was caught, says Edda Mellas, the family was hopeful that Amanda would be released. Knox told her parents that she vaguely recognized Guede, possibly from his association with the downstairs neighbors, but that she never knew his name. In his first statements to police, Guede didn't name Knox or Sollecito, saying—rather implausibly—that he'd had consensual sex with Kercher that night but had left her room to use the bathroom, where he had put on his iPod headphones. At that point, he stated, an unknown assailant had entered the flat and killed Kercher. Guede had fled the country, he said, because he was afraid he'd be blamed for a crime he had not committed. But before fleeing he went home to change his clothes, danced until 2:30 at a local disco called Domus, and then drank at a pub until 5 a.m. Though it seemed unlikely that either Knox or Guede would lie to protect the other, Giuliano Mignini believed that the two were connected in some way and pressed forward with his premise that the three people—Knox, Sollecito, and Guede—had all been at the scene of the crime and taken part in Kercher's murder. In a statement released on December 19, 2007, Judge Maurizio Bufali wrote that evidence pointed to "a group participation in the heinous crime in which a passive role does not appear plausible for any of those present."

IN JANUARY GRAPHIC PHOTOS of the bathroom and Kercher's bedroom were released by the Italian police and quickly snapped up by the British tabloid the *Sun*. In one, Kercher's room is pictured in disarray, substantial amounts of dried blood smeared across the floor. The form of her body is visible, lying under her duvet. Shots of the grim, harshly lit bathroom, in which the walls and sink appear streaked with fresh, red blood, were also published. It's a startling image when you consider that this is the same room Knox told her mother and investigators that she had showered in before alerting the police. But Ciolino explains that in the photo the bathroom had been treated with Luminol, a chemical that detects traces of blood, even if the site has been cleaned, and turns a vivid hue. Video shot by Italian investigators and viewed by *Radar* confirms Knox's initial account that only negligible amounts of blood were visible that morning. But the public

perception created by the dramatic photos in the *Sun* led many to believe that Knox had casually ignored a bloodbath in her house.

Around this time, police also began to theorize that robbery may have been a motive in Kercher's killing. Two days before she was killed, Kercher had withdrawn 250 euros for rent; her landlord never received it. Knox, they now speculated, may have stolen from Kercher in order to pay Guede for drugs. According to this scenario, a confrontation ensued, leading to Kercher's death. Knox's family says this theory is as ridiculous as the sex-attack theory. At the time of her arrest, Knox had thousands of dollars in her bank account, saved from various jobs along with help from her parents. Sollecito was a kid from a well-to-do family who drove an expensive car; neither had a motive for petty robbery. It was Guede, say many who knew him, who was hard up. Informally adopted by a wealthy Perugian family as a teen, he had recently been disowned for his incorrigible behavior. Months

"The prosecution of Amanda Knox is a travesty of justice that is unworthy of a civilized nation. It's the sort of thing you might see in the most dysfunctional third world country."

after his arrest, Guede, perhaps at the prompting of local authorities, thoroughly changed his story, now claiming that Knox was at the flat that night, and that Sollecito had killed Kercher after an argument over money.

Douglas Preston, an American journalist who lived in Italy for four years, had his own brush with the Perugian prosecutor Mignini, which he wrote about in a 2006 piece for the *Atlantic*. Based on that experience, and based on evidence in the case that he has seen, he believes that Amanda Knox is innocent. Speaking in August from his home in Round Pond, Maine, Preston told me of his own interrogation by Mignini while he was working on a book, *The Monster of Florence*, about a still unsolved series of killings in the Tuscan hill country in the 1970s and '80s. Mignini, he said, a deeply religious man with a penchant for conspiracy theories, had come to believe that the murders were the work of a satanic cult. Any journalist offering an alternative hypothesis was subject to the threat of being charged with tampering with a public investigation, or worse. Over the several hours in which Mignini interrogated him, Preston says, he was terrified. He can only imagine how a 20-year-old student would have felt. The prosecutor's tactic, he recalls, is to ask

the victim what might have happened. "He said to Amanda, 'We need your help; you're the roommate.' You can get anyone to look guilty by asking them to speculate what might have happened." In a strange twist, Mignini is himself facing trial this fall over allegations of abuse of power relating to the Monster of Florence case. In April 2008 he was also officially under investigation for, among other things, wiretapping a journalist and violating judicial seal. Last winter, in a hearing on the matter, Luca Turco, the public minister of Florence, stated that he felt Mignini had "fallen prey to a sort of delirium." And yet officials have not removed him from the Amanda Knox case.

Perugia, says Preston, is the sort of backwater where a murder like this is the story of the century, and Mignini made the mistake of leaping on Knox and Sollecito before any of the evidence in the case had been analyzed. Hence the premature "case is closed" press conference on November 6. Meanwhile, the provincial town fosters many resentments toward the international students who flock there each year. In the eyes of many conservative townspeople Amanda Knox, the *Americana*, represented the hordes of rowdy foreigners who disrupt the peace in their walled city. "Many, many young girls like her come from America to do what she did: have Italian boyfriends, smoke pot, and drink. She represents a certain type that traditional Italians don't like," says Preston. He also recalls a conversation with an Italian who called the prosecution of Knox "payback" for the 1998 accident in the Italian ski town of Cavalese, in which an American military jet cut through a cable car line, sending 20 people plummeting to their deaths.

Guede, in Preston's opinion, was the lone culprit in Kercher's killing, likely a home invasion gone wrong. "In real life, crime is banal and the guilty person is almost always obvious," he says. "Mignini is a man who should really be a novelist. He would have made a great thriller writer. He just can't admit he made this catastrophic mistake of arresting Knox." The Italian criminal justice system, he continues, gives a great deal of power to men like Mignini. In part because of pressures to keep the Mafia under control, the judiciary is something like "a state within a state." The result for Knox—along with the current of opinion pushing against her—is bad news. "If Americans knew the full story of this case, they would be horrified. The prosecution of Amanda Knox is a travesty of justice that is unworthy of a civilized nation. It's the sort of thing you might see in the most dysfunctional third world country."

Lisa Pasko, a criminology professor at the University of Denver who specializes in young women who commit violent crimes, has been following the case and does not believe that Knox participated in Kercher's murder. She likens Mignini's behavior to that of the very vocal prosecutor in the Duke rape case, former Durham County District Attorney Mike Nifong, who improperly leaked information to the media

in order to beef up his case against the accused lacrosse players. "Sadly, prosecutors *do* do this," she says. "They make their careers on famous cases, and they jump the gun by tapping their own belief systems. [For Mignini] the monster Amanda has to be created—if you can't pollute the media with ugliness about this girl, then you are going to have a harder time prosecuting." Indeed, there is nothing in Amanda Knox's staggeringly normal middle-class childhood—sports, a regimented school life, a healthy family support network—that would suggest she would ever commit murder. Pasko explains that girls and women make up only about 10 percent of homicide offenders, and those who are guilty usually have either grown up in a violent environment, been systematically abused at home, or have some history of serious mental health problems. "How did this girl who looks like a slice of America end up involved in this horrific crime? Well, the truth is, she probably didn't," says Pasko. "There's no evidence this girl had a violent past. You just don't snap and turn on your roommate in this highly sexualized way." To Pasko, Knox's stonefaced reaction to the murder of her roommate seems completely appropriate: "Shock looks like a flat aspect. It looks like cold behavior." But all too often in cases like these, women are punished for not "getting hysterical." If Amanda Knox is guilty, says Pasko, "this crime goes against everything we know about criminology."

Then there are the bits of evidence that have been leaked to several news outlets in Italy and magnified by the international press. These include an 80-page diary written by Knox in prison, then seized and possibly leaked by authorities. The media quickly characterized it as a "sex diary," because in one entry Knox wrote the names of seven men with whom she'd had sexual contact over her lifetime. Though many media outlets reported that the encounters had all occurred during her two months in Italy, her family refutes those accounts, saying that the first four names on the list are people Knox knew in college. Another source close to the family says that Knox's first sexual experience came fairly late, while she was a university student, and that she was anything but a "man-eater." Knox wrote that list last winter, says Ciolino, the private investigator, because prison authorities told her on the evening of November 21, 2007, that she had tested positive for HIV and needed to find out who might have infected her. She made the list, says her father, on the advice of a man who identified himself as a prison doctor, because "she was scared out of her mind, and she didn't want to die." She was later told that her blood test had been a false positive, though sources close to the case have said that they believe this was one of Mignini's early tactics to try to find a male sexual partner of Knox's who could provide a link to Kercher's murder.

"The central problem here," says Ciolino, "is this insane, maniac prosecutor. They wanted to make Amanda Knox a little whore."

Ciolino says the two other pieces of evidence to which the prosecution is clinging—DNA supposedly belonging to Knox that was found on the tap of her flat's bathroom sink and (at least potentially) on the handle of a knife from the kitchen of Sollecito's flat, with Knox's DNA on the handle—amount to nothing. "I'm going to give you a real good statement of the evidence," says Ciolino. "There is none." Knox's DNA, he says, "is going to be all over" the flat she shared with Kercher because she lived there. Clint Van Zandt, a former profiler in the FBI's Behavioral Science Unit, also said in an MSNBC.com article in December that it would not be unusual for Knox's DNA to be in the house. The DNA on the handle of the knife (which is not even a conclusive match) is easily explained by the fact that she had used it while cooking in Sollecito's flat. Given the amount of blood at the scene of the crime, it's clear that if it were the murder weapon, copious amounts of Kercher's DNA would be on it, too—yet apparently, none has been found. "The science says Rudy Guede raped Meredith, robbed her, and murdered her," concludes Ciolino.

UNFORTUNATELY FOR KNOX, this is not how the Italian authorities see it. In March, when Ciolino was in Rome, he met with investigators from Italy's Serious Crime squad, the equivalent of the FBI. It was lunchtime in the Eternal City, and shopkeepers were closing their stores for the midday break. Ciolino was led to a room in police headquarters, passing through a hallway adorned with photographs—nicknamed "Murderers' Row." The gallery includes pictures of a notorious couple who had kidnapped and murdered a 7-year-old, the biggest drug seizure ever in Italy, and the head of the Sicilian mob—a man who has been wanted for nearly 40 years. And then, at the very end, remembers Ciolino, "There's a picture of Amanda being grilled by eight Italian investigators, taken from above. This is one of the biggest cases that's ever happened for them." The notion that this was a crime perpetrated by a group, and masterminded by Knox, says Ciolino, is self-evidently ridiculous. "But they love the fact of a conspiracy in Italy. The more bizarre, the more silly, the better they like it."

Nine months after the murder of Meredith Kercher, in a hearing in early July, Amanda Knox, Raffaele Sollecito, and Rudy Guede were recommended by the prosecutor to be charged with her killing, a crime that could carry sentences of up to 30 years. The trial has not been officially scheduled, but it will likely begin this fall and could last a year or more. Knox's parents, meanwhile, are trying to find a way to prove her innocence. Although they have reached out to the American embassy in Rome, the diplomats, while helpful, are following protocol for criminal investigations of this type and will not intervene beyond a point. Knox's parents have hired a public relations specialist, Seattle-based David Marriott, who is assisting them with press requests and

has booked them for short segments on a few television news programs. CBS's *48 Hours* and NBC's *Dateline* did hourlong specials on the case, showing varying degrees of sympathy for Knox. But at this point the American media seems to have lost interest in Amanda Knox, under the assumption that she must have played some part in this grisly crime. Still, her family continues to believe that she will be acquitted. "She is not what the media is portraying her to be," says her mother. This summer, as she spoke with an Italian journalist who is covering the case, Edda Mellas asked why more of the press attention had not turned to Guede, a petty criminal who had a history of home invasions with a knife. According to Mellas the journalist replied, "Well, that's not sexy. Amanda's a pretty foreigner. Who cares about the kid with the criminal background?"

Knox's middle-class parents, say sources familiar with their situation, have put themselves under serious financial strain to support their daughter. Currently her mother and father take turns traveling to Italy so they can see Amanda during the two hours a week she is allowed visitors. Each day she spends 23 out of every 24 hours in her cell, reading or singing to try to keep her spirits up. On Amanda's birthday (she turned 21 on July 9), Raffaele Sollecito, now being held in a separate prison, was able to send her a simple arrangement of nine yellow anthuriums. The note read: I HOPE THAT JUSTICE PREVAILS SOON.

Curt Knox says that though Amanda is strong, there are days when she cries in his arms for the first 30 minutes of their allotted hour of visitation time. "She misses her family," says Mellas, breaking into tears. "She knows she's innocent and it's just a matter of time..." She is also trying to stay sane, structuring her time, studying languages in her cell, and thinking about returning to her old life. The University of Washington student of languages is now fluent in Italian. **E**

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