

CHAPTER THREE



THE EVIDENCE

Back in his apartment later that afternoon, Hogan sat down at the kitchen table and started his customary lists. At the top of one sheet of paper, he printed WHAT I KNOW. Then he started to list the facts as he knew them:

1. *Victim was Bradley Phillips, employee of The Nicholls Company, in the city on business from Chicago.*
2. *Cause of death was a puncture to the spinal cord, probably from an ice pick. There was a bad bruise on the back of his neck, his lungs had water in them, and there was a lot of bleeding. Evidently, the jugular vein had been hit.*
3. *Found a long strand of black hair on his jacket. He had short brown hair.*
4. *Found brownish-red marks on the collar of his shirt. Could be make-up.*
5. *The back of the heels of both shoes were scuffed and worn, as if the body had been dragged for some distance.*

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Hogan sat back, looking at the short list. "Not much to go on," he said, sighing. "Let's see what else I can come up with." He took another sheet of paper, printed WHAT I NEED at the top, and began writing.

1. *What's up with the StarDancers card? Was he there last night? At any time during his visit? - Check Club*
2. *What is the D****o on the back of the card? - Doc Burton?*

Hogan smiled as he wrote the name, remembering the excitement he generated in his old professor whenever he asked for his help on a case.

3. *Was he alone last night? - Check Club*
4. *If he did go to StarDancers, did he make it back to his hotel? - Hotel Staff*
5. *Check the hair - Doc Burton*
6. *Check the smudges - a woman's make-up? - Kathy? Doc Burton?*

Hogan looked at the clock on the stove. 4:30. "Might as well start with the fun one," he smiled, reaching for the phone.

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At 6:30, Hogan walked into an Italian restaurant on West 75th Street. Looking around the front dining room, it didn't take him long to spot Kathy. She smiled and waved to him.

"Hi, Kath," he said as he leaned to kiss her lightly.

"Hmm," she said, as she kissed him back and squeezed his hand. "It's good to see you."

"Sure is," he responded, sitting in the chair next to her, still holding her hand and smiling.

Kathy nodded toward his place setting. "I hope you don't mind. I thought you'd like a drink." Hogan reached for the martini glass and sniffed it. "Vodka. Shaken, not stirred. Just as you like it, Mr. Bond."

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"You're something else, you know." He picked up the glass and tapped it against Kathy's extended wine glass. "Cheers." After taking a sip of the cold drink, he continued, "And thanks for the referral. Now I've got something to keep me busy. At least for a while."

Kathy looked at him. "What referral?"

Hogan looked back at her with surprise. "The body they found in Central Park." She shook her head. "Oh. I thought you told her."

"Told who?"

Hogan started from the beginning. "A woman named Lynne Vardon at The Nicholls Company called me this morning. A coworker of hers from out of town didn't show up for work, and she was worried about him. She said she got my name from your firm."

"It wasn't me," Kathy responded, taking a sip of wine. "But it could have been anybody. Everyone in the firm knows about you."

"I guess so. I just assumed it was you."

"So, what happened?"

"Oh, yeah. Well, while I was on the phone with her, I saw a report on TV about a body that had been found in The Lake. I went to The Lake and found that the name on his identification was the same name she had given me. So I went to give her the bad news, got a photo of her coworker, then went to see the body with Tom Walker."

"And...?"

"And it was him, all right. Pretty gruesome. Evidently, he was hit on the back of the neck, then somebody drove an ice pick into his neck, and into the spinal cord and the jugular vein. Then the body was thrown in The Lake, probably to make it look like a drowning."

"Wow. How did she take the news?"

"Understandably, she was pretty upset. And I guess she doesn't trust the speed of the police. She asked me to find the killer."

"Does Tom know that?"

Hogan nodded, taking another refreshing sip. "I told him, and he's okay with it. In fact, at the morgue, he referred to me as his 'partner.'"

"Good." They paused for a few minutes to order their meals. When the waiter had left, Kathy continued, "So how are you going to start, Matt?"

"I already have," he responded. "At the morgue, I found some interesting things."

"Like what?"

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"First, the victim had a card from a strip club on Broadway. And something was written on the back. A name or something. But most of the letters had been washed away by the water."

"How do you know it was a name?"

"I don't," Hogan replied, "I'm just guessing. Whatever it was, it started with a capital 'D' and ended with a small 'o.'"

"What else did you find?"

"Two things that may confirm that he was at the club. One was a long hair on the shoulder of his jacket. It looked black to me, and he had short brown hair. The other was a smudge on the collar of his shirt."

"A smudge of what?"

"I'm not really sure, Kathy. But maybe you can help me." He took the plastic bag containing the scrapings from the smudge and handed it to Kathy. "I scraped this from his collar. The water probably washed most of it away, but at least I got some."

Kathy took the bag and opened it, smelling the contents but noticing nothing. "If there was any aroma, the water took that," she said. She shook the bag slightly, managing to get a piece of the contents to fall onto her other palm. Putting the bag down, she took the small amount of material between her right thumb and forefinger, gently rubbing it. "It feels powdery, and looks like it has a flesh-colored tint." She looked up at Hogan. "It could be make-up."

"That's what I thought, too. Maybe make-up from a dancer at the club. I thought about asking Doc Burton to look at it under the microscope. And the strand of hair, also."

"Why not? He may be able to tell you something about them."

They took a break for several minutes to enjoy the salads that had just arrived.

When they were done, Kathy asked him, "Do you have that card with you?" Hogan nodded, handing her the plastic bag. She looked at the front, with somewhat of a frown crossing her face, then turned the card over. "Hmmm. That looks like an 'a' to me, Matt."

Hogan leaned toward her, looking at the card. "I guess it could be. At first glance, I thought it was an 'o.'"

She pointed to the bottom of the letter. "See, it looks like there's a little tail here. Could be the stem of the 'a.'" He nodded. "But why don't you ask Doc Burton to put this under the microscope, too? He may be able to see something we can't." Hogan nodded again. "And you know how much he likes to help you." They both smiled at the thought.

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Within a few minutes, the waiter had delivered their meals, so they enjoyed the food and small conversation for the next half hour.

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About 8 o'clock, Hogan and Kathy sat back in their seats, feeling full from the pasta and slowly sipping coffee.

Ever the curious one about Hogan's cases, Kathy asked, "So, what's next?"

"I guess a few things. I'll go see Doc Burton tomorrow for the hair, smudge, and card. I should talk to the woman at The Nicholls Company again, and probably talk to more of the employees there. I'll ask for her advice about whom I should talk with. And," he added, watching Kathy's reaction closely, "I probably should visit StarDancers to see if anyone saw him there."

Her reaction was as he expected. "Oh, really? Gee, that's tough duty, but somebody's got to do it, right?" Kathy's head was tilted slightly to one side, and a hint of a smile crossed her face.

"Well, yeah. If he indeed was at the club last night, it's quite possible that the killer saw him there or on the street after he left. I can't miss that." Kathy nodded slowly, still smiling. "Do you want to go with me? That way, you can be sure I'll behave."

Now she shook her head, still smiling. "That's not for me, Matt. I think I'd be uncomfortable. But you should go. Really," she added, grasping his hand on the table. He chuckled, nodding his head.

"Well, how about Chicago, then? I may go there for a day to talk to some of his coworkers there. You could come along."

Kathy thought for a moment. "I've never been there. Maybe I should. When are you going?"

"I thought I'd fly out on Sunday, spend Monday talking to people, then return on Tuesday. So you'd only need to take a couple of days off."

Kathy smiled, nodding her head. "Yeah, I'd like that, Matt. And I think I can find something to do on Monday."

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The next morning, Hogan called Lynne Vardon, and they agreed to meet at nine. Then he called Doc Burton, scheduling to meet with the excited man at

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eleven. He got to the Nicholls Company building a few minutes before nine, and walked into the same area that he had been in the day before. As quiet as it had been then, somehow it seemed even quieter – perhaps gloomier – than it was before. The same fortysomething woman greeted him from behind her desk. The pleasant disposition was still there, but not the smile.

“What a terrible loss,” she said. “Brad was such a nice person. Why would anyone do this to him?” She was obviously trying to hold back tears.

Hogan just shook his head. “I don’t know. But I hope to find out.”

The woman nodded, managing a weak smile. “I’ll let Lynne know you’re here.” She dialed the phone, then simply nodded at Hogan and returned to her work.

Even before Hogan had the chance to sit down, Lynne Vardon walked out of the office area.

“Hi, Matthew,” she greeted him, shaking his hand. “Let’s go into my office,” she suggested, and he followed her down the hallway. Once inside, she sat at a chair at the conference table, motioning for Hogan to do the same. “So how can I help you with the investigation?”

“One of the things I should do is talk to some of Brad’s coworkers. I’ve found in the past that I can discover a lot about a person’s interests and activities if I do that.”

She nodded. “That makes sense. But there aren’t too many people here that knew Brad well.”

“I thought that might be the case. In fact, I was thinking about going to go Chicago to talk to some of the people there.”

Lynne nodded again. “Okay. I can set up some appointments for you. Our HR Manager there should be able to tell me who knew Brad the best. In fact, I’ll have our travel agent book the flights for you. Just let me know when you want to visit.”

“Sure. I’ll call you later today,” Hogan responded.

“And you’ll talk to the widow, too?”

Hogan shook his head. “I really don’t want to upset her more than she’s been already. And I don’t know if she can tell me anything that will help.”

“But she wants to see you, Matthew.”

“She does?”

“The HR Manager in Chicago talked to her first thing this morning about survivor benefits. He mentioned that we had hired you to investigate, and she immediately asked if she could talk to you.”

“I wonder why?” Hogan reflected.

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"I don't know. It could be as simple as pleading with you to solve it quickly. Or, maybe she has something that she thinks will help you. In any event, it couldn't hurt."

"Well, if she asked, then I'll talk to her. Could you please arrange for that, also?"

Lynne nodded, making a note of it. "What else would help?"

Hogan thought for a moment. "How about a list of his business activities for the past few months? Meetings he had, places he traveled, stuff like that. Certainly nothing confidential." He remembered the card from the club. "Also, can you get samples of his handwriting? Both cursive and printed." Lynne's face took on a questioning look. "Just in case I come across anything in my investigation," Hogan explained, omitting mention of the card.

"I'll see what I can come up with," she responded, making more notes.

"And two more things. Did Brad have a laptop computer or cellphone with him here in New York?"

Lynne nodded. "I've got them here," she said, motioning to her credenza.

"Can you look through his recent phone calls and his recently created files, just to see if there is anything that may relate to his death?"

"Like what?"

"I don't know. Maybe personal calls or e-mails, notes, anything like that. I think you can ignore company-related calls or files." She nodded. "And, is there any way you can find out if Brad was in his hotel room at all on Wednesday night? That may help clarify his activities."

She nodded, making a note. "I should be able to do that. I know the front desk manager at the hotel. Anything else?"

Hogan shook his head. "I'm sure that's plenty. I don't want to push my luck. But I'll call you this afternoon to schedule the trip to Chicago. If I think of anything else, I'll let you know then."

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At 10:15, Hogan stepped off the Number 1 train at 116th Street, so he took advantage of the extra time to stop for a cup of coffee at Starbucks two blocks down. His thoughts wandered all over the place as he sat, sipping and looking out on Broadway. The time passed quickly, and at 10:45, he walked outside, then north to Columbia University. Making his way to the Science Building,

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he quickly found the familiar office of Doctor Burton. The Chemistry professor, now in his 70s, had been one of Hogan's favorite instructors during his four years at Columbia, serving informally as Hogan's mentor for his senior year there. And, ever since Hogan began his career as a Private Investigator, he had asked for Burton's help on several cases, the most recent involving the murder of a Broadway actor. Burton's response was always enthusiastic. It seemed that he looked forward to working with Hogan the way most people look forward to a vacation. It excited him.

And today was no different. Burton stood as his eyes lit up and a smile spread across his face upon seeing Hogan. "Matthew! So good to see you again! Please come in." He pumped Hogan's hand enthusiastically, pointing the way to a small chair in front of the cluttered desk.

"How have you been, Doc?" Hogan asked as he sat in the hard chair.

"Fine, just fine, Matthew. Looking forward to working with you again! What is it this time?" He couldn't wait to get started.

Hogan smiled at his mentor's enthusiasm. "Not much, Doc. Just another murder."

The mere mention of the words made the professor even more excited, if that was possible. "Tell me about it, Matthew! How can I help?"

Hogan told Burton the details of the case as he knew them, then produced the bags containing the hair and the suspected make-up. "I'd like to see what you can do with these, Doc."

Burton took the bags from Hogan, smiling. "I think we should be able to come up with something, Matthew. Let's go!" And he led the way into the next room. Several tables were in that room, and on one of them was a microscope. Burton leaned over to turn on the light of the microscope, then sat on the hard stool at the table. Taking the hair out of one bag, he held it up to the room light. "First glance, I'd say it's from a woman with black hair," he proclaimed.

"My first reaction exactly," said Hogan, moving closer to the table.

Burton put the hair on the glass, then looked into the eyepiece, adjusting the knob on the side until his vision cleared. "It's black, all right. And the length suggests it came from a woman."

"I guess it could be a man with long hair," Hogan suggested. "But in either case, it came from somebody else. The victim had short brown hair."

"Right," Burton confirmed, replacing the hair in the bag and taking some of the material from the smudge out of the other bag. He pinched some of it between his thumb and forefinger, looking at Hogan. "It feels like some sort of

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soft powder, but it's got almost an oily feel to it, as well." He put the pinch on another slide, then slid it under the microscope. "Hmmm," was the only noise he made for several seconds.

"Hmmm what, Doc? What is it?"

"Nothing unusual, Matthew. As I had suspected, it is basically a soft powder. But there is something there that seems to be holding the granules together, almost like a glue. I don't know if it's oil or not. It could even be perspiration, I guess. Or perfume."

"Is there any way you can find out?"

"I may be able to," Burton answered, still looking into the microscope. "And the powder has a beige tint to it, indeed indicating that it may have been used on the skin."

"That all fits, Doc," Hogan said, looking into the microscope after Burton had moved his stool back. "So what next?"

"Let me do some tests on the powder," Burton explained. "I may be able to find out exactly what it is."

"Just don't use it all, Doc. I may need some of it for other purposes."

"That's fine, Matthew. I won't need too much."

"When can you have something?" Hogan asked impatiently.

Burton chuckled, as he had seen this side of Hogan many times in the past. He looked at the clock on the wall. "It's almost noon now, and I do need to get some food in me. I'll be able to run some tests this afternoon. How about if I call you by tomorrow morning, Matthew?"

"That'll be fine, Doc. And speaking of lunch, why don't you join me? There's a great deli a couple of blocks away."

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One hour later, the two were walking back to the Science Building. Suddenly, Hogan said, "Doc! I almost forgot!" He took the card from the club out of his pocket. "I wanted to see if we could take a close look at the back of this card. There's something written on it, and I can't make it out. Maybe the microscope will help."

Burton nodded, smiling at the prospect of more investigative activity. "Certainly, Matthew. Let's go back inside." They walked back to the lab, where Burton took the card from Hogan and placed it under the lens of the

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microscope. "It was written with a pen, that's for sure," Burton said after several seconds of looking at the card. "But maybe you should look at it before I express my opinion, Matthew," he concluded, moving away from the eyepiece.

Hogan shook his head. "I've already formed my opinion, Doc. So I'd like to hear yours. Then we can talk about it." Burton moved back to the microscope and looked again at the card. Under the light of the microscope, he could make out some of the letters. But everything was not perfectly clear.

"So what do you see, Doc? What letters are evident?" Hogan asked impatiently.

"Well, it's difficult to make out all of the letters. Parts of them have been erased, probably by the water, and the light here seems to almost hide some of the strokes." Burton was silent for a few moments as he looked closer at the letters. "The only obvious one is a capital 'D' at the beginning. The small letter at the end could be an 'a' or an 'e.'"

"An 'a' or 'e'?" Kathy said it was an 'a.' I thought it was an 'o.'"

"Could be, but I do see a small tail at the bottom of it. Unless that's a smudge, my guess is it's an 'a,' but it could also be an 'e.' It's hard to tell if the opening in the letter is part of the 'e,' or if the water washed away part of it."

"Fair enough. Keep going, Doc."

"Unfortunately, those are the easy ones. I can make out two vertical strokes between the 'D' and 'a.' The first looks like it has a tail on it also. And the second looks like it has a hyphen to the right of it, about halfway up from the bottom." Hogan just stood there, shaking his head and trying to picture what letters they could be, as Burton continued. "And, there are spaces, as if there were more letters. But I can't make anything out, except for a few smudges. But I'd guess that there was a letter between the 'D' and the first vertical stroke, and another between the first and second vertical strokes." He backed away from the eyepiece. "Why don't you have a look, Matthew?"

This time, Hogan accepted the offer, going to the microscope and looking at the card. Nodding his head, he said, "I do see the 'D,' Doc. And it's obvious that the last letter is an 'a' or an 'e.' You and Kathy are right." Hogan chuckled quietly, knowing that, at this point, he would get the response from Kathy, "As usual." But he didn't get it from the beaming Burton. "But you're good, Doc. I can make out the two vertical strokes, and I can see the thing that looks like a tail and the thing that looks like a hyphen. But only because you mentioned them. I don't think I would have seen them otherwise. And you're

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right – there could have been two other letters there.” Hogan moved away from the eyepiece, letting his vision readjust to the room lighting. “So what do we have?”

The professor in Burton emerged as he moved to the whiteboard and picked up a marker. “Here’s what I saw,” he said, demonstrating his excellent memory for details as he made characters on the board. When he stepped back, Hogan saw what Burton had drawn:

D l l c

“I’ll buy that, Doc. The ‘D’ is fairly obvious. And the last one is an ‘a’ or an ‘e.’ What are the other two?”

Burton moved back to the board. “For the first one, Matthew, just imagine that the tail is connected to the stroke about halfway up, then a small loop were to appear from that point.”

“A ‘k,’” Hogan exclaimed. It seems so obvious now! You’re something else, Doc.”

Burton beamed at the compliment. “Let’s look at the other one now,” he continued. “Just suppose that this hyphen were actually part of the letter,” he said, walking to the board and extending the line to cross through the vertical stroke.

“A ‘t!’” Hogan yelled.

“Right,” Burton responded, smiling at his triumph.

Hogan stood there, grinning at this enthusiastic man who had once been his teacher. He was still teaching Hogan.

“Or, it could be an ‘f,’” Hogan said, settling down. “And, if either of those marks are random smudges, then either or both letters could be ‘l.’” Hogan moved to the board and wrote new letters directly below Burton’s.

Burton nodded his head soberly. But Hogan appreciated his insight. “But it’s a lot more than I had. Now all I need to do is fill in a couple of letters. You’ve sure made that task a lot easier, Doc. Thanks.”