

## CHAPTER FOUR

# THE WOMAN

An hour later, Hogan knocked on the door to Kathy's apartment. Although they'd been seeing each other for more than a year, they hadn't yet reached the point at which they felt comfortable giving their key to the other. That would come eventually, so knocking on the door would suffice until it did.

Swinging the door open and barely looking at Hogan, Kathy threw her arms around him and thrust her face into his neck. "It's so good to see you, Matt." She held him for several moments. Not crying, just holding.

"You too," he whispered, kissing her lightly on the temple. They stood holding each other for about a minute, saying nothing else.

Finally Kathy moved her head away from his neck. Smiling, she said, "Thanks," and kissed him on the lips. This, too, lasted about a minute. All this time, he tried to keep the pizza level in his left hand, extended behind her. Pulling away from the kiss, Kathy grabbed his other hand and led him to the kitchen, where he was finally able to

put the pizza on the counter. He stretched the fingers of his left hand to relieve the numbness.

“How about a drink?” he suggested, and she nodded, walking into the living room.

First chilling a couple of glasses with ice water, he filled a shaker with vodka and ice, adding just a couple of drops of vermouth, and shook it vigorously for about 30 seconds. Adding a slice of lemon to one of the empty chilled glasses and olives to the other, he poured the martinis into the glasses and walked into the living room. She took a sip and smiled. “Oh, that’s perfect, Matt. Good job!” He smiled, lifted his glass to her, and drank.

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An hour and a pizza later, Hogan was sitting on the sofa, sipping his wine with Kathy leaning against his shoulder. He had said that he wasn’t going to do any more with the case today, but the angry lion bothered him so much that he couldn’t resist bringing it up.

“I mentioned to you that I spoke with some of the neighbors of the man who was killed, didn’t I, Kathy?”

“Yes, you did.”

“Both of them described a woman that they had seen with him, or leaving his apartment. Their descriptions were pretty close to each other, and they also matched how I would have described her when I saw her hanging at the Cloisters.”

“Did they say anything else about her?”

“Yeah. One of them had spoken with her several times. He said her name was Lisa.”

“That should be corroborated when the autopsy and identification are completed.”

“Right,” Hogan responded, looking across the room at nothing in particular.

“That’s good,” Kathy continued, “but you don’t seem very excited. What’s wrong?”

“Something keeps nagging at me.”

“What is it?”

“The guy who had met Lisa also mentioned that he had seen another man named Eric leaving Christian’s apartment, and that he mentioned something about an angry lion.”

“An angry lion?”

“Yes. I searched online for an angry lion in the zoo, but couldn’t find anything.”

“That’s because you won’t find it in the zoo.”

“What do you mean? You’ve heard of an angry lion?”

Kathy looked up at him, smiling. “Yes. It’s a bar in the Village.”

“How do you know that?”

“We handled a case involving it last year. Some big demonstration that caused some injuries. Of course, the injured people sued the bar owners.”

“That figures. But I wonder why it didn’t come up when I searched.”

“Maybe you were too specific. Adding the word zoo may have sent it off track.”

“You think so?”

“Let’s check it out.” She got up from the sofa and walked across the room to the desk against the opposite wall, returning with her laptop. She opened it, sat next to Hogan on the sofa, and waited for its screen to light up. Once it did, she connected to Google and typed “angry lion new york” in the search window. Within seconds, the first page of search results had appeared. And at the top was The Angry Lion, a bar on Christopher Street in the West Village. Kathy clicked on the link and let Hogan read the description.

“You didn’t tell me it’s a gay bar,” he complained.

“I thought you should read it for yourself.”

“That could put an interesting twist on things.”

“In what way?”

“Evidently, Christian and Lisa were serious about each other. Exactly how serious remains to be determined. But there may have been another side of Christian.”

“Such as?”

“Well, if he and Eric were talking about The Angry Lion, a gay bar, perhaps they were also interested in one another.”

“So how will you check that?”

Hogan thought for a moment. “I think I need to get more information about Lisa first. Once I know more about her, I think I can find out more about her relationship with Christian. But I probably won’t get there until we get the autopsy results, which hopefully will include a positive identification of her. Christian’s brother identified her body, but we need more proof.”

“They haven’t found her identification and possessions yet?”

“Not that I’m aware of. There was nothing in the vicinity of the bodies, and we searched the grounds nearby. The only things I found were his cell phone and a man’s watch.”

“Did they check the call log?”

“Huh?”

“The recent calls made from his phone. Or even his contact list.”

Hogan sat stunned for a moment. “Duh. I never even thought of that. I wonder if Tom checked it.” He looked at his watch. 7:30. “But he’s probably not there at this time on a Saturday night.”

“You never know with cops. Why don’t you give it a try?”

Hogan dialed the number of the precinct station and asked for Walker. Surprisingly, his friend answered the phone after the second ring.

“Walker here.”

“Tom, it’s Matt. Why are you still there?”

“Sometimes, this is a 24-hour job, Matt. No rest for the weary. What’s up?”

“The cell phone that belonged to Christian.”

“What about it?”

“Have you been able to check anything about it? Contacts, recent calls, things like that?”

“I was going to call you about that, but figured you may be occupied tonight.”

“Thanks for that. But it’s okay.”

“Fortunately, another detective here has the same model phone, so I was able to charge it. I checked the contacts and the call history. The only thing I noticed was a lot of calls with Lisa Barronson. Almost 20 calls in the past week, in fact.”

Hogan related the information about Lisa that he had discovered in his meetings with the neighbors. “So that fits,” he told Walker. “Was there any more information in the contact listing in his phone?”

“Yeah, there was. Let me see here...” The moments of silence seemed like hours to Hogan. “She lived at 149 West 108<sup>th</sup> Street. No apartment number was listed.”

Hogan wrote the information in his pad. “That’s great, Tom. Anything else – work number, e-mail, anything?”

“Yeah. She used an e-mail address of llb01@gmail.com.”

“We may need to check the history of that account, once we know the address that Christian used.”

“Right. I’d sure like to know where their personal belongings are. Even their clothes. Everything’s just disappeared.”

“When we do find them, we probably have our killer,” Hogan responded. “Thanks.” Hitting the END key on his cell phone, Hogan turned to Kathy and smiled. “Got it, Kathy. Thanks for the good idea!”

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At 9:00 Sunday morning, Hogan got off the Number 1 train at 110<sup>th</sup> Street and walked south to 108<sup>th</sup>, then east until he spotted building number 149. As he walked up the cold concrete steps, the front door of the building opened and a man in his 50s stepped into the brisk air. As he did, he spotted Hogan and waited there, holding

the door open for him. Hogan smiled and uttered his thanks, and then stepped into the lobby of the building. He walked up to the collection of mailboxes in the wall to his right and began reading the names starting in the top left corner. About two-thirds of the way through, he saw one marked *Lisa B.* As many people in New York, particularly women, are very hesitant to make their full names public, it didn't surprise him that there was only a last initial. He continued looking at the rest of the names, and didn't see any others that were even close to Lisa Barronson. So he assumed he had found her in apartment 5B, and headed to the stairs. Out of breath when he reached the fifth floor, Hogan stopped to take thirty seconds of deep breaths, and then walked to the front of the building. Moving across the hall to number 5A, he knocked on the door. Moments later, the door opened slightly, the safety chain still in place, and a white-haired woman peeked through the crack at Hogan.

"Yes?"

Hogan held his identification up to the door so she could see it. "My name is Matthew Hogan, Ma'am. I'm a private investigator, and I'm working with NYPD on an investigation."

"What sort of investigation?" she asked, still peering out at him.

Hogan again tried to ease into breaking the news. "Something involving Lisa Barronson."

"Lisa? She's such a nice girl. She couldn't have done anything wrong."

"No, she didn't. Somebody else did."

"What do you mean?"

Hogan hesitated a few seconds, and then: "She's dead. Somebody killed her."

The woman's eyes opened wide, and she whispered, "Oh, my God" several times. She looked back up at Hogan, her sad eyes pleading with Hogan. "Who would do anything to Lisa? She was so sweet."

"That's what we plan to find out, Ma'am. I'd like to ask you a few questions to get anything that may help us."

"Am I a suspect?"

Hogan thought about the scene at the Cloisters, and what had been done to and with the bodies. He shook his head. “No, not at all. But you may have seen or heard some things that will help, Ma’am.”

Her eyes and facial muscles relaxed as she managed a wan smile and closed the door quickly. Hogan heard the chain sliding loose, and the door opened fully. The small woman was still smiling slightly as she told him, “Please call me Maggie. That’s much more comfortable for me. Won’t you please come in, Mr. Hogan?”

Hogan walked into the small apartment, and the smell of flowers instantly took him back to his grandmother’s apartment as a small boy. *Maybe all old ladies use the same air scents, who knows*, Hogan chuckled to himself.

“Please have a seat,” Maggie suggested, sitting on the sofa. Hogan did the same. “How did she die?”

Wanting to omit the gory details, Hogan said simply, “She died from a blow to the head. Her body was found with the body of a man, Chris Morton.”

“Christian?” she exclaimed. “Not him, too!”

“I’m afraid it happened, Maggie. So you knew him as well?”

“Yes. We met several times, and in fact, I made dinner for both of them just last week.

“I see,” Hogan responded, removing his pad and pencil. “What night was that?”

She thought for a moment. “It was Tuesday.”

“And they were both here?”

She nodded, saying warmly, “We had such a lovely evening.”

“Did you talk about anything in particular?”

Maggie thought for another few moments. “I do remember that they said they planned to go to the Cloisters on Thursday. They wanted to see the art, and eat dinner at the New Leaf Café.” She looked toward the door, at nothing in particular. “I wonder if they made it,” she said softly, mostly to herself, and then looked back at Hogan.

“I think they probably did, Maggie. Their bodies were found on Friday morning at the Cloisters. Their deaths probably occurred sometime late Thursday night.”

“That’s so tragic,” she whispered, settling into the back of the sofa.

“Is there anything else that you talked about on Tuesday?”

She thought again for several moments, shaking her head slowly. “I’m sure there were other things we talked about, but I can’t remember anything specific.”

“Okay. What else can you tell me about Lisa?”

“What would you like to know?”

“How long did you know her?”

“She moved here about two years ago, I think. It’s hard to remember exactly – I’ve seen so many people come and go.”

“So you’ve been here a long time?”

“Ever since my husband and I were married forty years ago.”

“Wow. I’m sure you have seen a lot of people. Does your husband still live here?” Hogan asked, noticing the wedding band on her left ring finger.

“No. My Albert passed away five years ago last month. But he took care of me, at least to the point where I could continue living here. It’s really the only home I’ve known.”

“You do seem to be very comfortable here,” was the only response Hogan could think of. Getting the conversation back on track, he continued, “Did Lisa have many visitors?”

“Just Chris for the past year or so. I do remember another woman visiting her on many occasions, and I actually met her several times. Her name is Sarah. Sarah Thomas, I think.”

Hogan made a note of it, nodding. “Good. Do you know anything else about her? An address or phone number?”

The woman thought again for several seconds.

“Actually, I do have something. A few months ago, she and Lisa were here, and Sarah gave me her cell phone number. They were going away for a long weekend, and wanted me to be able to contact

either one of them if there were problems with Lisa's apartment. I was kind of apartment sitting, you know." She smiled at Hogan.

"And do you know where the number is?"

She giggled. "Oh, right – now where did I put that?" She thought again, this time for much longer, and then suddenly got out of her chair and walked into an adjoining room. She returned about thirty seconds later holding a Post-It Note triumphantly in one hand. "Right where I left it – stuck on my calendar." She handed the note to Hogan, and he copied the number in his pad and returned the note to her.

"Thanks. And did Lisa see anyone the first year she lived here?"

"Now that you mention it, there was another man who would come to see her very often. But that stopped about the time that Chris started visiting her."

"Can you describe the man who came by for the first year she was here?"

She thought again for several moments. Hogan suspected that it was a sign of aging, that the brain takes longer to produce and transmit ideas. Maybe not – it was just a hunch.

"He was big."

"Do you mean tall?"

"Not that tall. Taller than Lisa, maybe a few inches over six feet."

"So you mean big, like fat?"

"Maybe he was a little overweight, but not tremendously so. He just looked pretty strong, like one of those football players."

"That helps," Hogan responded, remembering the strength he thought would have been needed to handle the bodies. "Anything else?"

"He was black."

"I see," Hogan said, continuing to make notes in his pad. "Do you remember his name?"

Another thinking pause. "I do remember seeing them in the hall one time. We weren't introduced, but she did refer to him as Tony. And come to think of it, she later told me that he worked in a gym on Lexington Avenue. I guess that explains his muscular build."

“That’s also helpful, thanks.” Hogan stood. “I don’t want to take any more of your time. You’ve been a big help, Maggie. Thank you.” He handed her one of his cards. “If you do think of anything else, please call me.”

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Back in his apartment, Hogan called the number that Maggie had given him. A female voice answered promptly after the second ring. “Hello?”

“May I speak to Sarah Thomas, please?”

“Who’s calling?”

Typical New York caution, or mistrust, Hogan thought. “Matthew Hogan. I’m a private investigator.”

“This is Sarah. And this is about Lisa, isn’t it?”

“So you’ve heard about her.”

“Who couldn’t? It’s been all over the news. I still can’t believe it.” Hogan thought he heard some very soft sobs. “But I expected to be contacted by the police, not a detective.”

Hogan ignored the inaccurate description of his job. “Well, I’m actually working with NYPD on this one, Sarah. Can we talk?”

“Yes. But I’m really tired right now. I am off tomorrow, though.”

“That’s fine – it would probably be better to talk in person anyway. When and where can you meet?” They agreed to meet at a Starbucks in SoHo at 10:00 Monday morning. On a roll, Hogan immediately called Conrad Morton, arranging to meet him for lunch on Monday.