

CHAPTER FIVE



THE CORONER

The alarm clock sounded a little too early for Hogan's liking; he rolled over in his bed and turned it off, not even looking at the time. He could just tell it was too early. After what seemed to him hours later, he awoke with a start. It was 11:00 in the morning. He stumbled to the kitchen, put a mug of water in the microwave, and sat at the table, looking at his lists from the night before. The familiar beeping from the microwave interrupted his sleepy stare, and he went to the cabinet and took out the jar of instant coffee. Putting his more-than-generous teaspoonful into the water, he stirred it and returned to the table. He looked again at the lists as he sipped the hot coffee.

"Might as well take them in order," he said, looking at the list of what he needed. "Starting with the coroner." Taking his coffee, he went into the bathroom to make himself presentable to the world. Then, donning a green cotton sweater, he walked toward the subway, headed for the morgue on 34th Street.

*

*

*

The front office was deserted and quiet, except for a clerk writing busily at a desk to Hogan's right. He looked up from the cluster of papers spread before him, not smiling. His greeting was equally as cold. "May I help you?" It was also forced and insincere.

"I'd like to take a look at the Trembell file."

Death on Broadway
Randolph Mase

The clerk looked through several papers, paused, opened a drawer and shuffled through some more papers, paused again, then looked up at Hogan. "Trembell?"

Hogan, remembering his frustration with Percy Smith, already felt his patience fading. "Jason Trembell. The actor."

The clerk again shuffled through even more papers, opened another drawer and fingered through some file folders, then looked back up at Hogan. "That particular file is not available."

"What do you mean, it's not available?"

The clerk nervously cleared his throat, looking down at the papers on the desk. "It's not available for review until the deceased is buried. And that's tomorrow."

"I know that is tomorrow. But what's that, a new law? Or just an office policy?"

"That's just the way it is," the clerk responded curtly.

Hogan opened his wallet, holding his identification so close to the boy's nose that he was forced to look at it. "I know that's not the way the law reads."

But the boy, who looked to be no older than eighteen, did not relent. "Sorry. Not until tomorrow."

Hogan was becoming increasingly agitated at the tactics. "Very well. An attorney should be able to resolve this very quickly for us," he continued, reaching for the telephone on the desk.

"Wait a minute," the clerk pleaded. "That's not necessary."

"Fine. Then show me the file."

"I can't."

Hogan's impatience and anger continued to mount. "What do you mean, you can't? I want to see that file!"

"But..."

"Now!" Hogan shouted, slamming his open hand on a pile of papers on the desk. "Or I'll have the entire New York legal community here in five minutes!"

Death on Broadway
Randolph Mase

The clerk was now visibly nervous, his hands shaking and beads of perspiration forming on his forehead and temples. "But I have instructions not to let..."

"Instructions from whom?" Hogan interrupted. "This is very interesting." The clerk again looked at the papers, avoiding Hogan's stare. "Well?"

"I was wrong, sir. That was another case I was thinking of. Here it is." He handed Hogan a manila folder with only a few papers in it.

Hogan nodded his thanks, not commenting on the feeble recovery by the clerk, and took the folder to a chair against the wall. On the death certificate, he saw the estimated time of death was 3:00 a.m. on October 20. The cause of death was listed as cerebral trauma, accompanied by severe bleeding, caused by striking against a sharp object. The time of the examination was recorded as 8:03 a.m. on October 20, and the attending physician was Paul W. Richards, M.E. The narrative portion of the report read:

All body organs normal; no discernable marks on the body other than a cut, $\frac{3}{4}$ inch deep, $\frac{1}{4}$ inch wide, 1 inch long on the right upper part of the forehead at the edge of the scalp; blood alcohol content in bloodstream is about 0.13. No trace of other drugs. Blood type of the deceased is A Negative.

Hogan also found a photograph of the body, and noted all pertinent facts in his pad. He stood and returned to the desk, handing the folder to the clerk.

"Where can I find Dr. Richards?"

"I'm not sure." The intimidated young man again looked down at the desk.

"Do we really have to do this again?" The clerk looked up at Hogan, then back down at the papers on the desk. "Where is he?" Hogan tried again.

Death on Broadway
Randolph Mase

The clerk shuffled through some papers on the desk. "Let me see," he stalled, "uh, he might be..."

"Might be where?" Hogan interrupted.

"Well...I think he might be..."

"Where the hell is he?" Hogan shouted, again slamming his open hand on the papers, yelling even louder than he had before.

The frightened clerk jumped visibly. "In his office. Down the hall. Third door on the right." His shaking hand pointed in that direction.

"Thank you," Hogan replied, still consumed with anger and shaking his head. As he walked toward the indicated office, he heard the clerk pick up the telephone.

Hogan knocked on the third door and walked in. At a counter in the far corner, he saw a man in a white lab coat hanging up a telephone.

"Yes?" the man said, turning to face Hogan. The man appeared to be in his forties and was very tall; Hogan guessed six foot five. With the dazzling red hair and bushy red eyebrows and mustache, the man presented an almost menacing appearance.

"Dr. Richards?"

"I am," the man responded, approaching Hogan, "and I understand that you've been giving my assistant a difficult time, Mr..."

"Hogan. But it was me who was getting the hard time. I wanted to see a file, and he said something about having instructions not to let it be seen. What's that all about?"

"Silly boy. He's got so much to learn." The doctor walked to a desk, leaning against it. He neither motioned nor invited Hogan to follow him, but Hogan did, leaving the door open.

"I've been hired to investigate the death of Jason Trembell. I understand that you were the medical examiner."

"I was."

"And you examined the body at the Vermont Theater, and performed the autopsy here?"

"I did."

Death on Broadway
Randolph Mase

The doctor, all 300 pounds of him, stood motionless against the desk, his arms folded in front of him. Hogan looked up at the hulking figure. "I've got a few more questions for you."

"The police have said it was an accident. What are you trying to prove?"

"I've heard the same thing. Let's just say that I'm simply trying to satisfy some skeptics." The doctor nodded, not relaxing his posture. Hogan took his pad and pencil from a pocket. "Where was the body when you first examined it?"

"Right where we found it. On the floor of Trembell's dressing room, under the corner of a table."

"And how was it situated?"

"On his back, as I recall."

"Was there much blood?"

"As much as you would expect from a wound like that. There was a lot on his face, and I noticed some on the corner of the table."

"Anywhere else?" Hogan prodded, "such as the floor, wall, or bed?"

"None that I saw," came the reply. "Of course, my concern was with the corpse. I let the police worry about evidence."

"I see," Hogan nodded, continuing to write. "And when did you leave the theater?"

"About seven."

"And you got there about six?"

"Yes."

"You didn't stay there too long, did you?"

The doctor stood erect until he towered over Hogan. "It doesn't take me long to determine if somebody is alive or dead," he replied testily.

"I guess not. Anyway, you left the theater about seven. Did you come straight to the morgue?" His only answer was another nod. "But your report states that the autopsy was performed at nine. What took two hours?"

Death on Broadway
Randolph Mase

The doctor was becoming more impatient with each question. "An autopsy is not an instantaneous job. A thorough examination takes at least an hour. Add to that the travel time, the time to prep, and the fact that the time on the report is the time the autopsy was completed, and you've got your answer."

Hogan persisted. "What exactly was the cause of death?"

"I'm sure you read it in my report. Cerebral trauma accompanied by severe bleeding, caused by striking against a sharp object." Hogan suppressed a smile as he wrote the words, taken verbatim from the report.

"Realistically, Dr. Richards, do you think that a fall of only three feet or so against the corner of a wooden table could cause a cut that is three-quarters of an inch deep?"

"It's possible," the big man responded.

"Maybe. And do you think the death was accidental?"

"That's the police finding, not mine. I'm concerned with the immediate cause of death, not with the circumstances."

Hogan continued, still writing notes in his pad. "Your report also states that there was a significant amount of alcohol in Trembell's blood. In fact, he was drunk."

"That's correct. It was well over the legal limit. That's probably why he fell."

"But I have information that he wasn't even drinking that night. That seems odd, doesn't it?"

The doctor stood even more upright, if that was possible, to loom even more threateningly over the much smaller Hogan. "It seems that your information is wrong, that's what it seems. He was drunk." He crossed his thick arms over his massive chest, glaring at Hogan. "Is there anything else?"

"I guess not. Thank you for your time." He left the office and the morgue, nodding and smiling at the nervous clerk as he passed.

*

*

*

Death on Broadway
Randolph Mase

Back in his apartment, Hogan sat at the kitchen table, took a sandwich out of its paper bag, opened a can of soda, and ate his lunch while again reviewing his notes. He found his WHAT I KNOW list and added to it.

14. *Cause of death was cerebral trauma and severe bleeding caused by a sharp blow to the head. Richards repeated the words verbatim from the report. No other marks found on the body.*
15. *Significant alcohol (.13%) found in Trembell's blood, even though the waitress at the Midway says he was not drinking.*
16. *Seems to be some secrecy in the morgue about the Trembell death. Had I asked to see the body, I probably would have been subjected to an autopsy myself!*
17. *The wound in his head was 3/4" x 1/4" x 1" and bled profusely. I doubt it could have been caused by a 3-foot fall against the corner of a table. Visually confirmed by photograph of the body.*
18. *Blood type on the table matches that of Trembell – A Negative.*

Hogan leaned back, looking at his watch. 1:45. "Enough time to visit the sergeant," he said, tapping his pencil on the table. "Let's see what he can tell me."