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Opening Extract from...

A Man Lies Dreaming

Written by Lavie Tidhar

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A Man Lies Dreaming

Lavie Tidhar

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'He had gone beyond good and evil, and entered a strange landscape where nothing was what it seemed and all the ordinary human values were reversed.'

Hugh Trevor-Roper,
report for the Secret Intelligence Service

'Clichés, stock phrases, adherence to conventional, standardised codes of expression and conduct have the socially recognised function of protecting us against reality.'

Hannah Arendt, *The Banality of Evil*

In another time and place, a man lies dreaming.

I

Extract from Wolf's Diary, 1st November 1939

She had the face of an intelligent Jewess.

She came into my office and stood in the doorway though there was nothing hesitant about the way she stood. She gave you the impression she had never hesitated a moment in her life. She had long black hair and long pale legs and she wore a summer dress despite the cold and a fur coat over the dress. She carried a purse. It was hand-threaded with beads that formed into the image of a mockingbird. It was French, and expensive. Her gaze passed over the office, taking in the small dirty window that no one ever cleaned, the old pine hatstand on which the varnish was badly chipping, the watercolour on the wall and the single bookshelf and the desk with the typewriter on it. There wasn't much else to look at. Then her gaze settled on me.

Her eyes were grey. She said, 'You are Herr Wolf, the detective?'

She spoke German with a native Berliner's accent.

'That's the name on the door,' I said. I looked her up and down. She was a tall drink of pale milk. She said, 'My name is Isabella Rubinstein.'

Her eyes changed when she looked at me. I had seen that look before. In her eyes clouds gathered over a grey sea. Doubt – as though trying to place me.

'I'll save you the trouble,' I said. 'I am nobody.'

She smiled at me. 'Everyone is somebody.'

'And I do not work for Jews.'

At that the clouds amassed in her eyes and stayed there but

she remained calm, very calm. Her hand swept over the room. 'I do not see that you have so much choice,' she said.

'What I choose to do is my own damn business,' I said.

She reached into her handbag and came back with a roll of ten-shilling notes. She just held it there, for a long moment.

'What is it about?' I said. At that moment I hated her, and that hatred gave me pause.

'My sister,' she said. 'She is missing.'

I had two chairs for visitors. She pulled one to her and sat down, crossing one leg over the other. She was still holding the notes between her fingers. She didn't wear any rings.

'A lot of people are missing nowadays,' I said. 'If she is in Germany I cannot help you.'

'No,' she said, and this time there was tension in her voice. 'She was leaving Germany. Herr Wolf, let me explain to you. My family is very wealthy. After the Fall our assets were seized, but my father still had friends, some even amongst the Party, and he was able to transfer much of our capital to London. I myself, and my mother, were both allowed to leave the country legally, and my uncles continue the family's continental operations in Paris. Only my sister remained behind. She is young, younger than me. At first she was beguiled by their ideology; she had joined the Free Socialist Youth before the Fall. My father was furious. But I knew it would not last.' She looked up at me, with a half-smile. 'It never does, with Judith, you see.'

All I could see was the money she was holding between those long slim fingers. She moved the roll of notes back and forth, idly. I had been penniless before, and poverty had made me stronger, not weak, but that was in my former life. My life was different now, and it was harder to be hungry.

I said, 'So you arranged for her to leave.'

'My father,' she said quickly. 'He knew men who could smuggle people out.'

'Not easily,' I said.

'Not easily, no. Not cheaply, either.' Again that half-smile, but it flickered and was gone in a flash.

'How long ago was that?'

'A month. She was meant to be here three weeks ago. She never appeared.'

'Do you know who these men were? Do you trust them?'

'My father did. As much as he could be said to trust anyone.'

Something jogged my recall, then. 'Your father is Julius Rubinstein? The banker.'

'Yes.'

I remembered his likeness in the *Daily Mail*. One of the Jewish gangsters who grew rich and fat on the blood of the working man in Germany, before the Fall. His like always survived, like rats abandoning a sinking ship they fled Germany and re-established themselves elsewhere, in clumps of diseased colonies. They said he was as ruthless as a Rothschild.

'Not a man to cross,' I said.

'No.'

'Your sister . . . Judith? She could have been captured by the Communists.'

She shook her head. 'We would have heard.'

'You think she was brought to London?'

'I don't know. I need to find her. I *must* find her, Herr Wolf.'

She put the roll of notes on my desk. I left it there, though whenever I looked at her the notes were in my field of vision. The Jews are nothing but money-grubbers, living on the profits of war. Perhaps she could see it in my eyes. Perhaps she was desperate. 'Why me?'

'The men who smuggled her here,' she said, 'are old comrades of yours.'

There was nothing behind her eyes, nothing but grey clouds. And I realised I had misjudged Fräulein Isabella Rubinstein. There was a reason she had picked me, after all.

'I do not associate with the old comrades any more,' I told her. 'The past is the past.'

'You've changed.' She said that with curiosity.

'You do not know me,' I said. 'Do not ever presume to think that you do!'

She shrugged, indifferent. She reached into her purse and brought out a silver cigarette case and a gold lighter. She opened the case with dextrous fingers and extracted a cigarette and put it between her lips. She offered me the open case. I shook my head. 'I do not smoke,' I said.

'Do you mind if I do?'

I did mind and she could see it. She flicked the lighter to life and wrapped her half-smile around the cigarette and drew deep, and blew smoke into the cold air of my office. A draught came in through the window and though I was dressed in my coat I shivered. It was the only coat I owned. I looked at the money. I looked at her face. She was nothing but trouble and I knew it and she knew I knew. I had no business hunting for missing Jews in London in the year of our Lord 1939. I once had faith, and a destiny, but I had lost both and I guess I'd never recovered either. All I could see was the money. I was so cold, and it was going to be a cold winter.

When the Jewish woman departed, Wolf sat there for a long moment staring at the money. The smell of her cigarette hung in the air, rank and nauseating. He could not abide the smell of tobacco. Outside the window it was already dark. The cold clawed at the windowpane. Below he could hear the market shutting, the sound of whores sashaying into the night. His landlord's bakery on the ground floor had already closed for the day. He stared at the money.

He pushed the chair back, stood up and took the roll of notes and put them in his pocket. He set the chair back and went round the desk and stood looking at his office. The painting on the wall showed a French church tower rising against the background of a village, a field executed in a turmoil of brushstrokes. Three dark trees grew out of a tangle of roots rising in the foreground of the church. On the bookshelf, a personally inscribed copy of *Fire*

and Blood, Ernst Jünger's memoir of the Great War, sat next to J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit*, Madison Grant's masterpiece of racial theory, *The Passing of the Great Race*, a collection of Schiller's poetry, and a row of Agatha Christies.

There was no copy of Wolf's one published book. He stood looking at the shelf. He had saved only a handful of the collection of books he had amassed before the Fall. Their loss ate at him. But he had already lost so much. He went to the hatstand and put on his hat. His shadow fell on the wall like a dirty coat. Wolf opened the door and went outside.

Berwick Street, Soho, on a cold November night. Electric lights cast the pavement in a gloomy glow. The dirty bookstore was open. Whores loitered outside. He stood under the awning of the bakery when his landlord came out of nowhere like a Jew in the night.

'Herr Edelmann,' Wolf said.

'Mr Wolf,' Edelmann said. 'I am glad I caught you.'

He was a short, pudgy man with hands and a face as pale as flour. He had a furtive manner. 'What is it, Herr Edelmann?' Wolf said.

'I hate to bother you, Mr Wolf,' Edelman said. He wiped his hands at his sides as if he still wore his apron. 'It is about the rent, you see.'

'The rent, Herr Edelman?'

'It is due, you see, Mr Wolf.' He nodded, as though confirming something to an unseen audience. 'Yes,' he said, 'it is due some days now, Mr Wolf.'

Wolf just stood there and looked at him. The baker hopped from leg to leg. 'Cold, isn't it,' he said. Wolf watched him in silence.

'Well,' Edelman said finally, 'I hate to ask, Mr Wolf, really I do, but it is the way of things, isn't it, it is the nature of the world.' His whole stance seemed apologetic, but Wolf wasn't fooled. There was a flash of steel underneath the baker's quivering exterior. Wolf didn't deign to reply. He reached into his pocket and pulled out the wad of money and peeled off two ten-shilling

notes, watching the baker's eyes all the while. He returned the rest to his pocket. He held the money in his hand. The man seemed hypnotised by the money. He licked his lips nervously. 'Mr Wolf,' he began.

'Will this do, Herr Edelmann?' Wolf said. The man made no move to take the money, waiting for it to be offered. 'It is the nature of the world that evil exists,' Wolf said. 'It is not money that is evil but the means to which it is put to use. Money is an instrument, Herr Edelmann, it is a lever.' He held the money steady in his fingers. 'A small lever to move small people,' he said. 'But give me a large enough lever and I would move the very world.'

'That's very interesting, Mr. Wolf,' Edelmann said. He was still looking at the money. 'Do you wish to pay for a month upfront?'

Wolf handed him the notes. The baker took them and secreted them about his person.

'I would require a receipt,' Wolf said.

'I will put one through your door.'

'Make sure that you do,' Wolf said. He touched the brim of his hat, lightly. '*Guten abend*, Herr Edelmann.'

'Good evening to you, too, Mr Wolf.'

Wolf walked off and the baker disappeared into the darkness like a shadow. There had been too many dark streets and too many shadows, melting into the night, never to be seen again. Wolf thought about Geli. There had not been a day gone past when he had not thought about Geli.

The whores were gathered in Berwick Street. They stood light as shadows, mute as stone. Wolf hesitated as he passed nearby. With his approach the girls grew lively, and raucous laughter welcomed Wolf's approach. In a passageway between buildings a fat whore was squatting with her back to the brick wall, crapping. He caught a glimpse of her pale loose flesh, her garments round her ankles. 'Looking is for free,' someone nearby said. A girl no older than sixteen flashed him a smile. Her lips were red, set in a white, made-up face. Her teeth were small and uneven. 'Hey, mister,' she said. 'You want a quick one?' She spoke English

with an accent he knew well and with a vocabulary learned from reading cheap novels.

Wolf said, 'I've not seen you here before.'

The girl shrugged. 'What about it,' she said.

'You are Austrian,' he said, in German.

'What about it.'

In the alleyway the fat whore farted loudly and laughed as her bowels emptied steaming onto the cold flagstones. Wolf averted his gaze.

'You should find another line of work,' he told the girl.

'Go to hell, mister.'

Underneath the streetlights a few johns were already passing, eyeing up the girls. In a few hours trade would be brisk. Another whore approached them. She was someone Wolf recognised, Dominique, a half-caste girl. 'Pay no attention to him,' she told the new girl. 'It's just Mr Wolf's way with us. Isn't it, Mr Wolf?' She smiled at him. She had light brown skin, red lips and cool eyes. The new girl looked at Wolf uncertainly. He knew the expression in her eyes. Trying to place him. When he had first come to London many had known his name. Now there were precious few who cared. 'Fräulein Dominique,' he said, politely.

'Mr Wolf.' She turned to her sister in trade. 'Mr Wolf never goes with one of us.' Her smile was mocking. 'Mr Wolf only ever looks.'

The Austrian girl shrugged. There was a dull look in her eyes. Wolf wondered how she had come to London, what she had escaped from. He could imagine it well enough. He bore the scars of such a departure himself. 'What is your name?' he said.

'It's Edith.'

He touched the brim of his hat. 'Edith,' he said.

'You can fuck me for ten shillings,' the girl said.

'What Mr Wolf wants,' Dominique said, 'it would take more than a ten-shilling whore to satisfy.'

Wolf didn't answer back. There was never a point, with prostitutes. In Vienna before the War he had seen them on the

Spittelberggasse, each girl behind a lighted window, some young, some old, some sitting, some standing, some doing their hair or smoking cigarettes. For a long time he had walked past the low one-storey houses, with his friend, Gustl, watching them, and the men who came to use their services, how the lights in the rooms would be turned off once a deal was concluded. One could tell by the number of darkened windows how trade was going.

The fat whore – her name was Gerta – had emerged from the alleyway pulling up her undergarments. She waved at Wolf cheerfully. He repressed a shudder of revulsion. The young girl, Edith, had lost interest in him. A couple of men on the other side of the street were looking at her with interest, cattle traders examining livestock. They called to her and she was gone, into the shadows. The half-caste Dominique was suddenly very close. She was taller than Wolf. Her lips were by his ears. Her breath warm on his skin. 'I know what you want,' she said. 'I can give it to you.'

There was a strength about her; he feared and desired what she could sense in him. Her hand reached down and pressed painfully on the front of his trousers. 'Yes,' Dominique murmured, 'I know. And I would enjoy doing it to you, too.'

For a moment he was frozen; she had snared him with lust; what the Jews called the 'evil inclination', the *yetzer hora*. But he was stronger than her; stronger than that. He removed her hand. 'I'll thank you not to touch me again,' he said. Dominique looked him down and up. Her lips curled and then she too was gone, into the night. Wolf walked on.

Wolf's Diary, 1st November 1939 – *contd.*

At night the fruit and vegetable market closes and a different type of market springs beyond my office window. Whores. How I hated whores! Their bodies were riddled with syphilis and the other ills of their trade. The disease was but a symptom. Its cause was the manner in which love itself has been prostituted.

I did not feel pity for the young girl, Edith. No. Instead I felt a cold anger, the sort of anger that had once driven me to oratory, when it had burned bright and strong. To see a Germanic girl prostituted in this way, in a foreign land, was a reminder to me of my own failure, of the way the land itself had been prostituted. Once Germany bled like a soldier; now it bled like a whore. It was a slow death; it was a death of love. I walked past the girls and in the night I felt unseen eyes watching my passing; but there are always eyes watching in the night. A mystery is not when one's action goes unobserved. Rather it is an action to which no witness is willing to come forward.

I know what Isabella Rubinstein feared. I made my way down through Walker's Court onto Rupert Street, passing the White Horse and the Windmill cinema onto Shaftesbury Avenue. Theatreland. The lights burned bright here and theatregoers strolled along the avenue mingling with pickpockets and dollymops. At the Apollo Theatre on the corner the electric signs advertised Patrick Hamilton's *Gaslight*. A pair of coppers I knew by sight went past me, eyeing the whores openly. I nodded to them and went on.

Gerrard Street was full of little clubs and dusty alcoves. At this time of night gentlemen were heading out to supper with their wives, and young men of a literary bent were debating the merits and faults in the poetry of H.B. Yeats, Ezra Pound and Modernism in general. On the corner with Dean Street I saw a group of Blackshirts standing together in a dark mob, eying the passers-by with sullen hostility. On a wall I saw a placard for Mosley's election campaign. Oswald's handsome British face stared out at me with its dapper moustache and ironic smile. I saluted him, crisply. Then I went into the Hofgarten.

It lay at the bottom of a narrow staircase behind a grey wooden door that bore no plaque. It was not a members-only club but then it was not *not* a members-only club, either. It was a place for like-minded people to meet and talk of the

past. I abhorred it for all that it represented and all that it wasn't, and couldn't be. I pushed the heavy door at the bottom of the stairs and went in.

It was dark and smoky inside. The smell of heavy Bavarian beer hung in the air like a peasant woman's thick skirts hanging to dry. I could hear laughter, men's drunken talk, the tap-tap-tap of chess pieces against a chessboard. A small piano stood in the corner, but no one was playing. It was too early and years too late for anyone to be playing the Horst Wessel Song.

I could feel eyes on me. Heard the pitch of conversation change. In years past I would have revelled in it. Now I set my jaw and bore it. I hung up my coat and my hat and made my way to the bar counter.

'What could I get you, sir?'

'I would like a herbal tea,' I said.

He was a big ugly brute of a man; a fine Aryan. The face he turned on me began to open its maw in a display of mockery or outrage, revealing a wealth of gold. He truly was a man who carried his valuables on his person. He never did finish, though. He took me in and his face changed and his mouth closed without voicing whatever wisdom it was he had been about to impart.

'Tea, sir?'

'If you would be so kind.'

'But of course. Of course. Herr—'

'Wolf,' I said.

He rubbed his hands together, as if he were cold. 'Wolf. Of course.'

'Has Herr Hess come in yet?' I said.

At that he all but stood to attention. 'Not yet, sir,' he said.

I gestured to an empty table in the corner. 'I shall be sitting over there,' I said. 'Please be so kind as to bring me the tea when it is ready.'

He nodded that great big head of his. A farmer boy from Austria, of the kind I had grown up amongst. Salt of the

earth. I wondered if he was smarter than he looked. I made my way to the empty table and sat down. I was glad of the darkness of the room. Too many familiar faces, too many reminders of a past the world had already forgotten and I was trying to. I fingered the roll of money in my suit pocket. I had not been to the Hofgarten in three years.

'Our fight is for the soul of this country, and the soul of the world. We must struggle, for nothing comes easily to men such as us, who will change the world. We, the Blackshirts, have been called, and we shall lead this nation to a new and higher civilisation. There is a cancer growing in our midst, the cancer of Judaism. This is our revolution. We shall be baptised in fire. Remember, you have a voice. You have a vote. Vote Mosley. We shall triumph in adversity—'

'Turn the God damned radio off,' someone said.

His shadow fell on the table before I saw him. I may have dozed off. The cigarette and pipe smoke hurt my eyes. My tea had been cooling on the table for some time.

'Hess,' I said. He had thick wavy black hair and thick black eyebrows. His smile was genuine but cautious. I didn't blame him.

'Wolf,' he said. For a moment, I thought he might try to hug me. I rose from the chair and shook his hand, formally.

'It is good to see you again,' he said.

'You, too,' I said. I looked at him. He bore up well. London had been good to Hess. His hair looked luxurious and shiny. His jacket was styled in black with the lightning bolt of the Blackshirts on the lapels. It looked tailor-made. He wore riding boots and a paunch. Hess had grown fat in this foreign city, after the Fall.

'You are doing well,' I said.

He patted his belly. 'I get by,' he said.

I gestured at the chair opposite and sat down again. He followed. 'Can I get you anything?' he said. I shook my head. 'You never come to the Hofgarten,' Hess complained. 'Never

come to see me. I wish you'd let me help you, at least. Money—'

'I do not want your money.'

He sighed. 'I know,' he said. He signalled to the barman. The lad brought over a small brandy and placed it at Hess's elbow. Hess swirled it around, sniffed it appreciatively, and sipped.

'Good?' I said.

'Wonderful.'

I slapped the glass out of his hand and it smashed to the floor, the brandy spilling on Hess's hand. I heard chairs scraping back, saw three men rise and marked them. Hess shook his limp hand then sucked on his fingers. He stared at me mournfully. 'Bring me a napkin, please, Emil,' he said. He gestured at his men and they sat down again. 'You have an escort, these days,' I said.

'These are dangerous times,' Hess said. 'A man needs must take precautions.'

The big barman brought over a silk handkerchief. It was embroidered with RH. Hess wiped his hand clean fastidiously and gave it back. 'Thank you, Emil,' he said.

I stared at him across the table. 'I meant no disrespect,' he said.

'I'm sure that you didn't.'

'What is it?' he said.

'I need information.'

He nodded. 'I heard you were working as a private investigator,' he said.

'You heard correctly.'

His eyes grew as soft as his face. 'They called you the Drummer,' he said.

'I have always fought,' I said. 'But I have always fought for order.' I took a sip of my cold tea. 'There must be order in all things.'

'Yes,' he said. 'Of course.' He loosened his tie. 'What do you need to know?'

'I am looking for a girl. She would have been coming from Germany, to London.'

'I see. Without papers, naturally.'

'Yes.'

'Such a thing is not impossible, for a price,' he said.

'Tell me, Rudolf,' I said. 'Do many people disappear, en route from Germany?'

'Disappear how?'

I said, softly, 'She was a Jewess.'

He stared into my eyes. 'Wolf . . .' he said.

'Don't.'

'For the sake of my love for you,' he said. 'Don't ask me.'

'I need to know.'

'There are doors which are best left closed,' he said. He pushed his chair back and stood up. 'For the sake of our friendship.' He looked at me curiously. 'What do you care what happens to a Jew?'

'I don't.'

'Come and work for me,' he said, impulsively. He saw my face. 'With me, I mean. There is money to be made, power. I am someone here, Wolf. I am a man of influence.'

'Hess,' I said, 'you are a pimp and a thief. You have traded your honour for cash.'

'Don't use those words.'

'What words would you have me use?'

He laughed at that. 'Perhaps I've merely outgrown you,' he said.

'You have been reduced,' I said. 'While I remain the same. My integrity cannot be purchased so cheaply.'

'You are a shadow of what you once were. A ghost.' He laughed again, a sad, bitter sound. 'You died in the Fall; what is left of you makes a mockery of what you once were.'

I stood up too. He was taller than me, but he had always been the smaller man. 'Please,' he said, again. 'Do not go asking such questions, mein freund.'

'Give me a name,' I said.

> Hess sighed. He reached into his breast pocket and threw down on the table a *carte de visite*. I picked it up. Printed on thick, expensive paper, it contained an address in the East End and nothing more. On the back, a symbol I had not seen in some time: it was a swastika.

The night was full of eyes, watching. Wolf made his way out of the Hofgarten. At the end of the street the same group of Blackshirts was beating a man lying on the pavement. The man had curled in a foetal position, his hands uselessly covering his head. The Blackshirts wore thick-soled boots and they were kicking the man savagely. A pair of policemen were watching from the sidelines without expression. The air was scented with the smell of men's sweat and blood and violence. It was a smell Wolf knew well, had in fact delighted in. Two white teeth lay on the ground beside the victim. Wolf paused as he walked past them. One of the Blackshirts wiped sweat from his face with the hem of his shirt. 'What are you looking at,' he said. Wolf shook his head. He walked on. Behind him the victim was whimpering in a broken voice. Oswald Mosley stared down at Wolf from the public walls, smiling winningly. Wolf walked on.

There were eyes in the night, watching. He felt shadows gathering about him and he stopped and started, dawdling in front of shop windows, trying to catch a reflection, a clue as to the unseen watchers' identity. Perhaps there was no one there. But he could scent them, hunters in the night. He had used the name Wolf in the 1920s and now he used it again, in London. He had always felt himself to have an affinity with wolves.

The *carte de visite* was in his suit pocket. He did not like seeing Hess again, did not like being reminded of what had passed. How Hess had risen while he himself fell. There was a dull ache in his left leg. It had broken in the camp and never healed properly, and ached in the cold. He had been there three days short of five months when he escaped. Sometimes he missed Germany with a powerful ache, with every fibre of his being. He knew he was unlikely to ever see her again.

The ’40s were coming. Christmas was in the air and along Charing Cross Road early decorations were already going up. A man behind a cart was selling roasted chestnuts. He had the swarthy complexion of a gypsy. The city was filled with refugees from the Fall, but the borders were closing, and tensions were mounting everywhere. Wolf bought the evening edition of the *Daily Mail* and glanced at the headlines as he walked. ‘Duke of Windsor in Support of Mosley’ said the front page. Well, no surprise there. The abdicated king had been a keen supporter of Wolf’s own politics, too, back when Wolf still had politics. He was a fool to marry the American woman, though. Love was a weaker force than hate, and Wolf could not help but despise the former monarch for that.

There. Was that a shadow moving behind him? Wolf ducked into an alleyway. A man in a black suit with an unremarkable face. But the man continued past, seemingly oblivious. Wolf emerged from the alleyway. He found himself by Collet’s Bookshop, still open at this hour, coffeehouse revolutionaries conspiring amidst leftwing pamphlets and communist propaganda. The man in the black suit had disappeared. Wolf walked on, stopped by Marks & Co. to browse the books outside. Popular fiction, books thumbed and marked. Dashiell Hammett’s *The Maltese Falcon*. A row of P.G. Wodehouse novels. Another copy of *The Hobbit*. A review copy of Anthony Powell’s *From a View to a Death*. But Wolf had little love for the weakness of the English tongue. German had a martial tune; it was neither tarnished nor afraid. He walked on.

Oxford Street coming up, Wolf walking aimlessly, checking his reflection in shop windows. He had black hair receding at the temples, a high forehead, a strong chin, ears sticking out slightly. No moustache. He could no longer abide the moustache.

There!

He turned suddenly and rapidly and began to walk with purpose the way he’d come. A second youngish man in a black suit and tie like an underemployed undertaker had begun to turn the other way, too late. In moments Wolf was on him, grabbing

the man by the lapels, slamming him against the brick wall. He pressed his face close into the stranger's. 'Who are you?' he said, speaking low. 'What do you want?'

The man didn't struggle. 'Excuse me, pal,' he said, 'I think you got the wrong idea there.'

Despite his diction his accent came across loud and clear and American. Wolf released him. The man had not struggled though he looked like he could have put up a fight, had he wanted to. Under the cheap suit was a body kept trim and in shape. 'Why are you following me?' Wolf said. The man looked embarrassed.

'Do you know the way to the British Museum?' he said. 'This damn city can be confusing. I think I lost my way somewhere.'

'Yes, you did,' Wolf said. He stared hard at the man. 'The museum is closed.'

'It is?'

There was a twinkle in the man's eyes. Wolf's hands tightened on the man's lapels. The man still didn't struggle. He seemed to regard Wolf with some irony. It was not a quality Wolf possessed, or much appreciated.

'Where is your friend?' Wolf said.

'Excuse me?'

Wolf spat. His phlegm hit the brick wall over the man's shoulder and slid down, slowly. 'I won't give you and yours a second warning,' he said. He turned just as abruptly and walked off. He did not watch to see if the other man was following him still.

* * *

In Berwick Street the whores were busy at their trade. The watcher in the dark had seen the detective exit his office and speak to the young German whore and to the coloured one, and seen him leave, but he remained behind. He had time. All the time in the world. He eyed the whores.

He was wrapped in shadows. He was like a ghost, or H.G. Wells's invisible man. In his invisibility there was power. He felt

the knife under the coat. The smoothness of the grind versus the sharpness of the point and edge. How good it felt. He watched the whores, watched a sailor talking to the young German, or was she Austrian, he understood only hazily the difference but it didn't matter. The sailor took her by the hand and they vanished into the shadows. He felt the knife, stroking the metal. They couldn't see him, nobody could. All he had to do was choose. He felt so hard, painfully so, but it was a good pain: it was a pain of anticipation. Soon. He had no need to rush. Waiting was half the pleasure, though perhaps he did not see it that way. It was just a fantasy. He wouldn't do anything. Not yet. But he could imagine it, standing there, watching the women, holding his knife. The things he would do to them. They didn't even see him. But he saw them.

Later he saw the detective come back. A small figure, so unremarkable. But you couldn't be deceived by appearances. It was for the detective that he was doing this. He watched the man's weary steps. The detective passed so close to him, nearly brushing against him, and he held his breath, but the detective didn't even notice him. No one ever did. Once the detective was past he pressed his back against the bricks and watched the whores again, his hand in his pocket. He was so hard and then he was soft and there was a pleasant warmth. He wasn't going to do anything. Not yet.

But soon.

* * *

In another time and place Shomer lies dreaming.