Lovereading.co.uk
Helping you choose your next book

You loved your last book...but what are you going to read next?

Using our unique guidance tools, Love**reading** will help you find new books to keep you inspired and entertained.

Opening Extract from...

Sleep Like the Dead

Written by Alex Gray

Published by Sphere

All text is copyright © of the author

Please note that this extract is taken from an uncorrected proof.

This Opening Extract is exclusive to Love**reading**.
Please print off and read at your leisure.

SLEEP LIKE THE DEAD

Alex Gray

sphere

SPHERE

First published in Great Britain in 2011 by Sphere

Copyright © Alex Gray 2011

The moral right of the author has been asserted.

All characters and events in this publication, other than those clearly in the public domain, are fictitious and any resemblance to real persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

All rights reserved.
No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, without the prior permission in writing of the publisher, nor be otherwise circulated in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

HB ISBN 978-1-84744-391-5
C ISBN 978-1-84744-392-2

Typeset in Caslon by M Rules
Printed and bound in Great Britain by
xxxxx

Papers used by Sphere are natural, renewable and recyclable products sourced from well-managed forests and certified in accordance with the rules of the Forest Stewardship Council.



Sphere
An imprint of
Little, Brown Book Group
100 Victoria Embankment
London EC4Y 0DY

An Hachette UK Company
www.hachette.co.uk

www.littlebrown.co.uk

This book is dedicated to Blake and Eloise with love.

We are such stuff as dreams are made on,
and our little life is rounded with a sleep.

William Shakespeare,
The Tempest

PROLOGUE 1

It always began in the dark. Not the crepuscular velvet blue of romantic nights but the sort of total blackness one would find deep underground – a coal-black cleft where one wrong move might mean stepping out into a bottomless void.

Darkness heightened every other sense, even the rank smell of fear prickling skin that was already damp and chill. And there was something else; something foul and rank as though some dead creature was buried underfoot.

The sound of a heartbeat hammering within a tightening chest was the only sign of life until . . . until that voice called out, soft and heavy within the thick blackness.

Then a sigh, relief that he had come again. That it would soon be over. Knowing he was here was better than the anticipation that had made this feverish sweat trickle down between thin shoulder blades.

Knowing he was here made what was to happen next inevitable.

The fingertips touched an unresisting throat, moving slowly in a mock caress. Then a pause, as though to consider the next move. But it was only the hesitation of a cat toying with its prey. That was understood.

With a suddenness that never failed to shock, the hands encircled the small white throat and squeezed hard. Then harder.

As ever, dark turned to red, raging behind each eyeball, protesting soundlessly as he pressed the carotid artery, cutting off breath and life.

Afterwards, blessed silence and a flicker of light from the street lamp outside as eyelids opened on the familiar room.

The bedside clock registered two a.m. Four long hours until daylight returned and life could resume its pattern; hours that would be witness to a creature fearful of sleep, desperate for rest.

It was always two a.m. when that nightmare act of murder was disturbed by wakefulness. And with it, the belief that one day it would finally happen.

PROLOGUE *2*

The sound of the doorbell ringing was just part of an unremembered dream, wasn't it? Eyes still gritty with sleep, the man turned over but the noise continued to drill into his brain, commanding the wakefulness that he resisted.

Thrusting the covers from his body, he felt the cold floor on the bare soles of his feet. The red figures on the bedside clock told him it was still the middle of the night. Bad news. It was always bad news when someone came ringing your doorbell.

He thudded downstairs, one hand on the wall to steady himself, wondering what was wrong. Whoever stood there, one finger pressed on the doorbell, wanted his attention. Now.

Bad news. Wasn't that what his parents had always told him? The call in the night. The scream of an ambulance through the darkness.

He fumbled for the light switch but somehow his hand didn't find it and he opened the front door instead. Wanting to stop that incessant ringing. Curious to know what was wrong.

Out of the dark came a figure then a flash of white as his head exploded in a moment of agonising pain, kicking him through time and space.

Then darkness descended for ever.

The man with the gun shook his head at the body on the floor.

Bad news, indeed.

CHAPTER 1

Detective Chief Inspector William Lorimer felt the swish of the plastic tape behind him as he entered the crime scene. He glanced at the house, one eyebrow raised in slight surprise. It was such an ordinary two-up, two-down mid-terrace, a modest suburban home, like thousands of others in and around this city in a district not particularly known for a high rate of crime. And certainly not for ones like this. But impressions could be deceptive, that was something he'd learned long ago, and as the Chief Inspector took another look around him his mouth became a hard thin line: scratch the surface of any neighbourhood and the veneer of respectability could expose all manner of human depravity.

The entire garden was cordoned off and a uniformed officer stood guard at the front gate, his eyes shifting only momentarily to the DCI. Lorimer turned to look behind him. Across the street a huddle of people stood, clearly undeterred by the driving rain, their curiosity or compassion binding them in a pool of silent anticipation. Three police vehicles lined the pavement, a clear sign of the gravity of the situation.

The incident had occurred sometime during the night yet the bright glare from a sun struggling to emerge from layers of cloud made a mockery of the situation. This was an ordinary Monday

morning where nothing like this should be happening. He could hear the hum of motorway traffic several streets away as people headed to work, oblivious to the little drama that was about to unfold. A bit in tomorrow's newspaper would command their attention for a few moments, perhaps, then they would dismiss it as someone else's tragedy and continue about their business, glad that it didn't impinge upon their own lives.

His business lay ahead, behind that white tent erected outside the doorway, keeping the scene free from prying eyes. Lorimer nodded, satisfied to see it in place. At least one journalist might be among that knot of watchers over the road, he thought wryly. Closing the gate behind him he ventured up the path then stopped. Someone had been violently sick out here, the traces of vomit splashed over a clump of foliage not yet washed away by earlier torrential rain. Whatever lay inside had been shocking enough to make one person's stomach heave.

With a word to the duty officer the DCI let himself into the house, his gloved hands closing the door carefully behind him.

The body lay spreadeagled on the hall carpet, the gunshot wound clearly visible in the artificial light. He was clad in thin summer pyjamas, the shirt open revealing his bare chest. Any traces in the immediate area would assist the scene of crime officers in learning a little more about the victim's end, as would the bullet lodged within his head. For Lorimer, the story was one that seemed sadly familiar; a gangland shooting, maybe drug related. The single shot to the temple indicated a professional hit man at any rate, he thought, hunkering down beside the body.

'What can you tell me?' he asked, looking up at Detective Sergeant Ramsay, the crime scene manager, who had arrived before him.

‘Well, so far as we can make out there was no call from neighbours about hearing a weapon being discharged.’ The officer shrugged as if to say that didn’t mean much at this stage. To many people, having a quiet life was preferable to giving evidence in a criminal trial.

‘The killer’s weapon may have been fitted with a silencer, of course,’ Ramsay continued, ‘or the neighbours on either side could just be heavy sleepers. We haven’t found a cartridge case, by the way,’ he added.

‘So who called it in?’ Lorimer wanted to know.

‘Colleague of the victim, sir. Was coming to give him a lift to work. Didn’t get an answer to the doorbell so he looked through the letterbox, saw the body . . .’

‘. . . And dialled 999,’ Lorimer finished for him. ‘Suppose that was the same person who was sick outside?’

Ramsay nodded. ‘Poor guy’s still shivering out there in the patrol car. Had to wrap a blanket around his shoulders. He’s been trying to give us what information he can.’

‘Okay. What do we know so far?’ Lorimer asked, looking at the dead man, wondering what his story had been, how he had been brought to this untimely end. The victim was a man about his own age, perhaps younger, he thought, noting the mid-brown hair devoid of any flecks of grey. For a moment Lorimer wanted to place his fingers upon the man’s head, stroke it gently as if to express the pity that he felt. No matter what his history, nobody deserved to die like this.

‘Kenneth Scott,’ the DS told him. ‘Thirty-seven. Lived alone. Divorced. No children. Parents both dead. We haven’t managed to get a lot else out of the colleague yet,’ he added, jerking his head in the direction of the street. ‘Too shocked to say much when we arrived. After he’d seen his pal.’

Lorimer continued to focus upon the dead man on the floor.

The victim's eyes were still wide with surprise, the mouth open as if to register a sudden protest, but it was not an expression of terror.

'It must have happened too quickly for him to have realised what was happening,' Lorimer murmured almost to himself. 'Or had he known his assailant?'

'There was no forced entry, sir, but that might not mean all that much.'

The DCI nodded a brief agreement. Men were less likely to worry about opening their doors to strangers, if indeed this had been a stranger. And a strong-armed assassin would have been in and out of there in seconds, one quick shot and away.

Lorimer sat back on his heels, thinking hard. They would have to find out about the man's background as a priority as well as notifying his next of kin. The pal outside had given some information. They'd be checking all that out, of course.

'What about his work background?' Lorimer asked.

'They were in IT, the guy out there told us, shared lifts to a call centre on a regular basis.'

Lorimer stood up as the door opened again to admit a small figure dressed, like himself, in the regulation white boiler suit. His face creased into a grin as he recognised the consultant forensic pathologist. Despite her advanced state of pregnancy, Doctor Rosie Fergusson was still attending crime scenes on a regular basis.

'Still managing not to throw up?' he asked mischievously.

'Give over, Lorimer,' the woman replied, elbowing her way past him, 'I'm way past that stage now, you know,' she protested, patting her burgeoning belly. 'Into my third trimester.'

'Right, what have we here?' she asked, bending down slowly

and opening her kitbag. Her tone, Lorimer noticed, was immediately softer as she regarded the victim. It was something they had in common, that unspoken compassion that made them accord a certain dignity towards a dead person. Lorimer heard Rosie sigh as her glance fell on the victim's bare feet; clad only in his nightwear that somehow made him seem all the more vulnerable.

'Name's Kenneth Scott. His mate came to collect him for work at seven this morning. Nobody heard anything last night as far as we know,' he offered, making eye contact with Ramsay to include him in the discussion. This was a team effort and though he was senior investigating officer Lorimer was well aware of the value everyone placed on the scene of crime manager who would coordinate everyone's part in the case.

'Hm,' Rosie murmured, her gloved hands already examining the body. 'He's been dead for several hours anyway,' she said, more to herself than for Lorimer's benefit.

'Rigor's just beginning to establish. May have died around two to four this morning.' Rosie glanced up at the radiator next to the body. 'I take it that's been off?'

'I suppose so,' Lorimer answered, feeling the cold metal under the layers of surgical gloves. He shrugged. 'It's still officially summertime, you know.'

'Could have fooled me,' Rosie replied darkly, listening to the rain battering down once again on the canvas roof of the tent outside. 'That's two whole weeks since July the fifteenth and it's never let up.'

Lorimer regarded her quizzically.

'St Swithin's day,' she told him. 'Tradition has it that whatever weather happens that particular day will last for forty days. Or else it's more of that global warming the doom merchants have been threatening us with,' she added under her breath.

‘But this fellow’s not been warmed up any, has he?’ Lorimer said. ‘Nothing to change the time of death?’

The pathologist shook her blonde curls under the white hood. ‘No. Normal temperature in here. Wasn’t cold last night either so we can probably assume it happened in the death hours.’

Lorimer nodded silently. Two until four a.m. were regarded as the optimum times for deaths to occur, not only those inflicted by other hands. He had read somewhere that the human spirit seemed to be at its most vulnerable then. And villains seeking to do away with another mortal tended to choose that time as well.

They’d find out more after Rosie and her team had performed the actual post-mortem and forensic toxicology tests had been carried out. Until then it was part of his own job to find out what he could about the late Kenneth Scott.

‘It’s okay, take your time,’ he told the man sitting on the chair beside him. Paul Crichton was still shivering with shock, a mug of hot sweet tea clasped in his hands. The car had taken them back to police headquarters and Lorimer had insisted on using a family room, not one of the usual interview rooms. Here there were soft furnishings in unthreatening shades of beige and brown; Lorimer had chosen to seat them both in a couple of easy chairs, a low coffee table handy for the tea and biscuits he’d ordered up. Victims came in all sorts of guises; the dead man on the floor back there, his family and friends, this work colleague who’d had the misfortune to find him. He glanced at the young man again. What age was he? Late twenties, perhaps? His dark hair tumbled over his face as he drooped forwards, the call centre lanyard swinging into space.

Maybe he wouldn’t find out much about Kenneth Scott at this interview, but it was always worth a try. Despite the horror of finding

their mate lying dead, some people had a strange sort of fascination with the whole scene of crime process. He'd noticed the man's eyes following Rosie Fergusson as she'd left the house, bag in hand. But whatever questions were on his mind had remained unasked. Now it was the detective who sought information and Lorimer hoped that Crichton was in a fit state to give him the details he wanted to know.

'How well did you know Mr Scott?'

Crichton licked his lips. 'We'd been mates ever since he came to the call centre,' Crichton replied. 'Turned out he lived not all that far from me so we decided to car share. Cost of petrol,' he added, attempting a shrug and failing, his shoulders still raised like twin hillocks of tension.

'What can you tell me about him?'

'Oh, he was a decent sort of bloke. Lived on his own. No kids. Least not any that I know of,' Crichton gave a weak grin as though such a mild joke was permitted under the circumstances.

'Girlfriends?'

Crichton nodded. 'He had been seeing someone from work. A lassie name of Frances Donnelly. Don't think it was anything very serious, though. Just the odd drink and that.'

Lorimer made a note of the name. She'd be near the top of his interview list. Women were often better at giving personal details in between tears of grief.

'It's obviously a huge shock to you, Mr Crichton,' Lorimer continued, trying a different tack.

The man nodded his head. 'Can't believe it. Ken wasn't the sort of person you'd expect anyone to harm. I mean . . .' he tailed off, as though struggling to find the right words. 'Don't want to sound bad. But Ken was a really ordinary sort of bloke. Didn't do drugs, never really got plastered either. Nice fellow, but . . .'

'Not the type to keep dodgy company?' Lorimer suggested.

‘Exactly,’ Crichton nodded eagerly, ‘Couldn’t say he was a boring sort either, cos he was nice, you know? We talked about the footie on our way to work, mostly. And work itself, I suppose. There was nothing bad about him.’

‘Did he ever talk about his previous marriage?’

‘No,’ Crichton shook his head. ‘Subject never really came up. I only knew he’d been married when there was a whip-round for one of our young guys getting hitched. I remember Ken saying he’d tried that once himself.’

Paul Crichton leaned forward, cupping the mug of tea in both hands. ‘It was as if he’d made a big mistake and didn’t want to be involved like that ever again.’ He looked sideways at Lorimer. ‘Know what I mean?’

Lorimer merely smiled. Too many marriages ended unhappily nowadays and he was only grateful that his own had lasted the distance. But it would be worth finding out about the ex and asking questions.

‘How long ago was it that he’d been divorced?’

‘Sorry, haven’t a clue. He was living on his own all the time I knew him. About eighteen months, I suppose since he joined the centre. So it must have been before that.’

‘And you have no idea who might have wanted him dead?’

Paul Crichton shuddered visibly. ‘Hell, no!’ he muttered. ‘It must have been a mistake. I mean, you hear of that don’t you? Didn’t the IRA shoot folk by mistake?’

Crichton had leaned back, relaxing a little, Lorimer noted, this new idea releasing him from the shock that had gripped him. The words would flow now, a release from the strain that had gripped him so tightly.

‘That must be it, don’t you think? A case of mistaken identity!’ he finished, sitting up straighter as though he’d scored a point.

‘That is always a possibility that the police must consider, Mr Crichton,’ Lorimer told him blandly. Yet it wasn’t something that happened often in this city. Still, if Crichton wanted a lifeline to rescue him from the awfulness of his experience, he could have it.

‘I take it the car sharing scheme was pretty much a regular thing?’

Crichton nodded. ‘Week about. This was my week, Ken’s would have been next week. We always had the same shifts. We even had the same week off on holiday. This was our first day back.’

‘Do you know if Mr Scott was away anywhere?’ Lorimer tried to keep his tone as neutral as possible. This might be leading somewhere and he didn’t want Paul Crichton becoming overexcited.

‘I was in the Canary Islands with my girlfriend. Fuerteventura.’ He shrugged. Ken said he might go up north to see some mates. No idea whereabouts, though.’

‘But someone else from work might know?’

‘Suppose so. Don’t have a lot of time to chat at that place. Talk enough on the calls to IT support as it is,’ he added. There was something rather defensive about Crichton’s tone and Lorimer noticed he was digging his fingernails into the soft flesh of his palms. He was trying to hold it all together; not show any signs of the emotions churning his stomach. There was just one last detail Lorimer needed then he’d let the poor bloke go.

‘Your workmates were aware that you travelled together week about?’

Crichton’s eyebrows rose in surprise. ‘I suppose so. It was no big deal. Loads of folk car share these days. Cost of petrol,’ he repeated in case the police officer had missed it the first time. Lorimer ignored the slight. The man was still in the aftermath of shock.

‘Okay, I think that’s us done for now, sir. If you can leave us your contact details that would be appreciated. Anything else you might think of, give me a ring,’ Lorimer drew a card out of the box on his desk and handed it over. ‘Don’t suppose you’ll feel like going to work now?’

Crichton shook his head. ‘Think I’ll phone in sick,’ he said. ‘Pick up my car later on.’

‘I’ll find someone to drive you home, sir. But I’d be grateful if you don’t mention the incident to anyone at the call centre until the police have had time to contact the management there first.’

Lorimer stood up and offered Crichton his hand. It was like shaking hands with a wet fish, the young man’s hand was so sweaty and cold. A sudden vision of Ken Scott came to mind, his limbs dead and cold, rigid now with the onset of rigor.

A nice, ordinary bloke, his mate said. Perhaps. In Lorimer’s line of work there were often hidden depths to the most ordinary appearances. Maybe there had been more to this victim than Paul Crichton could ever have imagined.

‘No sign of the ex-wife, sir,’ Detective Constable Annie Irvine shook her head, an expression of annoyance on her face. ‘We have her last known address but there’s no sign of any car ownership, so no joy there.’

‘Employer?’

Irvine made another face. ‘Hasn’t signed on and there’s no trace of tax being paid for the last two years.’

‘What about full-time education?’

‘Ah,’ Annie’s mouth took a little time to close as she pondered this option. ‘She’s well into her thirties, but I suppose . . .’

‘New life after marriage? New directions?’ Lorimer suggested. ‘It happens, you know.’

'Oh, and talking of new things, there's that new detective constable in with His Nibs right now, sir. Omar something,' Annie risked a smile as she left Lorimer's room.

Lorimer nodded. His day was so full of distractions from the important matters like the sudden death of an ordinary man; he'd clean forgotten that this was the starting date for a new member of his department. Detective Constable Omar Adel Fathy had come with the highest recommendations from his previous division in Grampian Region. He'd passed out of Tulliallan with the best results of his initial training too, Lorimer remembered from reading the fellow's CV. *A fast tracker*, Detective Superintendent Mitchison had told him, pointedly. It was a matter of pride to the Superintendent that his CID team were mostly university graduates; and a matter for scorn that DCI Lorimer had chosen to drop out of his own university course to join the police force. He'd have to see Fathy sooner or later, he supposed, but he hoped Mitchison would keep him for now.

Lorimer's hopes were short-lived.

'Ah, Detective Chief Inspector Lorimer,' the nasal tones of the Detective Superintendent greeted him from the doorway and Lorimer gave an inward groan even as he stood up to receive his visitors.

Detective Superintendent Mark Mitchison strode into the room, ushering in the man by his side.

Lorimer's first impression of Fathy was how much of a contrast he presented to the Super. DC Omar Adel Fathy was a slightly built young man, bright and quick in his movements as he came forward to shake the DCI's hand. Northern Egyptian, Lorimer guessed, from the darkness of the man's skin. Nubian blood somewhere judging by that gracefully sculpted head, he thought, recalling the statuary he had seen during his history of art years,

though this particular man lacked the height he associated with those elegant people. Beside him Mark Mitchison looked washed out, his conventional handsomeness faded by contrast.

'It is a pleasure to meet you, sir,' Fathy told him, giving the merest hint of a bow as he spoke. But it was not an obsequious sort of gesture, more an innate courtesy. The direct way he looked Lorimer in the eye, a smile hovering around his mouth, was instantly appealing to the DCI. Here was someone he could work with, he thought. Someone who'd not suffer the sort of bullshit that Mitchison doled out on a daily basis.

'Detective Constable Fathy comes with a glowing report,' Mitchison drawled and Lorimer was heartened to see that this utterance had the effect of making the Egyptian frown slightly in embarrassment.

'Good,' Lorimer said. 'You'll be ready for anything then? Like a new murder case, hm?'

Fathy's grin was answer enough.

'I'll leave you gentlemen, then, must press on,' Mitchison nodded to them both. 'Door's always open if you need to talk, Fathy.' Then he was gone.

Lorimer exhaled in relief. His immediate boss was the only thorn in his flesh in a job that he loved. When his previous Super had retired the word on the grapevine was that Lorimer himself would step into his shoes, but that hadn't happened, and, apart from a couple of secondments as acting Superintendent, Lorimer still hadn't gained the expected promotion. It was only a matter of time, his wife Maggie had reassured him. But Lorimer wasn't so sure. The fast trackers with university degrees like the man before him were the ones destined for greater things, he believed.

'Sit down, Fathy. That's the correct pronunciation, is it? Fa-thy?'

'Yes, sir. The TH is hard, almost like a V sound. Of course many will call me fatty,' he grinned, showing perfect white teeth. Lorimer returned the smile. The officer's spare frame gave the lie to that.

'This murder inquiry, sir?' Fathy continued. 'May I be included in the investigation team?'

'Possibly,' Lorimer told him. 'The actions have already been given out but I think you might be able to accompany DC Irvine, at least for today. Hopefully we'll have it wrapped up soon,' he raised his eyebrows in a rueful gesture. It was every officer's hope that a murder case would be quickly solved. The longer it took, the harder it was to find the perpetrator.

Fathy's answering nod seemed to indicate that he understood exactly what the DCI meant and Lorimer wondered just what sort of cases this young man had tackled in his brief career.

Later, on his own, Lorimer had the opportunity to check on DC Fathy's past experience. It was just as Mitchison had said. A bright and able police officer who had taken part in some fairly high profile investigations. Yet he had asked especially for a transfer to Strathclyde Police. No particular reason had been given and Lorimer had a sudden uneasy feeling that it might not have been just to enhance the young man's promotion prospects. Had he been unhappy in Grampian? And if so, why? There were often jealousies within the police force, officers jockeying for the few senior positions available. Had someone resented Fathy's obvious potential? Or had he been too pushy? He was very keen to play a part in the new case. But perhaps as the new boy he should be trying to keep his head down for a bit and settle in. Lorimer stared out of the window, wondering. He'd taken an instant liking to the handsome Egyptian. It would be a pity if he failed to fit comfortably into his team.