

The Shadow of Vengeance

*How far can you bury the past
before it finds its way back?*

The Shadow of Vengeance

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Foreword

There are books you read, and there are books you devour — books you disappear into, or perhaps even get lost in. *The Shadow of Vengeance* undoubtedly belongs to the latter category. This masterpiece is more than a thriller: it is a sultry cocktail of suspense, style, and psychological depth. A literary film noir, put to paper with a pen dripping with elegance.

From the first page, you enter a world where nothing is what it seems. A jazz club forms the beating heart of the story — a place that is both inviting and repulsive, where melancholy and mystery accumulate like cigarette smoke against the ceiling. The characters who gather here all wear masks. Some out of necessity, others out of conviction. What they have in common is their desire. For recognition, for revenge, for love — for the truth, even if it is unbearable.

At first glance, *The Shadow of Revenge* seems like a classic whodunnit: there is a crime, a secret, a search. But it soon becomes clear that the core of the story is not about the question 'who did it', but rather: why. What drives a person to the edge of the abyss? How far would you go to right what feels unjust — even if the past may already be irretrievably lost?

Through an ingenious structure with carefully measured flashbacks, the reader is gradually initiated into the lives, choices, and scars of the main characters. The timelines intertwine like jazz improvisations: unpredictable, emotional, but all with an underlying logic. Here, every word is weighed, every silence meaningful.

Beneath the seemingly cool style bubbles a deep emotional intensity. The Shadow of Vengeance is not only about guilt and punishment, but about identity, loss, and the façades we put up to survive. It is a story that leaves echoes long after you have closed the book.

So take a seat. Order a glass of whiskey. Let the smoke swirl around you. And immerse yourself in a world where the past is not dead — only hidden. Until now.

Wolf Goldmund

The city awakens

Doengdoeng... doengdoeng, the steel wheels of the train cars grind and squeak over the seams of the rails.

It is still early, but a freight train is already making its way to its destination. Along the river, you can also hear the regular sound of engines propelling cargo ships forward. Gradually, you can also hear cars and trucks in the distance making their way to start their work. The city is slowly awakening, even in the center.

A sea of people moves through the streets like a colony of swarming ants.

They jump on buses, hail taxis, cycle hurriedly through the center, or rush to the subway.

Shops are gradually opening, newsstands have their newspapers ready, and coffee and tea houses are already doing a roaring trade at this hour. A quick cup of black gold to wake up and grab a sandwich on the go.

The rat race has begun. Overcrowded trains with smelly and well-smelling people, packed together. A motley crew on their way to work and school. Young, old, handsome, ugly, tall, short, a diversity of travelers who take the same route every day.

They don't know each other. Except for a few who strike up a conversation, everyone stays in their own little world, looking around curiously or apathetically, exploring and recognizing. Some read, others listen to music, as their large headphones betray, and some have wires coming out of their ears. Various smells mingle.

Jack scans the heads of his fellow passengers with searching eyes. He remains hopeful. Could his train girl, as he calls her, be sitting there? She usually sits in this car.

He continues scanning and suddenly sees Alice reading. A broad, blissful smile appears on his face, dispelling his unease. He waves to her as he tries to make his way through the packed crowd to reach her.

They see each other on the same train almost every day and chat. She is happy to see him again. They get off and, as the weather is nice, Jack suggests walking to the park. "No problem for your work, Jack?" Alice asks.

"No, I can come in later, I have flexible hours, which is a great system," Jack replies. "Great," chirps Alice, "because I have to start later today, but I had forgotten about it. You know how it is, you're stuck in that daily routine: get up, shower, grab a quick bite to eat, and then rush to the train, only to realize that there was no need to hurry because you're already sitting in a carriage." They both laugh.

The sun is shining in a blue sky and after a short walk they sit down on a bench. They agree that Jack will pick her up after work so they can have a drink together before going home.

People trickle into the office in the morning and, while they start up their computers, they get a coffee and greet each other. The coffee machine is running at full speed: espresso, cappuccino, latte macchiato. Everyone flocks to it.

Work is also calling for Edward Sinclair. But as the director of one of the largest banks, he doesn't have to

be the first to arrive. His status allows him to come to work later. That's why he first has a quiet breakfast at home in his beautiful wrought-iron veranda orangery, where his wife Leonore has set the table. His newspaper is also waiting for him, so he can keep up with the latest news.

Edward Sinclair comes from an old Scottish banking family with roots in Edinburgh. The Sinclair dynasty began its rise in the financial world in the 18th century as gold traders and later expanded into international banking. Edward grew up on the Sinclair estate Braemar Hall, a stately country house in the Highlands, where he received a strict, elitist education. He studied economics at Oxford and was known for his sharp mind and aloof charisma. Although his family had groomed him to lead the family empire, Edward initially chose a different path and became a diplomat in Geneva. Only later did he work as an advisor to financial institutions. After the death of his father Alistair Sinclair, he took his place at the Imperial Sinclair Trust Bank, a discreet and powerful network of influential accounts and political connections. His marriage to Leonore, a woman of mixed European nobility, was partly a love match, partly a strategic alliance.

Leonore's ancestry strengthened his position in international circles.

It was time for Sinclair to leave for work.

Edward Sinclair wasn't particularly fond of crowded public transport and preferred to take a taxi to work every day. After all, the bank was in the same city where he lived, namely London. In principle, he could have afforded a Rolls Royce with a chauffeur, but his stately

mansion didn't have a garage. Besides, he didn't feel the need for one.

The taxi turns onto Regent's Way and stops at number 45, where The Imperial Sinclair Trust Bank rises like a monument to power and history. The building is located in the City of London, on a prestigious corner, between glass skyscrapers, where old money still whispers.

The façade is imposing and neoclassical, built of sand-colored natural stone with columns reminiscent of a temple to financial gods. Iron gates bearing the Sinclair family emblem—a stylized griffin with two keys—guard the entrance. The building does not exude modern sleekness, but a kind of unshakeable strength. As if it has always stood there, untouched by economic storms or political fluctuations.

Inside, the marble is cool underfoot, the atrium high and impressive. Brass accents, crystal chandeliers, and discreet security betray the class that walks in and out here every day.

"Good morning, Mr. Sinclair," he is greeted from all sides as he enters the building. He gives a brief nod to everyone he encounters.

With a firm stride, he walks to the private elevator, which is only accessible with a biometric key. His office is on the top floor—the "imperial level," as the staff calls it.

His office has a mix of timeless luxury and subtle modernity. Dark walnut, floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking the Thames and the London skyline.

Behind his desk hangs a painting of his father – stern, almost judgmental – while the bookshelves hold a carefully curated collection of legal works, market analysis, and classic literature.

On the left is a discreet door to a private lounge: leather armchairs, a decanter of whiskey on a silver tray, an old record player with jazz records—a nod to his club. But behind that luxury lies the isolation of power. Edward often works here late into the night, alone with his doubts, his files...his past.

In his office, he stands in front of the large window that offers a beautiful view of the city when Katarina, his secretary, enters.

"Good morning, Mr. Sinclair," she greets him cheerfully with a smile on her face.

"Ah, good morning, Katarina," he replies cheerfully, "Have you finished the reports for this afternoon's meeting?"

"Yes, take a look," she says, nodding toward the stack of documents she is holding.

"I just finished them and I also added a few recommendations that we can discuss.

I think they can help us improve efficiency," Katarina says proudly.

"That sounds good," Sinclair responds with a smile, "you always have valuable insights. What are your thoughts on the current strategy?"

Katarina sits down opposite Sinclair and leans forward slightly: "I think we need to focus more on customer relations. We have a strong foundation, but there is room for growth. Maybe we could organize a few events to get to know our customers better."

"That's an excellent idea. You have a good sense of what our customers want. Have you thought about possible locations?" Sinclair wonders.

"Yes, of course, I have a few options in mind. I can show them to you later this week. And maybe we could also invite some of our top customers to an exclusive gathering?" Katarina suggests.

Sinclair nods in agreement: "That would certainly help to strengthen ties. You really think ahead, Katarina, I appreciate that!"

With a shy but satisfied smile, she adds, "Thank you, Sinclair. I enjoy working with you, and you inspire me to be the best I can be."

"The feeling is mutual, Katarina. You bring a lot of energy to the team. Let's make sure we present these ideas well in the meeting.

Work out your proposal for the event in more detail, as well as which customer list you had in mind for this. Involve marketing and sales in this, and when everything is more concrete, come back to me with it."

Sinclair values Katarina because she is very competent. She works in an organized and efficient manner and has a keen eye for detail.

Her creativity enables her to quickly come up with solutions to problems that arise. She is an empathetic woman who is always ready to listen, which makes her popular with her colleagues. She is loyal to Sinclair and believes in his vision, but if she notices that something is not right, she will not hesitate to talk to him about it.

She exudes confidence when you see her walking with her back straight, charming and with big eyes.

Katarina Novak had a different life before London. A life filled with the sound of boots on cobblestones, snippets of forbidden conversations, and the shrill cry of night trains. She grew up in Prague in an intellectual family. Her father was a professor of literature and her mother a pianist. Her father suddenly disappeared after a nighttime arrest, and she knew she had to leave. After the communist takeover in 1948, the family got into trouble because of their liberal ideas. When Katarina was 18, she fled with her older brother to England, where she ended up in London through aid organizations, arriving as a nobody. She was a refugee, fighting against the cold, the language, and her memories. Yet she showed resilience. She learned English in evening classes and started out as a cleaner in an archive, until her language skills and dedication enabled her to start as a typist in a small law firm. And she worked her way up thanks to her sharp mind, multilingualism, and remarkable people skills.

She eventually ended up as a secretary at a prestigious bank, where she met banker Sinclair, whom she

admired and was fascinated by. He was everything she was not: established, confident, unmoved by the chaos of the world. He came from a different class, a different life. To her, he was initially a safe figure. Someone with power and direction. Yet there was something in her that touched him. Her seriousness, her calmness, perhaps also her silent sadness. He saw her not only as an efficient force in the office, but as a woman, as a human being.

This Czech woman has long, wavy, dark brown hair, and her striking green eyes radiate kindness. She is always dressed classically and stylishly.

When Sinclair asked her to stay late one evening to go over some papers, something changed. Glances became touches, distance became closeness.

Banker Edward Sinclair had a reputation to uphold; smartly dressed, always on time, and with a look that said more than words ever could. But behind the closed doors of his corner office, a different reality unfolded. His relationship with his secretary—charming, sharp-witted, and all too often in his vicinity—had long since ceased to be purely professional. It required precision to see each other. It usually happened after closing time, when the rest of the staff had already left the building. The soundproof walls and heavy wooden door of his office—once installed for confidential financial discussions—now also provided protection for other, less formal encounters.

They spoke little during those moments. Glances, subtle gestures, and the silence spoke for themselves. In a world where discretion was worth its weight in gold,

they had found their refuge, safe within the confines of his office at the end of the hallway.

On Tuesdays, she always arrived a little early. Not much, five minutes at most, but enough to maintain the illusion of coincidence. While the rest of the staff were still settling in at their desks, she was already in his office with the file he supposedly needed urgently. Their eyes met for just a little too long. Her fingers rested briefly on the paper, his hand came just a little too close. No one would find it strange. And yet they both felt they were crossing a line that had long since ceased to exist.

Edward was not a man who was easily thrown off balance.

But for several months now, he had caught himself moments of absent-mindedness, his thoughts wandering during meetings, his heartbeat quickening slightly when he heard her voice. She was smarter than most people around him, and she understood him. Not just as a professional, but as a man—as someone with doubts, fatigue, a longing for something that fell outside the lines. Their secret understanding slowly took shape. A lunch out that coincidentally coincided with a canceled appointment. A glass of wine after a late meeting.

What followed was a relationship they kept hidden from the outside world. She was single, Edward Sinclair seemed like a restless soul, searching for... perhaps some affection?

In any case, their colleagues were not to know about their romantic escapades.

They dined together in one of his apartments. In one of them, he would let Katarina live for free in gratitude for

her dedication and loyalty. She had also had a difficult past.

Edward covered all the costs for the interior design, furniture, and such, but she was allowed to choose whatever she liked. This became their love nest.

Together they talked about books, politics, music. But there was always a silence between them—a silence in which questions lingered.

For Katarina: Why me?

And for Sinclair: What do I really want from her?

Katarina struggled in silence. Was this man, with his well-tailored suits and controlled manners, really in love with her? Or was she a temporary distraction, a shadow in his otherwise neatly orchestrated life? She felt affection, even love. But also a growing uncertainty. She had promised herself never to become dependent, never to lose her identity in someone else.

And yet, every time he looked at her with that gentle gaze, she felt a glimmer of hope—and at the same time, fear. Because what if it ended? What if he let her go again, like so many before him had done?

Sinclair, for his part, was not free of conflict himself.

Behind his façade of calmness lay a man who had felt trapped for years by the expectations of his family, his work, his role. Katarina represented something he didn't know—survival, real courage, raw truth. He admired her, longed for her, but did he really dare to build a life with her? Or would he, as soon as things got difficult, fall back on the familiar path of security? Something developed between them that balanced between love and escape, between connection and unspoken distance. A love that might have been real, but not free. Not easy. Not without struggle.

Edward Sinclair is an influential banker who specializes in discreet asset management for ultra-wealthy clients. He is in his early 50s, stylishly gray at the temples, and has a calm but confident demeanor.

The successful banker also invested in real estate and even in a jazz club in Soho. Initially a dingy establishment, it grew into one of London's most popular clubs, called The Blue Note.

He also turned part of it into a separate room with cozy red velvet armchairs. Here, gentlemen could enjoy a delicious whiskey while smoking a good cigar. He had a large humidor full of exquisite whiskeys and excellent cigars. These two were a good match to enjoy in good company.

As he was very busy himself, he appointed a certain Joan Philips as manager.

Leonore's plan

When Edward, after work and dinner, sits with Leonore in the salon enjoying a hot cup of delicious, fragrant tea, Leonore asks him what he would think about moving.

"What made you think of that, darling?" Edward asks, somewhat surprised. "You know, Edward, I'm not really a city person. I find the hustle and bustle oppressive, and then there are the social obligations with endless dinners and gossip.

I long for peace and simplicity, dear Edward. You know, a garden with roses and other beautiful flowers; silence, the smell of old books in a library where the clock ticks slowly," Leonore dreams.

"I completely understand, Nore." Sometimes Edward used a disguised form of her name.

"What would you think of a villa in West London, away from the financial world and away from the eyes of the city. You would find peace there too, boy, at least if you didn't work all the time."

They had many pet names for each other.

Edward agrees to her proposal, partly to please her, partly out of guilt because he is so rarely at home.

"You have carte blanche, 'Nore. Feel free to find something you like, I'll evaluate your search afterwards," Edward concludes.

Leonore was born Leonore de Villiers. She is 45 and descends from a noble family known for their centuries-old estate in the Loire region.

She is the daughter of a prominent judge and an influential artistic but cool mother who still tries to control her daughter from a distance.

Thanks to her upbringing, she is steeped in etiquette, art, and languages. She speaks fluent French and German and spent much of her childhood in Sussex. She loves music, plays the harp, and reads extensively.

Leonore is also elegant, eloquent, and loyal. She possesses natural charm and sharp insight, making her more than just a pretty face at Sinclair's side.

Within their marriage, she is often the quiet force who is diplomatically and strategically able to advise or even guide him.

She married Sinclair at the age ^{of} 22, and even though the marriage was partly arranged, it grew into a complex but loving union.

Blues in The Blue Note

The smoke drifted slowly, curling above the tables of the Blue Note club and hanging like a thin curtain above the small stage of the jazz club. Velvet chairs were close together and an old piano tapped out the last notes of a song, while the audience clapped softly. The soft clinking of glasses at the bar mingled with the rustle of conversations at round tables.

In the corner sat George, trumpet on his lap, gaze fixed on infinity. He waited. Every Friday was the same. He played, she sang. But today, everything felt heavier.

Then Mia appeared, as always, just before her set. She moved like velvet in the twilight, her dress shimmering subtly in the subdued light, and her presence drew eyes as if she were the center of the universe. The microphone felt familiar under her fingers. She didn't sing, she whispered melodies into the ears of lonely people.

Her voice was dark, warm, and dangerous, like a glass of absinthe after midnight. Night after night, she enchanted her audience and captured their hearts with her voice. George looked at her as he had been doing for months—with longing, admiration, and something he preferred not to call jealousy.

But reality was inevitable. Mia didn't look at him. Her eyes always sought out Edward, the owner of the club.

He sat at the bar, Sinclair, in a gray suit, tight tie, hands folded around a glass of whiskey as if he had been carrying it for centuries. His gaze was not just focused on Mia. He listened with his whole body, tense, as if

trying to crack a code. And he had a smile that knew just a little too well what it did to people.

Then he walked between the tables as if the club was his kingdom, and Mia, his crown.

After the performance, Mia moved past the tables as if she wasn't looking for anything, but knew exactly who she wanted to find. Their eyes met for a second. Then she smiled.

"You look like you understand the music," she said, her voice even sultrier than on stage.

Sinclair raised his glass. "Or you sing as if you know more than you let on."

"Maybe," she leaned a little closer, "or maybe I just sing for those who listen closely."

Mia Delacroix is a talented but mysterious jazz singer who performs every night at the Blue Note.

Behind her velvety and seductive voice lies a woman with debts, secrets, and a burning ambition. She dreams of a life without worries, without the shadowy past that haunts her. This 35-year-old woman is half French, half Irish. Her mother was a jazz pianist in Paris. She always has red-painted nails and wears a pearl necklace that once belonged to her mother. Her soft voice can effortlessly switch from seduction to coldness. She was someone with her own plan, her own agenda. She came to London to sing her way into the elite, with Sinclair as her key, but not her final destination.

The powerful banker Edward Sinclair, who is successful and unapproachable, as well as the owner of the club, seems immune to superficial seduction until Mia enters the picture.