

ONE

Lone Wolf

Kriminalhauptkommissar Wolf spotted the dealer in his usual spot, sandwiched between two underage whores on a horseshoe couch in the far corner of the narrow, black-lit bar, the wall mirror to their back. Hidden speakers were whispering a 1970s disco hit. It sounded like the soundtrack to *Saturday Night Fever*.

Wolf smirked. St. Pauli never disappointed. He brushed past girls perched on shiny stools in glow-in-the-dark pastel bikinis and matching high heels that showed off voluptuous salon tans to their elderly “dates.”

“Hey, scumbag,” he said, walking up to the couch. It looked incandescent under the black light, but he knew it was pink velvet. “Where’s my cut?”

The alarm in the dealer’s eyes was immediately covered by reptilian lids. He shooed away his female companions with a large pinky ring and clunky bracelet. “What cut?” he said.

Wolf pulled out his SIG Sauer P6, cocked it, and slammed the barrel onto the dealer’s thigh. “This cut,” he said and pulled the trigger. The sound of the blast was muffled by pulverized femur—and followed by screams.

The loudest came from the dealer, who was writhing on the red carpet, clutching his smoking thigh with both hands.

“Where’s my cut?” Wolf repeated, pressing the bloody mess of flesh, bone, and black leather with a steel shank.

The guttural agony under his boot caught its breath.

Wolf regretted his carelessness. It would take more than saddle soap to clean his carefully oiled Red Wings. Son of a bitch. He increased the pressure on the wound.

The scream went up an octave under the flashing disco lights.

The rest of the bar averted its gaze. The whores and johns knew the drill. Nobody in St. Pauli ever saw anything that might jeopardize their own health. From the hidden speakers, the Bee Gees underlined the point with their falsetto *Stayin’ Alive*.

Wolf reached down and frisked the leather jacket at his feet with latex-gloved fingers. He came up with three small baggies. Each contained identical amounts of yellow powder. He figured a gram apiece. He opened one baggie carefully and dipped a finger inside. His tongue tingled disapproval. The meth was probably cut with baby laxative. He sighed. It would have to do until his next visit to the property room.

Wolf holstered his gun and sauntered over to the bar, barely registering the whores and johns making a scared, silent exit out the front door. He lifted a slightly warped plank that felt sticky, stepped onto the spongy black rubber mat, and turned sideways to slip through a narrow doorway hidden behind a black curtain.

In the stuffy back room, he spotted a fifth of Jack Daniels and a carton of unfiltered Camels. They were his now. He retraced his steps and hit the front door. Kool & the Gang were blasting *Open Sesame* as the evening air cooled his face.

Wolf chuckled and headed for the alley, which was keeping the beat by spraying rows of white neon across the tailfins of the glistening metallic-brown Mercedes. His old man, who drove the 220 SE off the factory floor in 1968, wouldn’t have approved of the blinking titties and spread legs overhead, but what the hell.

You did what you had to do.



Twenty minutes later, Wolf was sitting in the passenger seat of the Benz on the other side of the universe. The *nouveau riche* HafenCity district was originally outside the walls of Hamburg. The then-marshy island was where the city fathers executed pirates like the infamous Klaus Störtebeker back in 1401. Six centuries later, it had become the largest urban redevelopment project in Europe. Today, it housed nothing but new-money types who wore ridiculously large and complicated “aviator” watches that started at five thousand euros.

Wolf used his blue Polizei Hamburg ID card to form a monster line of yellow powder on the open mahogany-paneled door of the glove compartment. Quantity, not quality, he thought.

He snorted the whole thing in one loud, prolonged go. As the meth flamed down the back of his throat, he shut his eyes and squeezed his nose with thumb and forefinger. When the burning turned into that phlegmy feeling under his tonsils, he rolled down the window and spit it onto the pristine sidewalk.

Towering above his head were rows of luxury condos. Most were made of ugly concrete slabs that cast long moonlight shadows. Most had floor-to-ceiling windows with wide-open curtains that advertised obscene wealth.

In the sixth-floor penthouse at the far end of the street, a punk admired his own reflection in an oversized window and made adjustments to gelled hair that Wolf could almost smell from the street. Two minutes after the punk disappeared from the window, the apartment went dim but not all the way dark. He probably had all kinds of dimmers and timers to match his mood and schedule.

Five minutes later, the overly bright headlights of a Lexus

emerged from the underground garage and cut across the shadows, temporarily blinding Wolf even though he was already sitting low in his seat. He waited until the red brake lights flashed in his side mirror. Then he fired up the Benz, which purred to a start with reassuring calm. He eased the column shifter into gear and made a sweeping U-turn. Once the old diesel had straightened out, he switched on the headlights and started his loose tail.

A series of turns and bridge crossings brought them to the harbor. Wolf adjusted his hands on the wheel and followed his prey into the night.