

THE MURDER OF A REDHEADED BEAUTY

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THE MURDER OF A REDHEADED BEAUTY

A novel

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Chapter One

It looked like it was going to be another perfect day in this perplexingly hot and dry Swedish summer. On one early morning in June, exactly half a year since he was released from a county prison after serving time for committing a theft of a rare painting, a Rembrandt oil sketch, at an art museum, Edward Rubin Tegelkrona woke up at 7 a.m. with a strange thought in his head:

“Content is something very small.”

The old man looked at the small plastic clock that was posed on the bookcase, which was placed right across the room, approximately ten feet from his bed. It was 7 a.m. At the same time, he caught a glimpse from the book, which he had placed on the bedside table the night before. Actually, he had only managed to read one single page in it and this was maybe due to the extraordinary tricky and sober language in it, he thought. The book was an early short novel by Joseph Conrad. Conrad was undoubtedly one of the greatest writers of all time. Edward however still lingered by the thought from his dream about content (in a novel) being something very small. Form, by contrast, is something much more important, he silently contorted, while intensely rubbing his eyes. This idea wasn't in fact really

his, but originated from a book by Sartre, the title of which he had forgotten. He was very “good at” forgetting things nowadays, at 72. The notion presented by Jean-Paul Sartre wasn’t at all very strange or remarkable per se neither, but it sure was a strange notion with which to wake up to.

Edward had expected to wake up at sunrise. The alarm was set just as a precaution. Now he woke up, to top it all off, right out of a dream. He noticed that his chest was all sweaty. The dream hadn’t been about Sartre at all, he suddenly remembered; it had had to do with a meeting with old friends from Edward’s time in the Army. However, in the chaos of the dream, all of them had been assembled in a small flea market in a suburb, like the ones organized by the Missionary Churches. Edward had been buying an old infantry cap from a poor collection of hats managed by a very old unmarried woman in black, and it was an infantry cap, from which it was clear that it was a cap of a Private Second Class. However, Edward himself, in the dream, knew he himself actually was a Corporal. And this, while many old-age comrades from the old good times irradiated around him, snapping, stuttering, and arguing about all their peculiar hobbies, which they had acquired as retirees, trying not to succumb to sin, drink-ing, and sadness. Thus, an older white-haired companion, with great tattoos –Edward hadn’t the slightest idea who he was –had begun to cultivate small mice as a pastime. The former comrade explained decently, and with an intense, ridiculous and intrusive seriousness, how crucial it was for the half-rats to have walls in their housing, perforated with small holes for the sake of ventilation. Suddenly the whole antiquarian-like room was completely flooded by these little animals, irrigating here and there, plaguing the re-

tirees, who occasionally mentioned their memories of canteens, kettles, hand grenades, and pea soup. But Edward could not in any way get rid of the silly cap. Without wasting more time on trying to remember more of the dream, even though it certainly had a significant message, Edward pulled off the white t-shirt and reached out for a new one that he had already placed on the big radio close by on the previous night. The radio was a big, black, more than 20-year-old, JVC radio device, standing next to his bed. He now swung his legs to the floor while listening to the brittle summer noises from the birds and the bikes from outside softly intruding into his flat by the left-open balcony door. He had placed his large, pale feet on the naked floor, but could not perceive weather it was cold or not, due to the damage caused to the nerve endings in his legs and feet, caused by excessive smoking, the use of alcohol and the misuse of certain medical drugs. He heard the engine of a motorcycle down on the street. 'I guess it is Spontlav.' Edward said to himself. Spontlav was a neighbor of his, living on the 1st floor, who drove an old Harley Davidson motorcycle. It was a very peaceful summer morning. It was all very nice and tender. Little did Edward know what had been going on in the house during the earliest hours of the morning. Perhaps as a sign of hesitation before the activities of the day, Edward's dull gaze again fell on the book by Conrad. "Imagine no longer being able to read a book!" he complained while he wiped his nose with the back side of his left hand, but he soon dismissed this thought, since he thought he would not disgrace and discourage himself by starting this day with negative thinking.

He hacked, snarled, and panted, as often was his habit, - he was very noisy - and then looked the-

atrically at the window and the balcony door, where light softly entered. On certain days, when his own mind was totally ambivalent, he almost felt monitored by an invisible being. Somewhere inside, in some control station of his mind, he thought, he no longer was able to concentrate as much as needed to be able to read books properly. "Ah", he then cried out all of a sudden.

"The weather is super!"

Aside from sleeping, Edward's favorite occupation nowadays was the taking of long strengthening walks. Reading books was, according to Edward, something that belonged to the youth. Leon Battista Alberti, the learned Italian, the inventor of perspective and an erudite humanist in Renaissance Italy, did not read a single book after the age of thirty!

The weather on this Monday was very favorable to Edward's plan for this day, a plan that most of all consisted of the rather pleasant activity of delivering two small plastic pots containing small *Monstera Deliciosa* plants to his younger sister, who lived in Billdal on the other side of Gothenburg. His sister, Janina Blingstav-Tungspetz, married to Jan-Albin Tungspetz, the banker, temporarily resided with her daughter in a bungalow in the southern part of Halland, in Baastad by the sea, and wasn't at home today. But Edward had the key to Janina's place. It would, of course, have been much more pleasant to meet up with Janina, but it was, under the circumstances, a enjoyable task to have, the delivering of flowers to her, for a retiree like Edward. Especially when the weather ... was such a marvel.

The paper bag with the two pots in it waited out in the hall. The *Monstera Deliciosa* had long been under permanent ban of the almighty EU, because

these plants were considered poisonous. For many years, you could not get hold of a single *Monstera* anywhere in Sweden in any store at all. If you ate leaves of *Monstera*s, you would end up very sick or dead. But now the ban was for some reason lifted, and Janina no longer had small children, of whom she would have to prevent from eating leaves of flowers.

The house where Edward himself resided was an old functionalist one, built during the 2nd World War. Many houses around it looked just like Edward's, and all of them were situated on a hill, quite in the center of Gothenburg. In the areas between the houses, there were lawns with trees and lots of greenery, playgrounds for children, small parking lots, and ...nothing more. The area of houses, this part of town, although it was all inhabited, seemed completely deserted. The parking places were very few, but the area was designed and prospected long ago, in the 1930ies when not everyone, like people do now, drove around in a car.

Everything about these houses in this area, houses Edward actually hated, although he was living in one of them, was either horizontal or vertical, and it was either all yellow, or white. They sure wanted a lot in beauty. Anything which might be a reminder of something mystical, mythical, or historical was not to be seen anywhere in this part of town. The idea behind it all, the whole architecture, was fundamentalist, authoritarian thinking. The inhabitants here were simply implicitly urged either to accept the emptiness of it all, of their bleak boxes, or to leave! And how could they? They could not imagine anything, since they had been from the start deprived, by the architectural forms of the area, of their A.) creativity and B.) determination! They were all living in a kind

of reversed Versailles. This part of Gothenburg really was the Sun City of Nothingness. Nothingness was the Supreme King here. Where the magnificent tyrant, Louis VIX, once was celebrated and revered in Versailles, here Nothingness resided. Equality was the center around which everything dumbly, falsely and unconsciously evolved. Almost never this, the character of nothingness, was felt as painstakingly obvious to sensitive souls as by the tests of the atomic bomb alarms on the first Monday in March, June, September, and December. When people heard these strange and familiar sounds from emergency horns, they all halted, went pensive for a while, look around them as if it was the first time they did. People wondered if death would not be a better option in comparison with the fate of living here. Or, they might have done so. And some people were actually not sure if the bomb already had hit, or not. In short: the houses where Edwards lived were tremendously ugly, although few people in this area thought so.

Well, this was it, concerning this part of town! In a way, there should not really be anything peculiar about it, if, in this very part of this town, something terrible took place! Like, if somebody suddenly and cruelly was to be deprived of his or her life. But, of course, let us not reveal anything of the contents of this little story beforehand.

Among those who actually, despite it all, lived here in the same house as Edward Tegelkrona, in this very district and in this estate, Edward knew most of them. Many were newcomers to Sweden. The inhabitants in the apartments of the house changed rapidly since the flats were neither very big nor very...flashy. Thus, many students were living here, and many retired people. Students

and the majority of the elderly lived alone, and it was thus very convenient that half of the flats in this entire district were just single-room apartments. Among the studios, which were between 30 and 35 square meters big, there were some in which two persons had managed to settle together, despite the poor size. On the door signs of these apartments, one could read two surnames.

Often, these signs displayed names of people of immigrants from distant countries and strange cultures. Out of these apartments, one could often listen to voices raised, but the quarrels did not bother anyone much, other than in silent summer nights on the balconies. Edward himself, who was very broad-minded, looked upon these quarrels as evidently being caused by living in close quarters with one another.

Apart from these eruptions of human territorial anguish, the estate was calm and friendly. It was extremely peaceful and almost void of life. Nobody had seen a police officer or a social worker here for ages.

The hallway was painted light green, decorated with mosaic lions and the giant façade, encased by windows facing east, let in the morning sun during the entire year.

Concerning time perspectives, Edward himself actually was born in this neighborhood, which was nothing he boasted about, since this would maybe point to a certain lack of initiative, on the brink of what might be called social ineptitude or – alternatively – idiocy, and nobody wants to be known as an idiot.

Among the people, that Edward actually knew was his closest geographic neighbor, a woman in her sixties, by the name of Frusing. She was someone Edward carefully tried to avoid meeting. She had a habit of all the time trying to explain

things, how things were or ought to be, i.e. very simple, or too simple. She also always complained about the lack of cleanliness regarding the stairs in the house, and she complained about the weather, the prices and about the absence of shops, essential services, and many other things in this particular district. Everything she said was probably all-true, and Mrs. Frusing was probably a very kind person, but Edward still went bananas. Maybe it was her dialect. It was terrible. She did not come from Gothenburg.

The wall dividing Edward's and Mrs. Fusing's apartments was thin. It was the thinnest of walls. Every time Edward was about to leave his apartment, he thus crept up to the wall in the hall, listening to noises from Mrs. Frusing's apartment. Were there any movements in Mrs. Frusing's place? Was she on the verge of leaving her apartment? If this was the case, Edward gladly waited for a couple of minutes, in order to get clear of the risk of meeting with her.

In general, Edward had no problems with his neighbors. Actually, he did not even recognize many of them, because he suffered from a difficulty: an inability of being able to memorize faces, a form of face-blindness. This was probably due to some head injury he had suffered once in his youth when, during the construction of a ridiculous boathouse in Mollösund in Bohuslän, something fell right off the giant racks for the preparing of stock fish near the outermost islands and hit him in the head. Lovely times, Edward thought, despite the fact that he had not been happy at all during these years. Not in the slightest. The magic and tenderness of those times probably depended on the fact that all possibilities were there. The horizons had all been open and wide. One might enjoy possibilities in a cer-

tain way, after they have disappeared. Edward did. This, yet, was one of his remaining pleasures. I will not bore anyone with the telling of all of Edward's habits. It was, simply, a gorgeous summer's morning for Edward in his apartment, an apartment that was piled high with books up to the ceiling. He usually drank his coffee with chocolate in a very big coffee cup, decorated with red and orange flowers.

We instead will resume when he left his flat, just before 8 a.m. bringing his bag with Monsteras, wearing a small military cap, of the style worn by Radko Mladic, on his head, a cap which might as well have escaped from his dream of the olden years in the infantry. He wore this cap in order to cover up his baldness.

Edward felt rather at ease. He really had nothing to worry about. Nothing was wrong and nothing indicated that this day would look any different from any other days this summer. However, indications like that are hard to perceive. What would they be like, in fact? Would they appear as a cloud with an odd shape, or something? There were no clouds in the sky on this day.

Chapter Two

Tegelkrona slanted down the stairs carrying his small bag of flowers in one hand and his mobile phone, a Samsung S5, in the other. Edward wanted to check the departures for the buses in the bus traffic app. But he soon concentrated upon the flight of stairs in order to reach the 1st floor in one piece. On his feet he had ra-

ther fine brown leather sandals, *Mon Rex*, despite him not being rich at all. He was in fact very poor, by Swedish standards, and the sandals were a find from a flea market that was open on Sundays in the eastern suburb of Bellevue.

But as soon as he reached the lowest floor of the building, he noticed a peculiar sound, something very bizarre from the mini-apartment just to the left of the main entrance. Edward did not actually know the young man who rented the small flat, which was situated some three inches above street level, but they had exchanged a few words at the bus stop close by. The man had said some rather interesting things, but not very many of them. He was perhaps around twenty-five years old or so, and he appeared to have immigrated to Sweden from Tunisia, or maybe Lebanon – Edward did not remember – and his name was Ali. His surname was very long, and Edward could neither pronounce it nor learn it by heart from the small paper strip where one could read it, glued to the letterbox on the door.

The single most remarkable thing with Ali, if one should choose something, was his extensive and vibrant intelligence. Intelligence shone around his entire being, and surely nobody who met with him could avoid noticing it and be unaffected by the charm of the young, dark-haired, Levantine, handsome man. Edward, too, was impressed and struck by Ali's appearance and strength of mind. Often, Edward was charmed by women – mostly young ones – yet seldom by men. But this was something special.

Now, however, the issue was the very strange noise from Ali's apartment.

Along with the name of Ali at the letterbox, there was another name: "Pettersson". This 25-square-meter flat, almost too small to be of any use to

anybody, the smallest in the entire building, had been rented out many times to many people. Who this “Pettersson” really was, no one knew any longer.

The noise sounded like from a horse in pain or danger, but it was quite obviously a human being uttering those noises. It sounded like someone that having trouble breathing, or violently weeping.

Outside Ali’s apartment, a couple of yards away on the green-beige polished stone floor, was a mobile phone that seemed to have been thrown away. It was just barely visible, having glided a bit under a baby’s carriage that stood in a corner in the hall of the building. But Edward, due to his constant state of stress and his attention to all that went on in and around him, spotted even the small phone.

That he had heard the noises from Ali’s apartment, although they were not very loud, was also because that the door was not entirely shut. It was open just a few centimeters. Through a small gap, one could look into the apartment. This was what Edward did. He had put down his paper bag, picked up the mobile phone – a cheap Sony one with a butterfly and a black-and-white shell on it – and put it in a pocket of his worn Levi’s blue jeans. He then looked into Ali’s apartment with his best eye, the one least affected by cataract, and this is what he saw:

It was more or less a scene that could have been painted by Delacroix or someone else among the romantic-realist painters of the 19th century, during the period that featured realistic, bloody, and filthy scenes in oil colors on giant canvases. What immediately presented itself to Edward, and what would stay in his mind for a long period of time, was a striking scene.

The room must have had its blinds set horizontally, because light flooded through the window upon the vast bed, upon which lay a naked red-haired girl with a golden hue. She was almost surrealistically beautiful, even in death, and it looked like a Strindbergian intimate theater. By the end of the bed a small figure kneeled. It was a young man: Ali, the Arab. He was dressed in a light brown moleskin jacket. This figure stood out against the pale and the red colors of the unfortunate but stunningly beautiful victim. Ali was of medium height, neither thick nor thin, neither muscular nor skeletal. Out of his mouth came a moaning sound, like that from the deepest register of a church organ. Such a sound, heard in a mini-apartment of 25 square meters, was abominable.

The naked girl was lying across the bed with her one arm dangling over the side, and she certainly appeared to be dead. Edward recognized her as a certain Lene Jensen, who had resided on the 6th floor in the same house. This made the whole thing even worse, utterly morbid, and shocking. The young girl, who just a while ago had been alive – she had only reached her twenties – was now quite dead.

The fact that she, who had been a real beauty in her life, still was such a good-looking girl, although she was dead, took his breath away and made him dizzy. Edward was still standing in the doorway, and the terrible noise from Ali combined with the extraordinary sight made his heart pound. He imagined that his bicuspid aorta valve was bulging dangerously. “Lene Jensen!” he thought, and he suddenly had to straighten his back in order to take a deep breath. This indeed was too much!! He also loosened his jacket a little. It was very a very hot day, too. Even in the

stairs, inside the building, the June air felt hot. The whole inner structure of the house was now warm after several weeks of hot weather, and thus served as a storage container of heat.

Edward blinked and shook his head violently to rid himself of his dizziness. Then, just for of a second, he bent forward again, but changed his mind all of a sudden, firmly grabbed the hold of door, and swung it wide open. He entered the non-existent hall of the apartment in one single, determined stride. He was thus now standing in the main room of Ali's flat, where the girl lay on the bed, which was broad, about 120 centimeters across. She seemed to have decided to continue to embarrass the world with her extraordinary, subtle features, all glowing like amber.

Edward, who wasn't crazy, was not all used to handling practical things, and certainly not those that involved social competence. He was a loner. He certainly was not equipped to deal with matters which consisted of dealing with lifeless women carelessly thrown across the beds of strangers. Edward was more inclined to occupying himself with brooding over abstract things, most of which had no bearing on immediate reality. This disturbed him, but he could not change his inclination in these matters. He also looked upon himself as actually being subject, in a rather extensive way, to delusions, misconceptions, and misunderstandings. These misconceptions were not really perceptual, but had to do with his intellectual processing of information, and mostly by his habit of getting stuck, or lost, in disarrays consisting of endless loops of corrupt logic and bad argumentation. He thus never saw ghosts, did not hear voices, did not fear from invasions from Mars, and did not suspect his neighbors of conspiracy. No, nothing of the sort! No. Edward's mind was instead

invaded by lots and lots of ideas, and those ideas, which were very original and thrilling, terrorized him in his everyday life. His advancing age apparently did nothing to stop these ideas. Quite the contrary!

His mind raced more and more grew day by day, and it now seemed that it had reached a level hitherto unseen in Gothenburg. It was now of a higher amplitude and frequency than ever before. This made Edward's rather diffuse feelings of delusion even stronger, and this delusion also was potentiated by a rather newly arrived, sudden but growing and terrible insight regarding the shortness of life. At times, he was disgusted by the pure intensity of speculation, and he was soon frightened at the extent of curious flight of thought. Thus, Edward nowadays seemed to be living in the midst of a vortex of ideas, concepts, and mental images, all of which seemed to have a multitude of meaning. They all discharged into a giant dualism, a feeling of being lost – a cacophony of implicitness.

The foundation of Edward's soul was – and had long been – an inclination to interpret everything in life according to two special, all-comprehending, seemingly contrary principles, to watch what came before his mind's eye through two differing, simple rasterizations:

One principle was that everything was rather nice and good, and that all that was, was good enough and suitable to constitute a human life.

The other principle was that nothing at all mattered, and that very soon, all this absurd and crazy energy called life would come to an end, at least for him, Edward Tegelkrona.

This all seemed like a giant melancholy and a heavy depression. We might add that it was in no way these principles which were part of what we

are referring to as the delusions of Edward. These principles were – in their diversity – forming Edward's preunderstanding of life itself. Thus, they harbored all those misconceptions and delusions, and made them richer in form and content.

Edward wasn't really depressed. In his head – which was rather grand, which always troubled him when buying hats and caps – the most inventive solutions to the collisions of values, which constantly developed, were given birth. As a result, lately Edward spent all of his time confusing his sadness over the impending end of his life with his giant euphoria concerning the infinite beauty of existence, and it was all gathered in a dark, violet, elegiac synthesis, a turbulent fanfare, a massive, convulsive, desperate tribute to life itself. He often sat in his room writing these eulogies with a simple ball-point pen in black notebooks, which were bought downtown in the Flying Tiger shop on the avenue.

The meaning of those tributes also seemed to be – as a meta-message – that everything in this world was overrun and lifted up to a higher level, by art and literature, untroubled by the flight of time. This was an old, romantic idea. Thus, in the midst of his vortex, Edward was a romantic. Edward's conviction was primarily that literature was the savior of humankind.

Thus the philosophy of Edward Tegelkrona was Threefold. One might sum it up by saying that Edward was living with the rather uncommon delusion that literature was the meaning of life. And he was very happy that he had once written a small book on Rembrandt called Rembrandt and the line.

This was, however, of extremely little help to him as he crossed the threshold to Ali's apartment and looked at the outraged Arab and the unlucky vic-

tim of a brutal strangulation lying on the large bed. It was more of a help that he actually knew who she was, and that he remembered having talked with her some weeks ago.

But what on Earth had happened? What was this all about? For heaven's sake, it was Lene Jensen, dead!

Had Edward been of a more resolute character, he would have addressed Ali, who knelt by the side of the bed, sobbing, at once. But now, Edward just looked at the dead girl as he, step by step, moved closer to her body and looked with horror at the poor thing, slain and mutilated there on the double bed.

Probably, and this was not a surprising thing at all, Edward's behavior also had to do with the sheer and extraordinary beauty of the corpse. The young girl in her twenties who had been the pride of Abrovinsch Street was still, in her strangled, dead, state, stunning to look at. She lay on her back. Her hue was shiny and like amber, her arms, legs, and breasts were full and beautifully rounded, her waist slim and elegant, and her nails small and well-manicured a dark green, each with five small lines of white.

The girl was a Nordic type. She was Scandinavian red and lightly freckled. Her mouth, in which the small teeth shone healthy and clean, was half open. The long, light red hair ran down on the wooden floor in a whirl. One could not actually see blood, but on her neck there was a dark blueish line across, which indicated how she had been killed.

Lene Jensen's greenish-gray eyes were wide open, staring, even in death, up towards the thin metal curtain rod which span across the wall by

the three-glass window, the rod from which no curtain hung. It was just a small, brown, cloth monkey from a red-green, twined string on which was mounted a small German flag.

Edward, who had been dazed as he looked at the dead, naked girl, suddenly noticed that he himself was subject to inspection. Ali, the Arab, had stopped moaning and grunting, turned his head, and was calmly watching Edward. The young man looked at Edward with his dark eyes, which shone and were bright and crisp like a Himalayan waterfall.

Ali, raising his head yet a bit, said:

“I don’t know who did it.”

Edward immediately plunged into his inner depth for some advice, aware of that there was no absolute hurry, but also knowing that there was no time for contemplation. He reflected for a couple of seconds on what Ali had said and on time itself.

“Is she dead?” he asked with an odd fervor.

“She is cold as ice,” Ali said with an accent that was typical of Gothenburgian suburbs like Angered and Hjällbo.

On Ali’s cheeks tears had been trickling down on his chin and down onto his grey cotton shirt.

It is natural with senses – senses with humans as well as with those of other animals – that they sharpen considerably in situations of danger. This was also true of old, torn individuals like our Edward, just like with old hermits, sick snakes, and fat old crows as well as with spiders, who lost half their heads and parts of their legs. This thought crossed Edward’s mind because he had heard someone come down in the elevator from somewhere on the upper floors, and it was not at all strange that he could hear this, since he had left the door to the stairs wide open himself.

He swiftly ran the few steps to the door, caught a glimpse of his *Monstera Deliciosas*, which were just outside, but decided, with the speed that a crisis often gives, to leave them there. He slammed the thick door, thus shutting himself into the mini-apartment with Ali and the unlucky, perfect beauty, Miss Lene. There really was no need to slam the door; it always closed with a thump and a sucking noise due to its own weight.

Lene had been living on the 6th floor. It was the top floor, where it was the coldest in the winter and the hottest during the summer months. Now she lay here, like an art installation, exhibited like a piece of conceptual art; like a doll, a nature morte, stiff and uncommunicative. Edward, keen on enjoying dualisms, might have been filled with enthusiasm before the sight of Lene thus strangled and naked. But he was not. He could have been thinking that she was amazing, even as a corpse. But he did not. He had turned from the door and stared at the bed on which poor Lene was posing and thought: "Everything psychic is contagious."

Edward was indeed a very strange and peculiar old man.

Ali's eyes followed the Swede's movements with growing interest. Edward had a spasm in his back when he noticed the look from Ali. "What did he expect?!" Edward thought, "That we would let just anybody see what's in here?!"

At the same time, he was aware that what he just had done was all wrong. And as if it was not enough, Ali was looking at him reproachfully, and Edward also noticed a faint smile on his lips, presumably caused by the shock. He felt his mobile phone pressing against his thigh.

The Arab finally rose from his place on the floor, wiped some tears from his face, searched for his

cigarettes in his pockets, and soon extracted a grotesquely crumpled French cigarette.

Very few things made Edward more furious than the destructive habit of smoking cigarettes and cigars and pipes. That made him start panting heavily as he watched Ali light a cigarette using tiny matches which he had found on a small table. Edward ogled the dead girl, whose pubic hair was red, and he heavily sat down in one of the two small chairs, a red one similar to chairs in waiting rooms at airports and in hospitals, by the table at the window. He looked angrily at Ali's slender hands, busy with the small cigarette, and said:

“Will you be smoking too?”

“Too?” Ali asked, smiling, looking at Edward. “Wha' do you mean?”

Ali spoke almost flawless Swedish. Some people do have a knack for learning foreign languages. Ali seemed to be a phenomenon. But of course: the man was, through and through, highly and subtly intelligent!

“I did not mean anything at all,” Edward retorted.

“Why did you close the door? Why don't you call the police?” Ali continued calmly while wiping more tears from his cheeks and chin. His skin had a natural olive hue. It seemed as if tears would not stop flowing from his eyes. Edward, on the other hand, did not cry at all.

Ali, the cigarette stuck between his white teeth, reached out towards Edward with his hands, holding a brand new iPhone. Ali did not know Edward and Edward did not know Ali. Apparently, Ali was saying that Edward should call the police. For some odd reason, Ali did not call the police himself.

Ali was sitting across from Edward in the other red chair. Both fauteuils flanked a round beige table, on which there were a small black HP laptop, some used drinking glasses, and a motley package of salt biscuits from the supermarket. Other than the bed, this was the only furniture in the apartment. The flat had as anonymous a style as if it was a hotel room. The furniture actually looked like a parody, or like a stage set in a small theatre. One window that faced the street was open.

Edward took a deep breath. He did not know very much about Ali. He guessed he was a computer engineer or maybe a political scientist. Or was he a salesman? Or a medical student? Well, it did not matter much to Edward, because if you were as gifted as Ali certainly was, it was of minor importance. Anyone can become a political scientist in a couple of months. Political science is pure speculation with some statistics added to it. With salesmanship and medicine it is quite another thing of course. Anyway...

Edward decided to believe that Ali did not originate from a wealthy, oriental family. If you, for example, come from the upper classes in Iran, you would inevitably have a good library and certainly some expensive rugs on the floor. Ali seemed to own about two shelves of cheap, paperback novels, and nothing else to read.

Edward thought of sophisticated Iranians he knew, who had been owned expensive, leather-bound versions of Eastern and Western classics. These young men from Teheran were eloquent in their expressions on cultural matters, with subtle and varied taste, and often a good memory, too. They looked upon the world with a certain distance, intellectually, which gave them a superior affect in all sorts of human company.

Once, a couple of years ago, when Edward had bought some chips in a small shop run by Iranians, he had mentioned to the young girl who was serving the customers that he had published a book on Rembrandt. "Ooh! How marvelous! Are you an author?", the young Iranian woman had exclaimed in her brittle voice, her eyes lit with spiritual fire "...you know, to be an author is the most extraordinary thing there is!" Edward had escaped as soon as he could, without knowing what to say. Yes, he had written a book, but he certainly did not look upon himself as a full-fledged author.

Bringing himself back to the present situation, Edward said to Ali, "It is as simple as this: I did not think you killed her!"

Edward wished that there had been a slight echo in the room. But there was none. His words died immediately, as if they were never spoken.

The fact that the two of them, in this terrible situation, sat next to the dead young woman, discussing the situation, was all on Edward's account. He often thought that the proper thing to do in a new, tricky situation was to refrain from the ordinary protocol, so as to reach a broader understanding. Edward believed that this was always a courageous thing to do. Edward's view was that other people's ways of handling difficult situations were wrong, and that people in general were complete idiots.

"Killed?" Ali said, feigning surprise almost perfectly.

The young man had put one leg over the other and seemed to have stopped crying. Edward looked at Ali's legs, which seemed appallingly thin. Edward himself always had wished that he had had slender legs, maybe because he had two really solid, thick ones that kind of stood out

against the rest of his body, which wasn't sturdy at all. His arms seemed more like asparagus. Each time he thought of how disproportionate his body was, he was a little sad.

Ali suddenly added:

"You know of many things, don't you? Do you know who she is?"

Edward had noticed that Ali had been genuinely sorry for the girl, but that he, equipped as he was with his almost superhuman intellect, swiftly had acclimated himself to the new situation, which had actually been noticeably worsened by Edward's abrupt actions.

"No, I don't actually know anything at all," Edward bluntly lied, and then he, suddenly a bit aggressive, as if he was going to be sick, put his hand over his eyes in a gesture of confusion, and said: "I was on my way to my sister Janina with a bag of flowers..."

Edward now almost broke out crying. His words seemed a bit absurd and out of place. He did not cry because of the flowers.

He cried because he did not understand what had happened to him.

He suddenly lost control.

Edward could not see, because his own hand was in the way, how surprised and amused Ali was as he scrutinized the old man's every move. The thoughts of the Arab were never revealed, but it was clear that his mind was working intensely. Maybe it was guilt? Or a need to escape from the scene of the crime as quickly as possible? Or something else?

Edward did not know, and did not care right now. He was completely lost and bewildered, trying to suppress the urge to cry, which did not succeed at, at all.

After passing a few minutes more in complete silence, Edward began to calm himself down.

Then Ali said, again, with the stubbornness of a fool:

“Maybe we should call the police.”

CHAPTER THREE

This day in June was extremely hot, and there wasn't any wind. Humidity in the air was on an extremely low level, and this made people more unaware of the heat and made it a little easier for all in town to carry on with their lives. Thus, the heat was almost surreal, for Swedish circumstances. The heat was really excessive, but very few really suffered from it. The grass did however. Between the park-like trees outside, on Abrovinsch Street, the grass had already turned yellow, and was sparse and dry. Certain circular areas on the rather large, stooping lawn in front of Edward's house, a seven storey colossus, were all naked and bare. Summer had so far been a disaster when it came to the health of plants, vegetables, grass and flowers. Many animals suffered from it as well. There had already been quite large fires in the woods surrounding the city, since it had in fact haply not rained since the last days of April, but just for a few showers in connection with sudden thunderstorms. Maybe on this very Monday, when the terrible murder struck, it was already over 26 degrees Celsius hot, although it was not yet ten o'clock. Down in Europe, and even in Sweden, people had already died from this heat. In the middle of the day, the temperature in Gothenburg

reached 32 degrees, but in Cordoba, it was as in fact 38. And in Portugal, it was so hot, that you would not like to know about it. But at least 42 degrees it was said to be. The so-called "African heat" had swept to the north and conquered almost the whole of Europe.

"It happens very rarely", Edward said slowly and pensively, while looking at the dead girl, whose beautiful head, with its long light reddish hair, all of a sudden, after a small jerk, seemed to be hanging a bit further down from the bed towards the floor.

"But", he continued, "it anyway certainly happens, that I myself, who just ordinarily do not become very much effectuated by other people and their dos and whereabouts at all, do catch interest in one person or another. This seems exactly to have happened in your case. Ever since I talked to you by the bus stop, when you expressed yourself so neat and well on multi-culture and on music and of the future of the world and about the universal state as the sole savior of mankind, I became all excited. I actually found what you said extraordinary and very generous in tone too..."

"Yes?" Ali said. He apparently had to concentrate quite a bit in order to grasp the meaning of what Edward had said, and he now responded hesitantly and very politely. Ali did not however recognize, what Edward just told him, as true at all. Their conversation at the bus stop had been really something quite else than what Edward was referring to. What Edward related was to Ali all news and fantasies.

Edward glanced at the arab.

"I just cannot believe that you are the person, who brought her about."

"You did not think I killed her?" Ali cried out in an almost loud voice, and now he was no longer

speaking Swedish, but English, which obviously was a language with which he felt more at ease, and that at this moment suited him better, than with the Swedish tongue. Or he simply needed to somehow rearrange his mind.

“No, as a matter of fact, I don't. You see,...You know, you were weeping, loudly enough for you to be heard way out in the stairs.”

“I guess one might kill a person and still be crying from the shock afterwards?” Ali said, now more calm again, while blowing some smoke towards the ceiling, in order to spare Edward, who had expressed his dislike when it came to smoking. The young woman who was the cause of the chit-chat presumably never, in her much to short life, had smoked any cigarettes. Smoke could not harm HER now, that's for sure. Few people would call the conversation a “chit-chat”, but I do.

Now all of a sudden something went in the back lock with Edward. His usual bright intellect now qualitatively transcended, as if by a stroke of magic, into a state of chaos and haze, into something muddy:

“I don't understand ...”, he mumbled almost suffocated by nausea. “Is there a glass of water anywhere around?” he cried out, but he soon added, already slightly recomposed:

“Now, yet, when we still are discussing this matter, mightn't we cover her up? I really cannot think clearly when I am seeing her like that.”

‘Lene Jensen’, he thought, ‘Little Lene Jensen...’

Ali rose from his chair, mumbled something in Arabic, and then fetched a small cotton plaid from a drawer and then organized it neatly over the body of the girl. The only parts of Lene Jensen now were visible: her feet, one arm and her long, lightly red, curly hair. Then he went to the

pantry, which was situated in the shadiest corner of the flat, next to the bathroom. The bathroom was of mini size and had no bathtub in it, but just a toilet and a shower cabin. The kitchen contained a small electric stove and a sink. Ali returned carrying a glass of fresh water. The glass was a small about eight centimeters high old, crystal one, decorated with small clear, oblong octagons. Ali kept his eyes on what he was doing and neither did look at the bed, nor at Edward or at the door or the window. Lene was lying on the double bed, stiff and cold. Ali's manners somehow indicated that from now on the girl and her tragedy were problems of Edward and not at all any problems of Ali.

No doubt there was something in this situation that indicated that this objectively could be the case. Everything depended on Edward's next action. But, as it was, nothing at all happened. Edward appeared to have fallen into some sort of lethargy or trance. Maybe Edward had become quite sour. Changes of mind like this are not uncommon with older men, especially not with those who have a history of use of narcotics, and misuse of medicaments. The ordinarily quite happy retire and flower-transporter now had changed into a shadow of himself, a ghost, a Doppelgänger, etc., etc., and one could easily notice traces of malevolence in his blue eyes. This malevolence certainly was directed towards the subject of his admiration, against Ali. And maybe it was ambivalence itself that crept up, or maybe it was ambivalence that made this very malevolence creep up. Ambivalence itself generally takes so much energy out of a human being that it might leave her with only a rudimental capacity of sense and power to survive.

Just to find themselves in the midst of a discussion, a discussion about practical things, when a murder just had been committed, was to both of them rather absurd. And it is certainly hard to come up with an explanation to why this had happened. Maybe it was due to the fancy for reflection on Edwards's behalf, or maybe to his desire to help Ali out, or it might depend on the almost divine substance of the victim itself, which was that of the most beautiful thing on earth. To both of them Lene seemed a young, serene, extraordinary thing of beauty. Maybe she, Lene, or whatever her name really was, thus still in her present state exercised the same paralyzing impact that she had exercised as a living beauty. In a way, all inhabitants of Abrovinsch Street, and the whole part of town, men and women, had almost tiptoed in front of Lene Jensen as well as sighed behind her back.

"I'll be damned!" Edward cried out in a loud voice, and now there almost was an echo in the small flat.

"I am trying to help my fellow man, help everyone that is threatened by expulsion, and what I get in reward is loathing and ... scorn! It's really absurd!"

It truly was as if everything was too late. Much too late.

Ali crumbled the rest of his Gauloise in the ashtray, but immediately brought forth another, because it was Gauloise he smoked, and he lit the cigarette with a match from a tiny folder lying on the cupboard. How small a matchbox could they manufacture? And how crumple-friendly packages of cigarettes might be allowed to be into circulation? The match folder seemed just two centimeters high. The package with the Gauloises was so extremely torn that it looked like it had been

picked up from the gutter. But now even Edward also noticed the intensity with which Ali overthought the situation, while lighting the badly torn cigarette and while exerting into the air a cloud of black smoke.

"This is what it is like to be an old man!" Edward said in a loud voice. After that he silently remarked: "This is nothing you'll be aware of at once, but only when you are subject to threats. Then you will fall into dizziness and anguish, and you will sense that you are not strong enough, neither clever enough and that your time among the living people is over."

"Shall I feel sorry for you?" Ali solemnly asked.

"I would be happy if you did", Edward retorted, because Edward always felt at ease with irony. When subject to irony everything always appears more clearly, that was his conviction. Irony clears up the sky. Subject to irony all the old tensions will disappear and new, and fresh tensions will immediately replace them!

Now there were again voices heard from the staircase. They seemed to emerge from the narrow, steep stairs down to the laundry. Someone was climbing the stairs from the laundry. "They" had built these stairs in the clear intent that it should be extremely uncomfortable to climb. Especially when carrying heavy baskets full with various clothes to wash. A sharp noise was heard, like from the slamming of a door. The estate was about to wake up to a new day. Soon steps were heard outside Ali's door. Then the bell rang. Both men, one of which smoked a cigarette, while the other one was barely breathing, were listening, sitting put in their small, red, round chairs in sudden conspiracy. Few things in life is more wonderful than a sudden conspiracy.

“It is locked!” Ali whispered behind a raised back of his hand.

Ali at the same time made a gesture towards his head, indicated lunacy on behalf of Edward. Not by putting his index finger towards his temple, but by letting his hand, which first leaned with the fingertips lightly towards his temple, fling out into the air. When the steps had disappeared – somebody had been disturbed in their mind by the presence of the bags with the large Monsteras – Ali said:

“*Vous est mentalement malade!*” This is French and means: You are completely insane.

At the same time the Arab took out his mobile phone, which had a luxurious gleam, and dialed three digits on the display of the small computer in disguise. Edward could hear the sounds of the three plop-sounds.

“No, no! First I have to get to know if it was you that did it!” Edward cried out and rose with a protruding gesture, as if he wanted to snatch the telephone.

‘This all is indeed typical for Lene Jensen.’, he suddenly thought.

Ali shut off his telephone, where he just had pressed 911, and even pressed the dial button, and put it in his pocket. He then went up to one of the windows towards the street. The window was situated just a few feet above the level of the pavement, and Ali opened it up in its entirety, so that air could more easily get in, and said, in rather perfect Swedish: “Anybody could get in here, and get out too. Anyone knows that this very flat has been hired out to a vast number of people.”

“Everybody has keys to this apartment! Maybe even you? You, who have lived here for over thirty years, Or even longer? You, old man! You might even be born here? Arent’ you?”

Ali smiled. It was an inward smile. It was not a mean smile though. But it was a tense atmosphere.

Now it seemed as if Edward did not want to talk anymore, but just be silent. He sat holding his glass of water and after he had been addressed as "old man", he actually looked much older than before. One could almost believe he would die any second. His face was pale and his eyes seemed yellowish. His cheeks were thin, and seemed hollow, especially on the right side. As if there were no teeth at all in his mouth. His lips were rather blueish and a bit swollen and he swiftly and mechanically ran over them now and then with his dark red tip of his tongue. He nodded, but the expression on his face did not indicate any meaning at all, and he then simply said, having forgotten all about engagement, courage and curiosity:

"I think I want to go up to my place..."

"The hell you won't! ", Ali said, almost dropping his cigarette on the floor by the surprise of hearing Edward uttering this. We will sort this out, old man! But I will tell you first what happened!

Edward looked at Ali, the young Arab, and now again with true gratitude. Finally Ali seemed to have realized the responsibility Edward had taken in this very tricky situation. This was, Edward slyly thought, in the midst of his confusion, the first sign of real compassion from the side of Ali, since him crying over Lene. Ali hadn't bothered about him, about Edward, anything at all. But whatever Ali was going to tell him, Edward was quite determined to be sceptic about it! Edward had made up his mind! It was, according to Edward, the spirit of the building, that was the actual perpetrator of this hideous act of depriving

the poor girl of her life. That is, if it was a murder at all? But a murder it certainly seemed to be! If it was not the estate itself who was the killer it might be the very architecture, who was the real murderer. If it was a murder, that is. However, when Edward was silently speculating and while Ali in his much too clever mind was preparing whatever confession he was going to come up with, the small plaid had fallen off the face of Lene Jensen. The dead Lene, with a seemingly renewed curiosity, scrutinized the old curtain rod from which the small ape of cloth dangled in the small breeze from the window, waving the minute German flag. The sun had not yet reached their side of the house. Maybe it was now 10 o'clock. Not until noon it would be entering the Abrovinsch Street, but then it would last all day, until about 09.00PM.

“Today it is Monday.”, Ali said. “Last night ...”

“Shall I bring in the Monsteras?” Edward suddenly asked.

He had a short glance at the corpse and felt like he was going to faint. Why hadn't he already called the police? How could the two of them sit here, quite calmly, discussing, in the presence of a newly murdered darling redheaded beauty?

“Leave them flowers be”, Ali said. He continued in a low voice:

“Yesterday I was downtown visiting a small club, where there generally is lot of good guitar playing. It is called Club Hein, and it is situated by Windsor Street. It is run by some French people and a guy from Bratislava. I was there by 09.30 PM and I met a woman whom I accompanied to her home. She lived in Majorna. I woke up at 04.00 AM and she wanted me to leave before

she did. She works as a driver of streetcars. At this moment Ali's telephone vibrated violently. The sound was set to off, but not vibration. Edward guessed that it would probably be 911, who were calling back. Ali checked out the display, and it said "secret number".

"It's 911", he said. He now acted rather casual and took another cigarette and from here on he forgot to turn to the ceiling when blowing away the smoke from his cigarette, but he blew it right at Edward, who, modestly gesturing, tried to wave off the smoke in direction towards the window.

"I have almost lived here for two years now", Ali continued, after having put the telephone back into his pocket on his trousers. "I am renting this apartment from a guy called Heyman. He is a musician. A base player."

"I am paying him 4400:- on the 25th every month by Swish. But it has never been any problems. Except that there have been some visits by people who apparently have keys to this flat. Keys that fit. Maybe lots of people."

"But you cannot LIVE like that, can you?" Edward said, and it seemed as he slowly began to come to his senses again.

"That is the way I live, or at least that WAS the way I lived. I was happy with having somewhere to stay. Many immigrants do not have any flats at all to live in by their own; at least not as cheap as this one."

"But, I mean: people just coming and going, and you don't even know who they ARE! No wonder you did not bother to make it cozy in here ..."

This inevitably sounded odd, and it surely almost seemed like a blasphemy, regarding what

horrendous things had occurred in the apartment in the early hours....

“Why didn't you change the locks, by the way??”

“I wasn't allowed to do that by Heyman. Heyman told me that no other person but him and me had any keys to this flat.”

“You arrived here at 8.00AM, isn't that true?” Edward said, instantly composing himself.

“Yes, that's right. Around 8 o'clock. Soon before you yourself came here. The door was unlocked. Yesterday I am sure I locked it, as I normally do, when I left, around 6.00PM. But, as I said, many people are equipped with their own keys. And when I entered here she was, that girl, dead and gone. And I tried to get her to breathe. But she was cold. And then you came...”

“How long, do you think, had she been dead?” Edward asked silently, as if not to wake Lene Jensen up by asking. Ali glanced at the red-headed girl, whose eyes shone so very bright and blueish-greenish. Maybe Ali had seen lots of dead people before. You never know when it comes to such foreigners. Probably he was from the Middle East and just recently had buried many victims of the war himself. Maybe he had shot them first.

“She was not very cold,” Ali said. Not long dead.

“*You MIGHT HAVE killed her!*” Edward, now very tense, suddenly shouted out,.

They were silent for a minute. Both of them sat half erect in the small, ugly, red chairs.

“If we do not call the cops, what'll we do? Ali asked. Is there any large basement in the building?”

“ Pardon?”

“Yes, what do you think? Here I am. An immigrant, on temporary permission. And an Arab! Just think about that a little for yourself!

“It is exactly what I am doing, Edward immediately retorted and curled his lips. It is me who does the thinking. That is why we are left here! But I might even tell them it was me. But it depends on what really has happened here! How everything happened. Here.”

“What? Why??!”

“Well you are a young man with the whole life ahead of you. I, on the contrary, am an old man. If I say it was me, if it is meaningful and credible to say that it as me, then my life even now is of some use.”

“Meaningful? Use? Vous est malade! You, you are completely insane! Lunatic! Mental. Have you got any soul at all? Have you?”

Ali repeatedly hit hard with his fist against the side of the chair.

“Tell me, how would it be possible for you to prove that people might come and go here with keys of their own? Tell me? Just tell me!”

“But you knew? Didn't you? And didn't everybody here know?” Ali wondered.

“Well let's call the whole thing off then. I thought you would appreciate my rescue mission. But no. No, No. Well call the police, alright, the way you want it! Either you've got her under your nails, or you haven't...”

“Well, I both checked if she was dead as well as tried to revive her...”

“You killed her! Of course you did! You are just like the Arab, the famous Arab in Camus' *The Stranger*! Aren't you?”

“That old book is shit, “ Ali said calmly.

“Exactly, but now isn't the right time to talk about literature,” Edward replied, inconsequently, as it was he himself, who had brought up Albert Camus and his kafkaesque book.

Now there was a long silence again.

Edward was thinking that even Camus himself had thought the book was a rotten piece of shit. Maybe Ali knew about that too. He sure seemed well educated. In the meantime, Ali had stood up, clenching his fists, and was gone into the kitchen for more water for both of them. Edward also executed himself from the chair and stumblingly walked up to the bed, with the naked Lene Jensen on it. He cautiously bent forward to look a little closer at the strange marking on Lene's throat.

"Heavy strangling with a rope," he decided. "If you go wash your hands we might call the police immediately."

"Suppose I should take a plane to Beirut and go visit my uncles and cousins for a week or two, until everything has calmed down here?" Ali said after having sat down again in his chair, with his glass of water in his right hand, brushing his half long hair back from his forehead. It seemed as if he found this option sound and rational.

"He is from Lebanon." Edward silently concluded.

Soon the two men sat quietly facing each other by the window, and Edward looked around at the strange lack of furniture. Edward looked more boyish than Ali.

They looked somewhat like they were playing a game, waiting for the other to make a mistake. When he was with Ali, Edward always felt that being alive either was or resembled a game of chess. Ali's charm and his enormous intelligence made life different and ... totally amazeballs.

Nothing was heard from the door. Some noise from the street outside came through the small gap by the window. Now and then Ali took out his smartphone from his pocket, rhythmically letting his fingers tap on it just to indicate the only evident alternative, (of calling the police)

and then again letting it slip back into his shiny black trousers.

“Okay,” Edward broke the silence – the skin under his cheek seemed a little sloppy – and said in a less sly and more resigned way: “ I will tell you what really is behind MY actions here!”

“Yes, THAT would be fine,” Ali said with determination. “Because I cannot for my life understand what you are doing! What are you up to? Why don't you let the police and the judiciary system take care of me?”

The atmosphere in the room really was dense. To say the least. Death has a very strange impact. Ali's foreign accent also made his talk sound harsh and a bit artificial. Unreal. Ominous. It was almost as if he, Ali, was acting in some grotesque role in a play on a theatre. It was as if Ali was not a real person at all, and it was as if nothing was quite real in this flat. Yes, Lene Jensen being dead surely had an eerie effect, Edward swiftly summed it all up to himself.

Chapter four.

After having had a good look at the room and the people in it, tossing and turning in the small red fauteuil and having taken a couple of extra breaths the older man said:

”I'll tell you.”

Ali, after taking a quick look towards the dead girl, whose body shone like amber, sank deep down into his chair, closed his eyes and pretended to be sleep and to be listening, at the same time.

Edward himself, on the other hand, turning away from the sight of Lene, immediately - quite feverishly - began telling a story, twisting his rather thick fingers over each other, disregarding Ali's ironic attitude. Edward soon seemed forgetful of the situation and felt at easy embroid-ering his story in all sorts of possible ways:

"Well it is long ago, maybe thirty-five years ago, I went hiking in up by the coast of Bohuslän. It was June, just like now, and hot, just like now, and I came walking down on a lonely road at just north of Stromstad. Not towards Koster but to the north, up close to the Norwegian border. I had a lunch bag with me and a thermos and a parasol, and the sun blazed, the flies were buzzing..."

"You cannot just sit there talking..." Ali mumbled, deeply sunk in the tiny chair. It was as if Ali shrunk a bit while listening to the slender old man white the pale, big face.

"The flies indicated that I was on my way toward a farm with horses, because it was not just ordinary small flies..."

"Holy God! *Allah yueyenni!*" the younger man sighed, letting his head drop almost down on his left shoulder.

"... but it was horseflies. And there were chicks addicted to horses and one of them, a youngster who called herself "horseback girl", she was immensely beautiful, well rounded and had had a job at a circus as a jockey and she really was curvacious."

"Curvacious?"

"Curvacious? Like that." Edward showed with a small gesture like holding an ancient Greek urn or vase or something with both hands. "Yes, and she and I took a day off, that is: she took a day off, and then after a while she joined me in Gothenburg. The thing was, though, that she once

hurt her head! Long ago. But still. She had hurt her head. She hadn't fallen off a horse fall from a horse but rather something quite different. She actually had been beaten. By a man. Assaulted. Gravely. And this head injury of hers caused her to have frequently fits of laughter.

These fits didn't just came out of nowhere, but they most often were prolongations of an ordinary laughter. You see, if she was watching the telly and there was just something slightly funny in a show or something it might happen that she was simply unable to stop laughing after she had begun. She just kept laughing and laughing. Out of control. Until it all became wholly absurd."

"What a mess!" Ali said, opening his eyes monitoring Edward with his clear gaze.

"Exactly. But sometimes it was not just very disturbing, but rather cute. Of course on other occasions it seemed all wrong, as if she understood in a complete awkward way. That is, she seemed to laugh AT the joke, not with it! And she just did not stop! She could not stop!"

"Lethal." Ali contorted and then added swiftly."Very strange." and then took to looking at the dead girl who lay staring at the bed, her head upside down, hanging out over the end othe bed.

"There was nothing I could do about it. Anyway, she moved in with me and we became a couple. How gorgeous she was! In fact often when she laughed, in a pathological way that is, she walked away, went to bed, and lay there, turning her head against the wall. But not always. But yet. Such things are nice. Now, just after a year or so we did not get along anymore, because she wanted to marry and to have kids and all. Marry in a church on the countryside in May. With me. She said she was now 26 years old and that it was

time. I did not want to marry. Then our enmity began.

We were always quite turned on on each other. And one night when we had love I happened to say something about how divine it was, having that sex and all. She started laughing in the midst of my talk and I desperately tried to free myself and get loose but she – she was used to handling giant circus horses you know – had a hold of me with a base cross between her legs. She just held me, and she laughed louder and louder, almost so loud that the house crumbled. Now, surely she laughed loud enough to wake up our neighbors, because it was in the middle of the night. I simply could not get a stop on her. I yelled: ‘I am being evicted if you do not stop! I am being evicted!’ She just howled, hollered, and cried with laughter. Her laughter was wholly insane and my hands fumbled for her throat. I got hold of it and I pressed it to try to prevent her from screaming in the night. We had the balcony door all open. All of a sudden, her body rather collapsed, her head fell aside, and I immediately let her go. What had I done? Just after a minute or so, she woke up, by herself, and sat all erect in the bed, massaging her neck looking all confused. She panted for a while and then looked at me and said in a tone that seemed to originate from the realms of death: ‘That was close, Edward!’

The next day she was gone. I never saw her again. I think she lives in the north, in Norrland. Or maybe Blekinge in the South.

“Ha!” Ali grunted. “And that is what you think happened to her?”

“Yes. I think she lives in Norrland.”

Edward rose from the lounge-type red chair and, slightly limping due to the arthroses in his right hip, he took a turn on the floor in the diminutive

flat. The old fellow was slightly clumsy in his movements. He caught a glimpse of the small heap of what seemed to be the clothes of the dead girl, a heap by the bed along with her leather stringed beige sandals. Ali's black eyes followed suit the movements of Edward. The eyes of the dead girl however did not move. Ali lay in his fauteuil with his legs stretched out; his heels quite slowly massaging the parquet floor. Both Ali and Edward now seemed to have completely gotten used to the corpse.

"Maybe she really loved you", Ali said, closing his fists on the handles on the chair as if he was about to try to fold it up. The Arab was clearly worried.

"Might be..." Edward said. "But all the same she went away."

"Not a very strange thing, if you would be asking me. When you neither wanted to marry her nor having kids, and then almost strangled her to death. You might have called her back, mightn't you? If you really wanted her...?"

"Sure, yes." Edward stroke his short greyish beard with his left hand.

"People who love you aren't that frequent you know...", Ali said, raising thick his eyebrows.

"You are pretty good at Swedish." Edward changed the subject.

"Yes, I guess I have a knack for language."

Edward now was corrected. After that, the two of them both went silent, sitting motionless in their chairs. A noise from a motorbike halting somewhere outside on the street was heard.

"Do you know what?" Ali cried out looking at Edward. "Let us give a shit about all this! Let us run from here both of us? Let us rent a car going to Norrland for your horse girl? Eh?"

Ali's face was radiant with enthusiasm. However, Edward looked at him with a solemn face and said:

"Like in a roadmovie, eh?"

"Exactly."

"You have lost your mind. I plan to deliver flowers to my kid sister."

"But don't you think it is time you'll try to get some meaning into your life? Not just sitting fantasising!?"

"Asch!" Edward answered lamely. His look was quite empty.

"What was her name then?" Ali asked.

"Nikki Trehörning..."

"I'll google her name" Ali said in a rush and took out his phone from his vestpocket.

Edward looked on curiously. He was wondering how it might feel to be young like Ali. He himself had probably forgotten about it.

In the Abrovinsch Street it was still silent. It was early hours. No birds awake yet, but another motorbike drove by, silently exploding. Silly it was to drive motorbikes in the city in the middle of the summer! But maybe they were on their way out of town. It was almost preposterous how wealthy common persons had become! Almost everyone could afford to have a Harley Davidsson, just for a spare. Like for instance Spontlav, Geworg Spontlav, a middleaged, greyhaired, sturdy man, one of Edward's neighbours, a man living on the 1st floor, on the remote side of the elevator, seen from where Edward and Ali were right now.

"She does not live in Norrland at all. She lives in Karlsborg, by the lake of Vättern, you know.... Let's go to Karlsborg, Edward!"

Edward almost jumped out of the chair by the notion of his own name. How Ali could know his name, or remember that from some previous

occasion, Edward could not understand. Such an old trick, he thought, ... remembering people's name. Only psychopaths did, he silently summoned to himself.

"Nonsense.", he answered.

"I'll call the police." Ali then said.

"We will be both of us arrested for murder. You'll get at least fourteen years in prison. You are a foreigner. I'll get prison for protection of a criminal."

Ali did not comment on that. Instead he said in a light tone:

"I have two friends living in Sandarna. Way out west here. They own a small truck, a Yamaha. They will sure come if I tell them to, and they will easily transport the body away, and then, when she, the girl, is well buried, well all four of us go to Karlsborg to get Nikki!"

"My God, I go mad! It was a LONG TIME since this with Nikki!"

"Does not matter. It is a real plan, Edward."

They went silent again.

"You killed her, didn't you?" Edward asked in a low voice. "You killed her by mistake?" Edward now looked sternly at Ali. "It was just like with Nikki, wasn't it?"

Ali locked back at Edward.

"Let us say, just for the sake of reasoning, that it was NOT I that did it. Who did? And how are we going to get the killer?"

"First of all we should have to have a motive..."

"Yeah, maybe. And maybe someone wanted to frame me? Why else lure this girl to my apartment? Why did somebody want to put the girl right here? Do you have enemies?"

“No.” Edward said with a slight feeling of fright.

“Neither have I. But there are crazy people out there too....There are people how crazy as can be.”

“Now this way”, Edward cried out, looking up towards the white ceiling,” This flat, close to the outer gate, is known since very long to be often unlocked and many people has had keys to it before. Now this morning, perhaps someone arry-ing a key comes along, a girl, she comes in and lays down. After that somebody else comes in, maybe regarding the door as unlocked, and this is a man, who sees a girl on the bed, a real hottie, and he enters and then it will be a fuzz and a quarrel...”

Edward now, after this senseless speculation, looked towards the bed.

“I haven’t a ghost of a chance.”Ali said and he could hardly get the words through his throat. It was the first time in all morning he seemed to feel sorry for himself. He even seemed to ask for help.

Half past eleven on this very noon, after several hours of hesitation, they finally rang the police.

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