

THE MURDER OF A REDHEADED BEAUTY.

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[Soon available in Swedish.]

Chapter One

It looked like it was going to be another perfect day in this perplexingly hot 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, at an art museum, Edward woke up in his bed with a strange thought in his head:

“Content is something very small.”

The old man looked at the 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 got 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 due to the extraordinary tricky language in it, he thought. The book was an early novel by Joseph Conrad. Conrad was one of the greatest writers of all time. Edward still lingered by the thought from his dream about content being something very small. Form is, by contrast,

something much more important, he silently added, while rubbing his eyes. These ideas wasn't really his, but came from a book by Sartre, the title of which he had long forgotten. He was very good at forgetting things nowadays. The notion presented by Jean-Paul Sartre wasn't very strange or remarkable *per se*, but it was a strange notion with which to wake up to.

Edward Tegelkrona had expected to wake up at sunrise. The alarm was set just as a precaution. Now he woke up at 7 a.m., and to top it all off, right out of a dream. He noticed that his chest was all sweaty. Then he suddenly remembered:

The dream hadn't been about Sartre at all; it had had to do with a meeting with old friends from Edward's time in the Army. However, in 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, drinking, 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 retirees, 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 and the use of alcohol as well as 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 one of his neighbors, living on the 1st floor, who drove an old Harley Davidson.

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 early 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 contorted 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 himself by starting this

beautiful day negatively. He hacked, snarled, and panted, as was his habit, and then looked theatrically at the window and the balcony door, where light softly entered. Sometimes, when his own mind was totally ambivalent, which often was the case, he almost felt monitored by some invisible being. Somewhere inside, he thought, he no longer was able to concentrate as much as needed to be able to read books properly.

“Ah, he cried out. The weather is super!”

Aside from sleeping, Edward’s favorite occupation nowadays was taking long walks. Reading books was, according to Tegelkrona, something that belonged to the youth. Leon Battista Alberti, 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 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 town. His sister, Janina Blingstav-Tungspetz, who was married to Jan-Albin Tungspetz, but resided with her daughter in a bungalow in the southern part of Halland, by the sea, wasn’t at home today. But Edward had the key to Janina’s place. It would, of course, have been much nicer to meet up with Janina, but it was, under the circumstances, a pleasant 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 EU, because they were considered poisonous. For many years, you could get hold of a single *Monstera* anywhere in Sweden in any store at all. If you

ate leaves of *Monstera*, you would end up dead, especially if you were a child. But now the ban was lifted, and Janina now had no small children.

The house where Edward 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, although it was all inhabited, seemed completely deserted. The parking places were very few, but the whole area was designed and prospected long ago, when not everyone drove around in the city in a car.

Everything about these houses, and the buildings in this area, was either horizontal or vertical, and it was either all yellow, brownish red, or white. Anything which might be a reminder of something mystical, mythical, or historical was not to be seen anywhere in this part of town. There was not the slightest sign of beauty here. The idea behind it all, the whole architecture, was fundamentalist, authoritarian thinking. It was totally impossible to project upon these houses or parts of them either love or hate.

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 their surroundings and by the architectural forms of the area of their creativity and 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. It was all an infernal reversed Versailles. Where the

magnificent Louis VIX was celebrated and revered in Versailles, here Nothingness resided. Equality was the unknown center around which everything slowly, dumbly, and unconsciously moved. Nothingness was what this part of town was built around.

Almost never was this, the character of nothingness, was felt as painstakingly as by the tests of the atomic bomb alarms on the first Monday in March, June, September, and December. When people innocently heard these strange and familiar sounds from emergency horns, they all halted, thought for a while, look around them as if it was the first time they did, and wondered if death would not be a better option in comparison with the actual situation of living where they all lived at the time. Or, they might have done so. Some people were actually not sure if the bomb already had hit, or not.

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 was to be deprived of his or her life. But, of course, let us not reveal anything in this little story beforehand.

Among those – and many of them were newcomers to Sweden – who actually, despite it all, lived here in the same house as Edward Tegelkrona, in this very district, in this estate, where the hallway was painted light green and decorated with mosaic lions and where a giant façade, encased by windows facing east, let in the morning sun during the entire year, few were among those that Edward did not know about.

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 a lot of retired people. Many students and many 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. 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, and from these apartments, one could often hear 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.

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 those 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. Frusing'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 certain 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 *Monstera*s, 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 rather 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 triadic. 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 victim 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. 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. “What do you mean?”

Ali spoke almost flawless Swedish. Some people 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 were 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 an 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 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 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 of super-natural vision, 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."

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