He could not get the mysterious police car out of his mind while walking away from the suspicious policeman. Apparently the police were investigating something in UCL’s Institute of Archaeology, where their car was parked. His friend Karl Fehr was a professor at that institute, and he was the reason why Rietberg was intrigued by the police car. He had not known Fehr very long, but his friend had something about him―something out of the ordinary―that could make him prominent as well as land him into trouble.

After his return to his small bachelor flat on Herbrand Street he tried to concentrate on his work, hacking away on his computer. But what was the matter with the police car on Gordon Square? Finally he gave in to satisfy his curiosity. He had to know what happened if only to be able to do his work, not distracted by the thought of police investigating or even arresting a fellow teacher.

He phoned Fehr’s office number. After a few rings a man replied.

It was not Fehr. A man with a blunt voice asked: ‘Who are you?’

Rietberg did not like the tone. ‘And who wants to know?’ he asked, ready to put the receiver down.

‘This is the police. Please give us your name and phone number―we might need to contact you.’

So it was serious indeed―more serious than he had expected. Because it was the police and because he had said ‘please’, Rietberg told him what he wanted to know. But when he asked what this was all about, the police officer simply closed the line.

He decided to try his luck by walking back to the UCL building, which he did after a couple of hours wait, when he could safely assume that the police had gone. He knew Fehr’s office quite well. He had often gone there to join his friend for a drive in Fehr’s Jaguar to his golf club in North London. Rietberg was not only wearing designer clothes now, but had also taken up golfing, prompted by Fehr’s enthusiasm for the game. It was part of his post-retirement efforts to change from a grey academic to a youthful senior citizen.

He entered the building and tried to take the lift to Fehr’s office. The woman sitting behind the entrance desk had never paid much attention to him before―his looks and his demeanour were enough to identify him as a *bona fide* visitor. This time she stopped him.

‘Who do you want to see?’

‘Professor Fehr; I am his colleague.’

The woman, who looked very nervous, told him bluntly:

‘No, Sir, I am not allowed to let you in. Professor Fehr’s office has been sealed by the police and he is not there anyway.’

‘What happened?’ he asked, fearing the worst now.

‘I cannot tell you more than that,’ said the receptionist. ‘Please go away now.’

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There was one person who would probably know more. Alistair Trevelyan―Sir Alistair in fact, after he had been knighted for reasons unknown to almost everyone else, except to himself and to his Tory friends. He was an old acquaintance from about forty years ago, when Rietberg was in Cairo researching archives, while Alistair represented the British Bank of Commerce in the Middle East. Alistair played golf―quite enthusiastically―, first in Cairo at the Pyramids Golf Club and now during his retirement as a member of Fehr’s club in North London that Rietberg had also joined recently in an effort to get some exercise and become part of non-academic society.

He phoned him, trusting that Alistair would be at home, just like most pensioners are supposed to be.

‘Have you had any news about Karl Fehr recently? I got some policeman answering his phone, when I tried to contact him. I am a bit worried, I must say.’

The news he got from Alistair was bad indeed: Fehr had been murdered!

Alistair knew for sure, because he had discovered the murder. He did not want to be more explicit on the phone, but told Rietberg to come to see him at home if he wanted to know what happened. It took the taxi about 45 minutes for the drive to Holland Park where the Trevelyans lived―45 minutes that seemed like an eternity for Rietberg who was burning with curiosity.

Both pensioners had their whiskies, which Alistair in true style served from a crystal decanter, not directly from a bottle as Rietberg used to do. It was not even teatime yet, but Alistair’s wife Dina was still at work and therefore not able to frown upon their whiskies, at a time when tea or coffee or nothing at all was more appropriate.

Alistair’s report sounded as if he had told his story often before. He had gone to Fehr’s flat in Chelsea to pick him up for a game of golf, got no answer after ringing the bell and then rang another bell. In spite of repeated warnings not to let in potential burglars a trustful neighbour opened the front door from his intercom and was already expecting his unknown visitor outside his flat. Alistair ignored him and continued to Fehr’s flat, where he knocked several times without getting an answer. The no more so trustful neighbour followed him to check what Alistair was up to. Both Alistair and the neighbour waited now for Fehr to respond.

After Alistair had tried in vain to reach Fehr on his mobile, he said to his neighbour: ‘I am afraid that something must have happened. Perhaps I should call the police.’

The neighbour, who by now had become clearly suspicious, objected: ‘Why? Do you always call the police when someone does not answer a ring? He might be away for some reason. Or do you know more than I do?’

‘No, but we had an appointment, and Mr Fehr has never missed our appointments before.’ He was annoyed to have to justify himself to a complete stranger.

The neighbour had a better idea. Someone from the owner’s management company could be reached 24/7 and come with a master key in case of emergency. They had to wait, while both were standing uneasily together, not knowing what to say. In the meantime Alistair tried to excuse himself, but the neighbour did not want to let him go.

‘This could finally interest the police as you were saying yourself, so you had better wait as well,’ he said to Alistair, who cursed Fehr, Fehr’s neighbour and himself.

The man with the master key, who arrived after an hour, hesitated before opening the door.

‘I am not allowed to enter anyone’s flat except in an emergency,’ he said. But because he knew Fehr’s neighbour personally and after Alistair made it sound like a true emergency, he finally agreed to open the door.

They found Fehr crouched in his armchair with the back of his skull nearly blown away by a bullet that must have been shot at close range. There was a lot of blood―on the armchair, on the floor and even splattered on the wall. Alistair had never seen so much blood. In the thrillers he sometimes watched on TV, someone shot used to have a more or less neat hole on his forehead or on the chest without all that unpleasantness like blood pools or skulls reduced to half. And then there was the stench, the pervasive stench of blood and the beginning decay of the body. He nearly threw up, but finally managed to keep his composure.

In spite of all signs of brutality there were no traces of a fight in the flat. Two full glasses were on the table, a whisky tumbler and a water glass filled with juice. Even for a non-trained observer it appeared that Fehr had invited his murderer for a drink, before the killer stood up again, went in front of Fehr and shot him point-blank. It was not clear from Fehr’s position in the armchair if he had first to listen to his death sentence and the reasons for it or if it had been a merciful killing―sudden and unexpected with no time for the victim to realise what would happen to him.

‘It appears to have been a gangland-style execution with nothing disturbed in the flat,’ said Alistair, who was still shaken by his experience.

The police came soon after. Much to Alistair’s surprise, instead of thanking him they submitted him to intense questioning in the hope of finding an easy prey.

Alistair had somehow been the innocent victim of a campaign the press―foremost among them the London Evening Standard―waged against ‘Red’ Ken Livingston, the then Mayor of London, who was in ultimate charge of the Metropolitan Police. Newspapers were in the habit of describing London as a crime capital due to what they lambasted as Livingston’s inefficient rule. The police desperately needed a quick success and Alistair came in handy. They did not formally arrest or even handcuff him, but left no doubt that they hoped to add him forthwith as a convicted murderer to their statistics of solved crimes. As Alistair with his unshakeable Tory convictions was among Livingston’s critics, Rietberg could not feel very sorry for his predicament. He mumbled a few words of insincere sympathy, however.

‘They immediately tried to pin the murder on me. My effort to contact Fehr was too ostentatious to be taken at face value and could just have been a trick to avoid suspicion. Having phoned Fehr three days before for an appointment, as I told them, did not explain why I had not checked again that day, which would have been normal in their opinion. A dead Fehr could not have confirmed that appointment, of course. Why then did I show up at all? To demonstrate that I wanted to meet Fehr, only to hide the fact that as a murderer I knew quite well that he was dead?―Having neither an apparent motive nor a gun did not exonerate me either,’ he complained. ‘My motives were unknown yet and I could have thrown my gun away. So they kept me the better part of the day repeating the same idiotic questions.’

Rietberg found it quite remarkable that the law-and-order man Alistair was outraged by having that very law applied to him.

‘One question concerned something painted on the main door of the building: Two identical white squares. The police seemed to give those graffiti some importance, although I don’t know why. According to Fehr’s neighbour they had been there for a few days only. That meant they were made approximately at the time of the murder, which as far as I understood during my grilling must have happened three days or so before. I had not even noticed them, which they did not believe either. I could have made them myself for reasons they would soon find out, just as I could have killed Fehr – imagine!’

‘Could these squares have been Hebrew letters, representing a *mem*?’

‘Well, I read French and Arabic, but no Hebrew. But yes―it could have been Hebrew by the looks of it. Strange that you ask that question. Do you know more about that?’

If his French was as bad as his Arabic, Rietberg thought, then Alistair knew only English.

‘No―just an idea,’ he answered.

Alistair sensed that Rietberg did not tell him everything.

‘They had to let me off the hook finally, of course,’ he continued after a moment, looking suspiciously at Rietberg. ‘They had no proof that I visited Fehr at the time of the murder. It must have taken them a long time to check the omnipresent CCTV for someone looking like me, in vain of course. They even asked the neighbour if he had seen me at other times, which he had not. At least he told the truth, although he clearly wanted me to look suspect in the eye of the police, probably only because I ignored him after he let me in.’

Rietberg thought it over for a while. To question a knighted member of society and a staunch supporter of conservative virtues as a murder suspect would have surprised him before. Yet recently quite a few pillars of society had to face the law, so Alistair’s case was not that odd after all.

‘But to check you out must have taken some time. So when did all this happen?’

‘Two or three days ago,’ said Alistair, ’and―believe me―I could barely concentrate on anything else in the meantime.’

‘I wonder why it took them so long to contact the University. I only saw a police car in front of his institute just now.’

Alistair laughed. ‘You will never imagine who the police have been investigating first. Members of our honourable golf club, can you believe it?’

Alistair himself was responsible for this. During his grilling he was asked if he knew of any enemies Fehr might have had.

Alistair had mentioned an acrimonious debate between club members after a tournament that Fehr had won. The runner-up, an old widower, who practically lived on the golf course and who knew the golfing bible of The Royal and Ancient Golf Club of St Andrews by heart, had accused Fehr of cheating by touching the ball with his club during a practice swing without recording a penalty that would have cost him his victory. A special committee had been assigned to decide upon the final outcome of that tournament. As a result some members had stopped talking to Fehr to whom it was even suggested that he resign and move his membership elsewhere.

‘There was even a prize for the winner―a stay at a holiday resort in the Seychelles, sponsored by the owner of a tourist company, one of our members. It’s a five star hotel that made winning or cheating even more important.’

He grinned.

‘I had competed myself, but my bad form that day fortunately saved me from being a serious rival to anyone and from any further suspicion.―There could have been another motive. Karl liked to brag about his amorous adventures, even with ladies married to other golf members. Some of the members with attractive wives, who might have fallen for Fehr’s mysterious Swiss charms, could have resented his ways.’

‘That explains why the police never contacted me. I am not part of the golf club establishment, nor do I have a wife anymore,’ Rietberg remarked drily.

‘Some are even angry with me, after they heard that it was I who informed the police about that fight among our members,’ continued Alistair, without commenting on Rietberg’s remark. ‘During the past few days the police have tried desperately to find some lead to the murder in our club. To win or lose a golf tournament may sound trivial to most people, but not so to golfers. Certainly less trivial than being cuckolded.’

He laughed. After a moment he added: ‘At least not to those who have a chance of winning.’

A subtle hint that Rietberg should not be too concerned about the outcome of golf tournaments. Unkind, but not unexpected from a bloody snob like Alistair.

‘Well―I cannot imagine that Fehr could have persuaded Dina with his charms like you did,’ Rietberg replied with a smile, not as a testimony to Alistair’s charms nor to the virtue of Alistair’s attractive wife, with whom Rietberg had been hopelessly infatuated for many years, but as a revenge―albeit a subtle one―for Alistair’s doubts in his golfing skills.

Alistair did not like it. There was a moment before he replied.

‘Of course not,’ he replied curtly. No more the reply from a bloody snob, but from a straight husband. ‘By the way, you can also expect a visit from the police at some time. I never mentioned your name, but other members, who know about your regular games with Fehr, will certainly have told them about your relationship.’

Rietberg had nothing to fear from the police, but he was happy at his success to have disconcerted this pompous banker. His relations with Alistair had been strained from the first time he met Dina in Cairo and continued to be so after the three of them met again in London. As long-time acquaintances with a shared expatriate past in Egypt they socialised quite often, more so after Rietberg had recently become a member of Fehr’s and Alistair’s golf club. There had been times, when Rietberg and Alistair had even formed a sort of camaraderie while they cooperated to find the riddle of another mysterious murder case that was connected to the London art market. Yet a woman desired by two men, one of them happily married to her and the other forever frustrated, is a serious obstacle to a lasting friendship, even after youthful desire has cooled off. Resentment and jealousy never do.

Rietberg digested Alistair’s information about Fehr without further comment. He was shocked by the news, although after that scene on Gordon Square he already thought the worst. In fact, he had his own ideas about who might have been the murderer―definitely not a golf club member. It was more than a suspicion even. He knew some with serious motives to kill Fehr, more serious than the rage after a lost game or the humiliation of a cuckolded golf club member.

Of course, he could not mention any of that to Alistair. The only thing he said was:

‘Well, now they seem to have focused their attention on his colleagues at UCL.’