

Chapter One

I

The weekly American news magazine *World Reporter* goes to press at eleven o'clock on Friday night. As a rule there is not much work left to be done that evening, except by the proof-readers and checkers; but the atmosphere in the New York editorial offices is still tense.

It is understandable. A daily newspaper is committed for only a few hours and can always retrieve or cover its mistakes fairly promptly. But when a magazine as forthright and prophetic in its judgments as *World Reporter* is confounded by events, it looks foolish for several days. There was, for instance, the unhappy week when a South-east Asian general, hailed by the magazine on Friday as 'Asia's new strong man', had by Monday, when the magazine reached the news-stands, tamely surrendered to a mob of unarmed students and been hanged. Fortunately, such mishaps are rare. The editors are able men and as wary as they are well-informed. Every possible precaution is taken. The major wire service machines are watched continuously. All around the world, in a dozen different time-zones, those who staff the magazine's foreign bureaux are at their posts, monitoring regional news services and radio broadcasts. Private lines and teleprinter circuits connect the main editorial offices with the printing plants in Philadelphia and

Chicago. Electronic type-setting equipment has been installed. Stories can be re-slanted, punches pulled or converted into pats on the back, bets hedged and faces saved right up until the last moment. If there is tension, there is also calm and quiet confidence.

At least, there is in New York. In the foreign bureaux the weekly vigil before the Friday night deadline is accompanied by a gnawing anxiety that has nothing whatever to do with the work in hand. It has to do with the editor-in-chief, Mr Cust.

By nine o'clock in New York on a normal Friday evening, most of the senior editors feel sure enough of themselves and their work on the new issue to go down to the restaurant on the ground floor of the *World Reporter* building and eat dinner. With Mr Cust, however, it is different. Unless some extraordinary emergency arises, he has nothing more to do or decide until the Monday afternoon editorial conference about the next issue. As the principal shareholder in the magazine as well as its editor-in-chief, he has nobody to whom he must report. He could, conveniently for all concerned, go up to his penthouse at the top of the building and join his wife and her guests for dinner and bridge. He knows this, knows that it is a desirable state of affairs and that he himself has brought it about; but he also resents it. Accordingly, instead of going up to the penthouse, he remains in his office and sends for smoked salmon sandwiches and a bottle of Blanc-de-Blanc. Then, with the aid of a private file and the undivided attention of an overseas switchboard operator, he proceeds to nourish his self-esteem by bedevilling the foreign bureaux.

It is the only time he ever calls a bureau direct, and he selects his victims for the evening with care. They will be those – no more than two or three as a rule – for whom he has been able to devise what he calls ‘planning suggestions’.

He devotes much time and thought to their preparation. For

his purposes, a sound planning suggestion has to possess three qualities: there must be no chance of its having been anticipated by the bureau chief; it must always seem to be based upon exclusive inside knowledge cleverly obtained by Mr Cust; and, finally, it must so surprise, bewilder and exasperate the bureau chief concerned that he is stung into making protests which Mr Cust can have the satisfaction of quashing. In other words, the suggestion must be eccentric, illogical and perverse.

It is said that he is suffering from a type of cerebral circulatory disturbance characteristic of senility, and that recently the deterioration has become more marked. That may well be true. No editor in his right mind could have issued a directive as stupid and as malicious as Mr Cust's planning suggestion on the Arbil story.

II

It was received by Sy Logan, the Paris bureau chief, at 3.15 a.m. (French time) on a cold Saturday morning in February. I was in his office when the call came through.

The conversation began, as such conversations always did, with a polite inquiry by Mr Cust concerning the bureau chief's health and that of his wife and family. Sy replied with the required brevity, switched on the tape-recorder and waved to me to listen on his secretary's extension phone.

Mr Cust's voice is both loud and indistinct, like a defective public address system at an airport. Though deafened by it you have to strain to hear what is being said. He also eats his sandwiches as he talks, which doesn't help either.

'... fine thanks, Chief,' Sy Logan was saying.

'Great. Now, Sy, I've been thinking about that Arbil business last month, and what we ought to be doing about it.'

There was a pause; then, just as Sy was opening his mouth to reply, Mr Cust went on: 'They haven't traced that bikini girl yet, have they?'

'No, Chief.'

'Christ!' Although it was said mildly, the tone expressed more than concern over a state of affairs; it managed somehow to suggest that Sy personally was to blame. 'What *are* we doing about it, Sy?'

'Well, Chief . . .'

'Now don't tell me we've been taking Reuter's coverage on the story, because I already know that. I mean, what are *we* doing?'

'Chief, there's not much we *can* do. The girl's been missing for six, seven weeks now. Her pictures have been run in pretty well every paper and magazine in Europe. She could be in France, Spain, Portugal or Italy. Probably she's in France, but the police just haven't found her yet. Until they do . . .'

'Sy!' There was a plaintive note there now.

'Yes, Chief?'

'Sy, I don't want *Paris Match* or *Der Spiegel* beating us to it.'

This is a good example of the Cust needling technique. He did not mention *Time-Life* or *Newsweek* or *U.S. News and World Report*. The implication was that, while there was no chance of *their* beating *World Reporter* to anything because of the unceasing vigilance of the New York office, the Paris bureau, in its leaden-footed way, might well permit French or German competitors to steal a march on it. As they *had* stolen marches on at least two recent occasions, the admonition was particularly annoying. Sy leapt to his own defence.

'Beating us to what, Chief?' he demanded sharply. 'There's no angle on it for us yet. Not enough to go on. Until the police trace the girl, or she decides to come forward, the story's dead.'

'Is it, Sy, *is it*? In my mind's eye I could see Mr Cust placing a

skinny forefinger against the side of his nose. 'I think that's a pretty dangerous assumption for us to make.'

'Not dead then, only sleeping.'

'That's very funny, Sy, but you're not taking my point. We know that there's a political angle back of the story. We also know that there are political reasons behind the inability of the police to trace her. Or perhaps you *didn't* know that.'

'I know that that's the left-wing line on it here.'

'It's more than just a line, Sy. I've dug up some pretty solid evidence that it's a fact.'

'What sort of evidence, Chief?'

'I can't go into that now. Let me just say that the C.I.A. are very, very interested.' Another standard ploy that. 'And we ought to be interested, too. I think we ought to get out and find this girl, and get her story before someone else does the job for us.'

Sy cleared his throat. 'I'm sorry, Chief, I didn't quite get that. When you say "find", do you mean . . .?'

'I mean what I say – *find*. Until you find her you can't get the story, can you?' There was a touch of impatience now.

This was all fairly meaningless to me. I had been in Portugal getting interviews with exiled royalty when the Arbil affair had started. As I understood it, a man named Arbil had been murdered in Switzerland and the police were trying to find some woman who wore a bikini and had witnessed the crime.

Sy had been fumbling with a cigarette. He paused to light it before he replied carefully: 'I quite agree, Chief. If we could find her, we would certainly have a story.'

'Good. Now, who are you going to put on to it?'

Sy put the cigarette out again. 'Well, to be honest, Chief, I'd as soon put nobody on.' There was a dead silence the other end. Sy went on grimly. 'Before I came into this organisation,' he said, 'I was a newspaper man.'

'And a very capable one,' the voice conceded graciously. But

there was a hint of amusement there now. Mr Cust was beginning to enjoy himself.

The back of Sy's neck was getting red. 'Capable or not,' he ploughed on, 'one of the first things I learned from you was that I had to change my thinking. I remember some of the things you said. "Never try to do the newspapers' job." That was one. How did it go on? "We are a magazine. We don't compete with newspapers and television for beats and scoops. They record the news. We interpret the news and make it history." It's a bit late to be changing the ground rules, isn't it?'

'Nobody's changing any rules, Sy.' The voice was glutinous with pleasure now. 'We're just trying to bring a little imagination to bear on our job. At least, I am, and I'm hoping I can take you along with me. Now, think. The newspapers haven't come up with even a smell of a lead. Why not? Because all they've done is suck around after the French police. We now know that the police have been dragging their feet. It's time we moved in.'

Sy was as belligerent as he dared to be. 'Move in with what?' he said shortly.

'You know your own people best. Where's Parry now?'

'In Bonn covering the talks. You told me to send him there, remember?'

'So I did, yes.' He tried, unsuccessfully, to sound as if he had forgotten.

'Chief, what I'm trying to explain is that we'd be wasting our time. All the big news outfits have had their teams working on it, and they've had to give up. As for the police, their attitude makes no difference. If they have really tried and failed, we don't have a hope. If they know where she is and are stalling, we don't have a hope either.'

'Not even if I tell you where to look?' You could almost see his fatuous grin as he said it.

It brought Sy up short, but he recovered quickly. 'Would that be C.I.A. information, Chief, or can't you say?'

'You're damned right, I can't say. Not over an open line anyway. You'll get all the information you need in The Bag tomorrow. Now, who are you going to put on to it? What's that German psycho of yours doing at the moment?'

Sy transferred the telephone from his right hand to his left. 'I don't seem to recognise that description, Chief,' he said after a moment.

'Oh for God's sake! The one who did that sick story about the fag night-club. Pete something . . .'

Sy gave me a haggard look. He said: 'If you mean Piet Maas, you could ask him yourself, Chief. He's listening on the extension.'

'And I'm Dutch, not German,' I said.

'My apologies. Dutch it is.' He did not withdraw the word 'psycho', however. That still stood. 'Well, now . . .'

I said: 'I'd better tell you right away, Mr Cust, that I wouldn't be any good at all at playing detectives.'

'I agree,' Sy added. 'What we need for . . .'

'Who's asking him to *play* at anything?' Mr Cust bleated back. 'He's supposed to be working for us, isn't he? What's his current assignment?'

'Automobile production in the Common Market, Chief,' Sy answered promptly. 'The latest facts and figures, and a three-year growth projection.'

In fact, I was working on a piece about new French painters who were being bought by American art museums; but Sy was trying to bluff his way out. Mr Cust is against the Common Market, and *World Reporter's* policy is to attack it. Naturally, the Paris bureau is one of the main sources of ammunition for the campaign, and Sy had successfully used the fact before to counter New York office pressures.

This time he didn't succeed, though. Mr Cust merely hesitated.

'Who requested it?'

'Dan Cleary.'

'Well, I'll speak to him. You can forget it for the moment. This has top priority.'

Sy had one more try. 'Chief, if this tip-off is as hot as you say it is, I think I ought to pull Bob Parsons in from Rome, or maybe get after the story myself. After all, Piet Maas is basically a researcher and . . .'

'And that's just what you need for this, Sy, a researcher.' There was finality in the voice now. 'Pete, you shake the long hair out of your eyes, get your ass out of there and find that bikini girl. Sy, you see he finds her, quick. Okay?'

Sy mumbled something and the conversation ended. He switched off the tape-recorder and looked across at me.

He is a greying man in his middle forties, with a long, thin head and a bleak look about the eyes. He smells of after-shave lotion. I didn't like him, and he didn't like me. I had never done daily newspaper work; I wasn't his idea of a pro. I had been educated in England during the war years, and, although I had acquired some American usages since working in the bureau, I spoke English with a British accent. And, of course, there was my personal history. He tried to pretend that it didn't exist, but it made him uneasy all the same.

After a moment, he shrugged. 'Sorry, Piet. I did my best. I could have gone on trying to argue him out of it, but it wouldn't have done any good.'

He was right about that.

Sy had been second-in-command when Hank Weston, the former bureau chief, had hired me as a researcher. It had been pure kindness on Hank's part. I had badly needed to be hired at the time, and would have taken a job as an office boy if he had

offered it. The research thing had not lasted long. If you can write at all, writing for *World Reporter* is an easily learned trick. After a month or two, Hank had put me on the regular staff and given me a year's contract.

The trouble had started soon after he had left to go to a Washington job with USIA, and Sy had taken over.

Every so often *World Reporter* appoints itself the conscience of the world and goes on a moral rampage. The enemy is always announced as 'the spiritual sickness of our time' and *World Reporter's* method of fighting the good fight is to take a close, prurient and self-righteous look at some social phenomenon held to be symptomatic of the sickness. Juvenile delinquency of one sort or another always yields rich material, of course; but it tends to become monotonous. With the idea that some adult depravity, especially European depravity, might make a change, Sy sent me to Hamburg to scout the *Nachtlokale* there.

I found plenty of depravity of the usual sad, depressing kind; but, unfortunately, I also found something that entertained me.

The place was a transvestite night-club with a floorshow of men dressed as girls. It would have been commonplace enough but for one thing: the star of the show was exceptionally good.

Men in drag usually look just that: the false breasts are set too high, the calves bulge in the wrong places, the beard peers bluey through the pancake make-up. This man really looked like a woman; and a very attractive, amusing and talented woman at that. A rather drunken, and plainly heterosexual, ship's officer, who had strayed into the place by mistake, became so enthusiastic that, when at last a waiter felt obliged to tell him that the star wasn't a girl, he yelled back: 'I don't give a damn which it is – I want to go to bed with it!'

I made the mistake of reporting the incident, adding that the fellow had my sympathy. I thought it might amuse the office, and it did; so, instead of cutting it, they left it in to amuse the

people in New York. Mr Cust happened to see it and was not amused.

He had decided to have me investigated.

What he had expected, and probably hoped, to discover, no doubt, was that I was a homosexual. He is rabid on that subject. Instead, he had learned that I had been the editor and part-owner of *Ethos*, an experimental international news review which had gone bankrupt, and that I had spent several months in a French mental hospital following a suicide attempt. The investigators, a Paris firm of private detectives, had even managed to worm out of the hospital authorities the fact that I had received shock treatments.

It turned out that Mr Cust is just as rabid on the subjects of bankruptcy and mental illness as he is on homosexuality. I was finished. If Hank Weston hadn't taken the Washington job, he would probably have been finished, too, for having knowingly hired a man with my record.

Word of this soon got back, and I told Sy that I wanted to leave. But with *World Reporter* things are not that simple. Mr Cust is a jealous god, and at that time my contract still had five months to run. In that organisation, if you have an enforceable contract, you aren't allowed to quit, whatever the circumstances. If you go before the contract expires, you go, not because you want to, but because he has fired you for incompetence; and if the incompetence isn't real, then it will be contrived.

Sy knew this as well as I did.

'What happens if I refuse?' I asked.

'If you do, Piet, you're suspended and go off salary. But you still can't go to work for another magazine until the contract expires. Of course, if you want to take a five months' unpaid vacation, okay.'

I couldn't have lived five weeks without salary, much less five months. He knew that, too.

‘I’m sorry, Piet,’ he said again; ‘naturally, you’ll get all the help I can give you.’

Naturally. My failure would to some extent discredit the bureau. Besides, he had been told to see that I succeeded. It was possible that he too was being disciplined; perhaps for not having warned New York about me earlier. He wouldn’t get fired for my shortcomings, but he might get a black mark against his name.

I said: ‘I take it we can assume that this confidential information of his will be worthless?’

‘Not necessarily.’

‘But probably.’

He sighed. ‘The old man’s not entirely stupid.’

‘I question that.’

‘I know you do. You also overrate your own importance, Piet. We all know you wouldn’t win a popularity contest where he’s concerned, and we all know that he can be a vindictive old bastard, but he’s still a pro. He hears a lot of high-level scuttlebutt from people who feel it’s worth while doing him favours. If he says he knows where this girl is hiding out, then the probability is that he has *something*. It may not be enough, but there’ll be something. He likes playing hunches. And besides, there is such a thing as a long shot, you know.’

‘I know. You don’t bet real money on it, just the torn ten-franc note you’ve been trying to get rid of anyway.’

He shrugged. ‘It’s no good belly-aching, Piet. You heard what I told him. You heard what he told me.’ He went on quickly before I had time to say any more; he’d had enough of me for that night. ‘I tell you what you do. We have a complete file on the story, with clippings, pictures and the Reuter coverage. Take it home and get some sleep. Then read it, and meet me here at twelve-thirty. We’ll have the mail from New York by then. When we know what the score is we can figure out what you have to do. All right?’

III

I went back to the apartment off the Rue Malesherbes, and took two sleeping pills. They didn't work.

After an hour I got up and flushed the rest of the pills down the toilet. It was just a precaution. I never buy more than twenty at a time now, even though I get them through the black market, and there were only a dozen or so in the bottle; not really enough. It takes at least thirty to do the job properly; otherwise the stomach pump gets rid of too much of it. Then there is the long, nasty return to life, and the psychiatric ward. I don't want to go through that again; but I know myself, and I take no chances. In the grey early hours of a bad day, I could be stupid enough to make the same mistake twice.

I made some coffee and looked at the file Sy had given me.

The first reports of the Arbil affair had appeared in the Swiss newspapers, and these were included in the file; but they were mostly scrappy and contradictory. The most complete account was in a French illustrated weekly called *Partout*.

It was entitled, in lettering formed out of revolver bullets, *MYSTERY IN ZÜRICH*. Below this, embedded in a lurid wash-drawing of a car hurtling down a mountain road with a naked girl at the wheel, was a sub-title: *All Europe Seeks the Beautiful Young French Girl with a Bikini and a Key*.

Partout likes to dramatise, and the men who work on it cultivate a breathless, exclamatory style. They also work in teams. Although there was only one name in the by-line of the piece, it was obvious that at least three different writers had contributed. The opening was the work of someone with left-wing opinions and an unfortunate taste for the historic present. It read like an old silent film script.

THE PLACE: Zürich, Switzerland.

THE DATE: January 10th.

THE TIME: 22.00 hrs.

At the central electricity switchboard on this cold winter night sits the duty Controller, Martin Brünner (54). His eyes flicker ceaselessly over the meters and indicators on the control panel before him as he sips his cup of chocolate.

Earlier that day there has been a partial thaw followed by a sharp freeze-up. He is expecting trouble.

But not the kind of trouble he is to get!

Suddenly, a warning light flashes.

Emergency!

The Controller's fingers move swiftly, precisely. The warning light has indicated an interruption of service in the wealthy Zürichberg district – there is a breakdown at a transformer sub-station. Within seconds the Controller has operated the switching necessary to bypass the breakdown and restore electricity to the area.

The rich must be inconvenienced as little as possible.

The ordinary guys, therefore, must work.

Controller Brünner suspects an insulator fault. A standby repair crew must go out to deal with it. The Controller gives the order. A minute later the boys are on their way, swearing philosophically, to do the job.

In charge of the crew is Hans Dietz (36), a married man with two children. He sits beside the driver of the repair truck. The other two members of the crew sit in the back among the tools and line tackle.

The sub-station is located below the crest of a high hill near one of the outer radar installations serving the Kloten-Zürich International Airport. To reach the short track leading to it, they must drive up the Waldseestrasse, a winding mountain road with a precipitous drop to a lake on one side and the boundary walls of some old villa properties on the other.

The gateway to Number 16, the Villa Consolazione, is within a few metres of a hairpin bend. As a safety measure, the municipality has set

up a large mirror on the lake side of the bend so that descending traffic can be forewarned of cars turning into or out of the villa driveway.

Tonight, however, the mirror is obscured by frost.

On the way up, they encounter no cars on the road. That's a bit of luck, because the frozen snow is banked up on both sides of the road and there would be difficulty in passing. The surface is glacial and they are obliged to go very slowly. The Villa Consolazione is barely visible from the road. They do not notice whether or not there are lights burning in the villa grounds.

Why should they notice? They have a job to do.

They reach the sub-station just before 23.00 hrs. It takes them over two hours to locate and deal with the fault. When the job is done, Dietz reports to the Controller over the truck two-way radio, and asks for a test. It is now 01.35 hrs. Three minutes later, assured that all is well and that the sub-station has been switched back into service, the weary crew begin to reload their truck in preparation for the return journey. It is almost exactly 02.00 hrs. when they reach the Wald-seestrasse again.

They go down in low gear as slowly and cautiously as they have made the ascent – at 10 k.p.h., no more.

Suddenly, Dietz sees danger ahead!

A car is coming down the driveway of the Villa Consolazione. It is going at an insane speed! He can see its headlight beams on the banked snow. My God! He shouts a warning to his driver. Foot down. The brakes go on hard.

Too late! The heavy truck swings its rear-end and then slides on over the ice with all four wheels locked. An instant later, the car erupts from the villa driveway, skids across the road and catches the truck's front fender.

It is only a glancing blow, and does little damage to the car.

But for the sliding truck it is disaster.

It spins broadside on, slams into one of the massive stone gateposts, rides up the compacted snow banked along the wall, and crashes over

on to its side. It comes to rest against the snow bank on the lake side of the road.

The car goes on down the hill without stopping. But, at the moment of impact, Dietz has seen both car and driver clearly in the truck headlights.

The car is a black Mercedes 300 S.

The driver is a young woman.

Neither Dietz nor his driver is much hurt. The lads in the back, however, have been less fortunate. One has a broken collar-bone, the other a scalp wound which is bleeding badly and needs stitches.

While the driver does what he can with the first-aid kit for the injured men, Dietz climbs back into the cab and tries the radio.

It is undamaged, and he is able to call Controller Brünner and tell him what has happened. By the time the Controller calls back to say that an ambulance and the police are on their way, Dietz has had time to think.

He failed to get the number of the Mercedes, but, as it came from the Villa Consolazione, he reasons that there must be somebody there who knows the driver's name and where she can be found. He proposes to go up to the villa and demand the information.

'Better wait for the police, Hans,' Controller Brünner advises him.

But no. Dietz is feeling his bruises and is an angry man now. He is going to get that madwoman's name.

He goes up to the villa alone.

At this point, *Partout*, heavily laden with hindsight, began to describe Dietz's thoughts as he went up the driveway. They also gave him a strange sense of foreboding which made him hesitate.

According to a local reporter's account, Dietz had stumbled halfway up the steep driveway, lost his footing on the frozen snow, decided that maybe the Controller had been right after all, and turned back.

It had been two traffic policemen in a patrol car who had eventually gone up to the villa.

A photograph showed it to be a two-storey building in a pseudo-*schloss* style of the twenties, with two small turrets. When the policemen reached the top of the driveway, they found the place in total darkness. The garage doors were open, disclosing spaces for two cars. One space was empty and there were fresh tyre-tracks in the snow outside it; the other was occupied by an old 2 cv. Citroën. The policemen got out and went to the front door of the villa. They found that open, too.

They rang the bell several times without receiving any answer. They had no authority to enter the place uninvited. After a bit, one of them went round to the back to see what he could find there. He returned, some minutes later, with an elderly man named Ernesto Bazzoli. Bazzoli and his wife Maria were the villa servants, and lived in a cottage some fifty metres away by the vegetable garden.

The old man had been asleep in bed, and was shivering, querulous and alarmed. At first, the police were given no chance to ask him questions; he was too busy bombarding them with questions of his own. Why were the big lights out? They were never to be out at night; that was Herr Arbil's order. And where was Herr Arbil's car? Why was the front door open? It should have been double-locked, and with the chain on, as it always was. Where was Frau Arbil? What had happened?

By this time he had led the way inside the villa out of the cold, and the fact that there was more to inquire about here than the identity of a hit-and-run driver was at once apparent.

In the main living-room every drawer, every cupboard and cabinet had been opened and its contents scattered on the floor. It was the same in the dining-room. In the library all the books had been swept from the shelves. Even the kitchen had been ransacked.

Upstairs the situation was different in only one respect. On the floor in one of the bedrooms, there was the half-naked body

of a man whom Bazzoli identified as Herr Arbil. He had been shot three times, twice in the stomach and once through the back of the head.

Here *Partout* switched tenses, and a crime reporter with a more matter-of-fact approach took over.

One of the traffic police telephoned the news to headquarters. The detectives, who arrived soon afterwards, took a quick look at the scene inside the villa, briefly questioned Dietz, Bazzoli and his wife and came to a conclusion which, at that point, seemed the only one possible.

There had been a violent quarrel between Arbil and his wife, during which one of them had ransacked the house looking for something hidden – money, jewellery, letters from a lover, a weapon. At the height of the quarrel, the wife had killed the husband and then fled in his car.

At 03.05 hrs. the night duty officer at Zürich police headquarters authorised a general call to detain Frau Lucia Arbil. The registration number of the Mercedes had been supplied by Bazzoli, and this was circulated along with her description. The nearby frontier post at Koblenz was specially alerted.

The Mercedes was found four hours later in the car park of the International Airport. A check of the passenger lists of outgoing planes at once began. There was no Frau Arbil on any of the lists. But a clerk at the Swissair counter remembered selling a ticket to a young woman answering her description. It had been for a 6.00 a.m. business flight to Brussels. She had had a French passport in the name of Mademoiselle Lucia Bernardi.

The police were in a difficulty now. The Swiss extradition treaty with Belgium requires that a strong prima facie case must be made out against an accused fugitive before the person can be arrested and returned for trial to the country in which the crime has been committed. Before Zürich could ask Brussels to act, they had to be certain that Frau Arbil and Mademoiselle Bernardi were the same person.

The aliens' registration department supplied the answer. Contrary to what Herr Arbil had told the Bazzolis, there was in fact no Frau Arbil. Lucia Bernardi had been Arbil's mistress.

It took until ten o'clock to establish that, however, and by then the Brussels plane had long ago landed and its passengers dispersed.

Late that day, the Belgian Bureau Central came through with the information that a woman answering Lucia Bernardi's description had hired a car at the Brussels airport and been driven to Namur. It was believed that she had taken a train from there to Lille.

If this were true, Zürich had a new problem. We French do not like to extradite our own nationals. She could only be tried for the murder in France.

IF she had committed the murder, that is.

By this time, Commissioner Müller, who commands the Kriminalpolizei of the Zürich canton, was having second thoughts on that subject. He had had the results of the autopsy on Arbil's body, and the whole case was up in the air.

According to the doctors, Arbil had been gagged and bound before he had been shot. He had also been tortured. The state of the genitals left little doubt of it.

More. The two revolver bullets which had inflicted the stomach wounds were of a calibre different from that of the single bullet which had entered the head.

The only gun found in the villa was a Parabellum pistol belonging to the dead man, and that had not been fired!

Two revolvers of different calibre suggested two persons. The crime laboratory technicians were able to state that the ransacking of the villa had been done by two men. One had worn cotton gloves, the other leather. They had forced an entry through a skylight in the roof.

Who were they?

Not ordinary thieves, for they had apparently stolen nothing.

Then, who was Arbil?

A third member of the team supplied the answer to this

question. He used longer sentences, and had a mildly sardonic way with him. He sounded older than the other two.

The dead man's full name was Ahmed Fathir Arbil, and he was a Iraqi. He was also a refugee.

Three and a half years earlier, as Colonel Arbil, he had been the delegate from Iraq to an international conference of chiefs of police at Geneva. The conference had still been in progress when the Baghdad government of Brigadier Abdul Kareem Kassim was shaken by an army revolt in the Mosul area. The revolt was put down after savage fighting, and executions of suspected ringleaders followed. Instead of returning to his fatherland when the conference ended, Colonel Arbil had asked the Swiss authorities for political asylum, on the grounds that, if he were to return to Iraq at that time, he would immediately be shot.

The reason he had given for his sudden fall from political grace had been that he was known to be sympathetic towards the Kurdish nationalist movement which had instigated the Mosul revolt. In support of his contention, he had produced an order for his immediate recall to Baghdad transmitted to him by the Iraqi Legation in Berne. Though it was formal in tone, both his military rank and his title of Director of Security Services had been omitted. The significance of the omissions was accepted. Subject to the usual proviso that he refrain from political activity while in Switzerland, asylum had been granted.

Until a year before his death, his residence in Switzerland had been relatively uneventful. Unlike many other political refugees, he had never been short of money. When he had leased the Villa Consolazione and bank references had been required, he had had no difficulty in satisfying the owner's representatives of his financial reliability. It was understood that his income came from a family business in Iraq. He had not sought any kind of employment, paid or unpaid, and had not engaged in any political activity. He had professed to be working on a history of Kurdistan; but this had not been taken too seriously. Most political refugees planned to write books – or said they did. In Arbil's

case, it had soon become obvious that his social life would take up most of his time.

A lean, powerful man with the aquiline good looks of his race, he had been very attractive to women. On his part he had had a taste for buxom, athletic, unmarried blondes in their early twenties. A number of reports from the police des mœurs attested to the fact that during the first two and a half years of his residence in Switzerland he had been able to indulge that taste with remarkable frequency. The women had not been prostitutes. However, since none of them had complained, since the affairs had been conducted with discretion, and since, above all, the man was a foreigner, no official notice of these moral offences had been taken.

Then, with the entry of Lucia Bernardi into his life, his tastes, as well as the situation at the villa, suddenly changed.

According to the dossier, a précis of which we were permitted to inspect, Arbil met her at St Moritz during the winter sports season.

Her application for a residence permit notes that she was born in Nice twenty-four years ago, that her height is one-hundred-and-fifty-five centimetres and that she has blue eyes with dark brown hair. Occupation: modiste. No distinguishing marks.

A great many photographs of her, taken by the infatuated Arbil, have been found in the villa. In most of them she is wearing a bikini, although there were some winter sports pictures, too. With clothes or without she is, in a slender, graceful and most unbuxom way, quite beautiful. She also looks as if she liked the man who took the photographs, and enjoyed being his mistress.

However, Commissioner Mülder's reluctance to accept the fact that a smiling girl who looked well in a bikini could also conspire with others to commit murder was only nominal. His second thoughts about her guilt were based on the evidence he had accumulated on the case.

Further questioning of the Bazzolis had produced suggestive facts. Some weeks earlier, Arbil had taken a number of precautions, in the Bazzolis' opinion bizarre and unwarranted precautions, against