

Murder, *Swiss Style*

A man in a dark uniform and cap is shown in profile, looking out a window. The window is divided into four panes, showing a cityscape with red-roofed buildings and trees with yellow autumn leaves. The scene is dimly lit, with the light coming from the window.

A Novel by
Mahmoud Bakr



CÁTEDRA PEDAGÓGICA

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By

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GRUPO EDITORIAL
Ediciones Cátedra Pedagógica

MURDER, SWISS STYLE

CHAPTER ONE

Coincidence and destiny are two of the most puzzling phenomena that have faced human beings for a long time. How a remarkable concurrence of events or circumstances without apparent causal connection can take place and then decide one's destiny, no one knows. What happened to me one afternoon was no exception.

It was almost 4.00 p.m. when the phone rang in my office. I picked up the receiver and said, «Yes?»

«Roger, Could you come to my office, please.» It was my boss, Claude Bourquin.

«Right away.» Then I left for his office, which is not far from mine. I knocked at the door and heard him saying, «Come in.»

Sitting on a chair was a tall man in his fifties wearing a three-piece suit. His hair was gray and well combed. He stood up as soon as I entered the office and stretched his hand out to me. My boss introduced him as Chief Inspector François

Dufour from the *Bourg-de-Four* Police Station, in the Old Town section of Geneva.

«Roger, Mr. Dufour would like to talk to you. I'll leave you two alone.»

Then he left the office. In a toneless voice, the Chief Inspector asked me to sit down. I sat down, not knowing what to expect.

«Mr. Sauter, are you married?»

«Yes, I am.»

«Is your wife's name Nicole Sauter?»

«Yes, it is.»

He opened a yellow file he had in his hand and took out an identity card. He put his finger on the photo and asked, «Is this your wife?»

«Yes, what has happened!»

«I am afraid I have bad news for you.»

«What? What?»

«She was found murdered this afternoon.»

In general, I am a calm person and can control myself. It is a habit I acquired from the British during my two years of study in Britain. But at that moment, I felt dizzy and almost like fainting. The office seemed to be turning upside down and clouds obscured my vision. I must have looked awful when the chief inspector asked me,

«Mr. Sauter, would you like a glass of water?»

«No, thanks.» Then I asked, Where did this happen?»

«In a flat, in *Rue des Granges*, in the Old Town.»

«What was she doing there?»

«She was with a man, who was murdered, too» he answered with inquiring eyes.

«With a man! Who the hell was he?» I asked the question with a tinge of anger.

«Mr. Marc Genet, the tenant of the flat. Do you know him?» he asked.

«No, I don't. What was she doing there? I mean, with this man!»

«We don't know yet.»

«How did you find out?»

«It was reported to us by the *concierge*.»

«How did she find out?»

« A deliveryman went up to Mr. Genet's flat to deliver a case of wine. When he rang the bell and there was no answer, he left the case for the *concierge* to deliver. As you know, it happens all the time. When the *concierge* went up with the case and opened the door, as she has a key to the flat, she found your wife and Mr. Genet on the floor, dead.

Of course, she immediately reported it to the police.»

«I don't understand. What was she doing there? Who was this man?»

There was silence for a moment, and then Dufour said, «Now, I am afraid I have to ask you to accompany me to the morgue to identify the body. I know it's painful, but you have to do it.»

On our way out of the office, I met my boss in the corridor and told him briefly that my wife had had an accident and that I had to go with Chief Inspector Dufour. «Of course.» he said.

In the police car, on the way to the morgue, which is in the cantonal hospital, I tried to remember if there had been anything unusual since I had got up that morning. It was the usual waking up at 7 o'clock. I went to the bathroom, where I usually spend between 45 to 50 minutes. Why I take that long just to shave and shower, I never figured out. It is one of those habits people develop as years go by. Then I got dressed and by the time I went to the dining room, Nicole was already sitting at the table drinking her coffee. We exchanged a few words and I sat down to have my breakfast. In ten minutes I finished and left for work. I tried to remember

if I had seen anybody in the lift on my way down to the garage, but I hadn't noticed anyone. Then I drove off to the office.

It was a sunny morning in spite of the rain the night before. On the road, everything was as usual. People were rushing off to work, some it seemed, with enthusiasm, others because they had to. Hanging on to a job these days is a privilege no one can afford to lose. Chief Inspector Dufour interrupted my recollection and said, «Here we are.»

The morgue is located at the back entrance of the cantonal hospital in the basement. On the door the word «Morgue» is written in small letters, as if the authorities want to hide it. There was something eerie about the place. I thought that impression was normal considering the place housed dead bodies. Although it was fairly warm at that time of year, the building was chilly. Inspector Dufour pushed the door open and greeted the receptionist. It seemed he was well known there. I followed him with heavy legs. I wish I were retreating instead of going forward. We entered an office, where a man in a white coat was sitting sipping a cup of coffee at his desk. When he saw us he stood up and shook hands with Dufour, who whispered a few words.

The man in the white coat then escorted us to a huge room with cabinet-like drawers against the wall. The smell was unusual but not nauseating. He went to one of these drawers and opened it. There was a body covered with a white sheet and at the end of the foot a tag was hanging. Inspector Dufour turned to me and said:

«I know it is unpleasant». Then took off the sheet at the head of the body and said, «Is this your wife?»

I looked and nodded, uttering one word, «Yes».

Nicole's face was pale, yellowish with lips almost blue. Her eyes were closed as if trying to conceal their secret. I looked at her for only a few seconds. However, an urge inside me was pushing to know what had happened. «Why was she killed? Who was that Marc?» were the questions going on in my mind at that moment.

«Mr. Sauter, are you all right?», the Chief Inspector asked.

«Yes, I think I am.»

«Can I take you home now?»

«Please.»

Dufour drove me home. Just before I got out of the car, he said, «Mr. Sauter, as you

probably know, you have to give us a statement. We also have to ask you some questions that might help us in our investigation. Not necessarily today. Would it be all right for you to come to the police station tomorrow morning at 10 o'clock?»

«I think so.»

Then he drove off.

Back in my flat, sitting in an armchair puffing away at my cigarette, I tried to review the last two hours. I started to feel the after-shock. As I looked around the room, my eyes caught Nicole's photo on the mantelpiece. It was a 20 year-old photo. She was beautiful, radiant and full of life. The persistent question started again, «Why?» Suddenly I stood up, confused and disoriented and not knowing what to do. I went to the kitchen, took a bottle of whisky and poured myself a large glass. I went back to the living room with the glass in one hand and the bottle in the other. I started to drink. I did not know how long I'd been there, when I heard the alarm clock ringing. I opened my eyes with difficulty and realized it was daylight. I was still wearing my shirt and trousers. The alarm kept ringing. I went to the bedroom to stop it. There, the bed was made, as it had been the day before.

I went to the bathroom to shower. Then, I made a cup of coffee, which helped revive me. Then I remembered the appointment with Dufour. It was almost 9 o'clock. I called my boss to tell him that I would not be able to go to the office.

Police stations in Geneva are unique. They don't look like the ones we see in American movies. They are either separate modern buildings or part of inhabited ones. Sometimes the façades look like shop windows. Instead of transparent glass, they have one-sided mirrors, where people passing by cannot see inside, but police officers inside can see those passing outside. I parked my car in the nearest car park. I walked for two minutes to the station. I pushed the door open. Inside, there was a sign saying 'Reception and Information'. Behind the counter, there was a nice looking young officer in uniform who received me with an expressionless face and stolid voice.

«Can I help you?»

«Yes, I came to see Chief Inspector Dufour.»

«Your name, please.»

«Roger Sauter».

He looked at a paper on the counter and then dialed two digits. I could hear the phone