

THE WEDDING DAY OF THE

When the World's Most Wanted Man was finally brought to justice in 1997, it fell to flamboyant, cigar-smoking lawyer Isabelle Coutant Peyre to defend him. Her case may have failed but their relationship didn't end there. Eamonn O'Neill meets the woman who's going to marry Carlos the Jackal

THE DAY of the Jackal's wedding is top secret. "We don't know the precise date or arrangements. We will see..." says his bride-to-be, 48-year-old Parisian lawyer Isabelle Coutant Peyre. "I don't want the wedding to be in a normal situation with government administration and all that."

Outside, on the grand Boulevard Saint-Germain, a police car walls its way through the midday traffic, its flashing lights piercing the grey winter gloom which shrouds the cobweb of narrow streets on Paris's Left Bank. Inside her bright fourth-floor office, furnished with contemporary art and commanding stunning views northwards across the Seine, Isabelle Coutant Peyre lights up a small cigar and waves a cloud of blue smoke dismissively in my direction. "Listen, the French government and the Venezuelan government have both been informed about our plans. They must

organise for special people like Ilich Ramírez Sánchez. Maybe the ceremony will be very big with Republican Guards. On horseback too! Yes, the mounted guards – the very symbols of *égalité, fraternité, liberté...* Ha!"

The man she intends to marry – Ilich Ramírez Sánchez, also known as Ali Bakarat, also known as El Chacal, also known as Salim and a multitude of other names gleaned from faked paperwork and stolen passports – is better known as Carlos the Jackal. For 20-odd years during the 1970s and '80s he crisscrossed the western world planting bombs and carrying out hijackings in the name of some ill-defined revolutionary ideal. Reputedly responsible for the deaths of around 83 people, he was the World's Most Wanted Man, until his arrest in Sudan in August 1994.

Coutant Peyre has been his lawyer since his capture by the French secret service. At first a team of lawyers represented the inter-

national terrorist but he dismissed one after the other, until only Ms Coutant Peyre remained. Now "Detainee 872686/X" and the high-flying human-rights lawyer are to wed. The legal organisation in Paris she belongs to has objected, she tells me, but she denounced its comments and publicly challenged its members to try and stop her. Nothing happened. So as far as she is concerned, she still fully intends to marry her infamous client. "The thing is, I have been Carlos's lawyer since [the mid-1990s] so our friendship, our relationship effectively, is not recent. It was after a long time that we decided on marriage because of the situation. People, of course, say that maybe you love him but that doesn't mean to say you are obliged to marry him. But, I have to say, the situation is very special."

As is Ms Coutant Peyre's appearance.

After climbing four flights of marbled stairs to her office, and waiting in a Vatican-like ▶



JACKAL