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Harry's Game

Written by Gerald Seymour

Published by Hodder

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GERALD SEYMOUR

HARRY'S GAME



First published in Great Britain in 1975 by Collins

This paperback edition first published in 2013

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A CIP catalogue record for this title is available from the British Library.

Book ISBN 978 1 444 76001 9
eBook ISBN 978 1 444 76002 6

Printed and bound by Clays Ltd, St Ives plc

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To William Kean Seymour

HARRY'S GAME

Introduction To The Twentieth Anniversary Edition

by Robert Harris

Thrillers exist for one purpose only – to entertain, to 'thrill' – and for that reason are among the most ephemeral of literary forms. Bought, read, discarded and forgotten inside a fortnight: such is the life-cycle of the average thriller.

But every so often the genre throws up a novel of such remarkable quality, the cycle is broken. Having finished it you don't want to throw it out: on the contrary, you press it on your friends. You don't forget it: its characters and atmosphere linger in your mind for years. John Le Carré's *The Spy Who Came In From the Cold* is a superlative example. So is Frederick Forsyth's *The Day of the Jackal*, and Martin Cruz Smith's *Gorky Park*. These are thrillers that have justly become classics of popular entertainment – novels that are likely to endure well into the next century – and this is the pantheon to which *Harry's Game* belongs.

Published in 1975, it was Gerald Seymour's first novel and has never been out of print since. Time ('that old common arbitrator' as Shakespeare called it) has judged it a classic – and for three good reasons.

First, and most obviously, it is a masterpiece of story-telling. From the opening scenes in which a nameless IRA assassin hurries across London to commit a murder, to the final, bloody confrontation on Ypres Avenue, Belfast, the plot uncoils with perfect logic and precision, and with remorseless speed.

Secondly, the character of Harry Brown – brave and patriotic, vulnerable and suspicious – is vastly superior to the standard thriller caricature of an undercover agent. Harry is no cardboard hero. He is a believable, flesh-and-blood figure. So, too, is his terrorist quarry, Billy Downs – his 'game'. It is this depth and subtlety of characterization that help make the book so believable.

Indeed, I can think of no contemporary British novelist who has drawn a more convincing picture of the terrorist war in Northern Ireland than Gerald Seymour (readers who enjoy this novel should make sure they read *The Journeyman Tailor*). This is the third and decisive factor which makes *Harry's Game* a classic. The crumbling streets of Catholic Belfast, with their warren of men's hostels, boarding houses and bars, have seldom been better evoked. The smells and sounds of the city rise off the page, so that Belfast becomes almost a character in its own right, all the more frightening for being so familiar. This, after all, is not Berlin under the Nazis or Communist Moscow: this terrifying urban landscape into which Harry Brown descends, with its bomb sites and safe houses and street ambushes, is a *British* town.

It is twenty years since *Harry's Game* was published. As I write, it seems for the first time possible – *just* possible – that the violent struggle it so brilliantly depicts may be drawing to a close. If that proves to be the case, and if a new generation of readers ever wishes to know what it was like, long ago, when marksmen and armoured cars had to maintain order in a major European city, they will find no better place to start than in the pages which follow.

I

The man was panting slightly, not from the exertion of pushing his way through the shapeless, ungiving mass of the crowd but from the frustration of the delay.

He drove himself at the knot of people that had formed a defensive wall round the Underground ticket machine, reaching out through their bodies with his money for the slot, only to be swept back as the crowd formed its own queue out of the rabble. It took him fifteen seconds more than two minutes to insert his ten-pence piece and draw out a ticket, but that was still quick set against the endless, shuffling line approaching the ticket kiosk.

He moved on to the next piece of gadgetry, the automatic barrier. He inserted his ticket into the machine, which reacted and bent upwards to admit him. There was space around him now. His stride lengthened. Bottled up amongst the mass on the far side of the barrier, with the clock moving, he'd felt the constriction, his inability to get away.

Now, in the open at last, he cannoned off an elderly man, deep in his paper, making him stumble. As he tried to sidestep his way out of the collision he knocked into a girl loaded for the launderette, hitting her hard with his left elbow. She looked startled, half focusing on him, half concentrating on holding her balance, her arms out of action clinging to the plastic bag pressed into her breasts. He saw the look of surprise fill her face, watched her as she waited for the explanation, the mumbled apology and helping hand – the usual etiquette of Oxford Circus Station, top hall, at 8.45 in the morning.

He froze the words in his mouth, the discipline of his briefing winning through. They'd told him not to speak en route to the

target. Act dumb, rude, anything, but don't open your big mouth, they'd said. It had been drilled into him – not to let anyone hear the hard, nasal accent of West Belfast.

As the man sped from the fracas, leaving the elderly man to grope amongst a mass of shoes for his paper, the girl to regain her feet with the help of a clutch of hands, he could sense the eyes of the witnesses boring into him; it was enough of an incident to be remembered. The briefing had said 'Don't speak . . .' but while the crowd acknowledged people's need to hurry it demanded at the least some slight apology for breaking the etiquette of the rush hour. The failure to conform was noted by the half-dozen or so close enough to examine the man, who now ran away towards the tunnel and the escalator leading to the Victoria Line. They'd had at least three seconds to see his face, to take in his clothes and, above all, to note the fear and tension in his face as their stares built up round him.

When he reached the escalator he swerved left to the walking side of the moving stairs and ducked down behind the moving line, past the stationary paper-readers and the bikini-advertisement watchers. Here the eyes were away from him, on the financial pages, the sports pics, or the hoardings floating tantalizingly by.

He was aware of his stupidity in the hall area, conscious that he'd antagonized people who would recognize him, and he felt the slight trembling again in his hands and feet that he'd noticed several times since he'd come across the water. With his right hand, awkwardly and across his body, he gripped the rubber escalator rail to steady himself. His fingers tightened on the hard rubber, holding on till he reached the bottom and skipped clear of the sieve where the stair drove its way under the floor. The movement and the push of a young man behind him made him stumble a little, and with his right hand he reached out for the shoulder of a woman in front of him. She smiled warmly and openly at him as he found his feet again, and a little hesitantly he smiled back, and was away. Better that time, he thought, no tension, no incident, no recognition. Cool it, sunshine. Take it easy.

He walked through, carried forward by the crowd onto the platform. They'd timed the frequency of the trains; at worst he'd wait less than a minute.

His left arm, pressed against his chest, disappeared into the gap between the buttons of his raincoat. His left hand held tightly onto the barrel of the Kalashnikov automatic rifle he'd strapped to his body before leaving the North London boarding house two hours and twenty minutes earlier. In that time the hand had never left the cold metal and the skin under his thumb was numb with the indentation of the master sight. The barrel and weapon mechanism were little more than twenty inches long, with the shoulder stock of tubular steel folded back alongside it. The magazine was in his hip pocket. The train blurted its way out of the darkened tunnel, braked, and the doors slid back. As he wormed his way into a seat and the doors closed, he edged his weight off the magazine, and the thirty live rounds inside it.

It was 8.51 by the cheap watch on his wrist, just visible if he moved the gun towards the coat buttonholes. Five minutes maximum to Victoria, three minutes from the Underground platform to the street, and, taking it gently, seven minutes from there to his target. 9.06 on location. The train pulled abruptly into Green Park Station, waited little more than forty-five seconds as a trickle of passengers got off, a few moments more to let others on, and the doors, to the shout of the big West Indian guard, were closing.

9.06 on location meant that he had two minutes in hand, perhaps three at the most, primarily to assemble the gun and pick his firing position. It was a close schedule now, and he began again to feel the trembling that had dogged him since Rosslare and the ferry, and that he had first felt acutely at Fishguard as he walked with the Kalashnikov past the cold eyes of the Special Branch section watching the ferry passengers coming over from Ireland. He'd gone right by them then, waving furiously to a non-existent relative in the middle distance beyond the checkpoint and suddenly realizing that he was through and on his way. At his briefing they'd told him the worst part before the

shooting would be at Fishguard. He'd seen when he was at the back of the queue how they watched the men coming through, watched hard and expressionless, taking them apart. But no-one from his ferry, that he'd seen at any rate, had been stopped. At the briefing they explained that in his favour was his lack of form, never fingerprinted, never photographed, that he was an unknown face, that if he kept his nerve he'd get away with it and make it out as well. No sympathizers' homes in London were being used, no contact with anyone, keep it tight as an Orangeman's drum, one said. They'd all laughed. The train jolted to a halt, the carriage emptied. Victoria. He pulled himself up with his right hand on the pole support by the door, and stepped out onto the platform. Instinctively he began to hurry, then checked himself, slowed and headed for the neon 'Way Out' sign.

By the start of the nine o'clock news something approaching order was returning to the Minister's home. Three children already on their way to school, two more still wrestling with overcoats, scarfs, hockey sticks and satchels. The au pair in the hall with them. The Minister's Afghan tangled round their legs.

The Minister was alone at the long refectory table in the breakfast room, newspapers spread out where the children's cereal bowls had been. First he gutted the editorial columns, then on through the parliamentary reports, and finally to the front-page news. He read quickly, with little outward sign of annoyance or pleasure. It was said that only his closest parliamentary colleagues, and that meant about four in the Cabinet, could spot his moods at a time like this. But the selection of papers offered him little more than trivial interest in the fortunes of his colleagues. Since his eighteen months as second man in Belfast, and the attendant publicity, his promotion to Social Services overlord and a place in the Cabinet had taken him back out of the public eye and reduced his exposure. His major speeches in the House were fully reported, but his monolithic department ticked along, barely feeling his touch at the helm. This morning he wasn't mentioned, and his department

figured only in the continuing story of a grandmother in the North-East who had been taken to hospital penniless and suffering from malnutrition and then told local officials that she'd never drawn her pension, and believed people should look after themselves anyway. Lunatic, stupid woman, he muttered.

The news was mostly foreign: South Africa and the mine strike, Middle East cease-fire violations, Kremlin reshuffle. 'In Belfast' – suddenly he was concentrating – 'a city centre pub was destroyed by a car bomb. Two masked men had warned the customers to leave, but the bomb went off before the area could be fully evacuated. Three men were taken to hospital suffering from shock, but a spokesman said no-one was seriously hurt.' Belfast was pretty far down these days, he reflected. Just time left to see what football manager was leaving where, and then the weather, and it would be five-past. He shuffled his papers together and reached for his briefcase under the table; the car would be at the door in three minutes. 'Moving off, sweetheart,' he called, and made for the hall.

The Afghan was now sitting quietly on the doormat, the children ready, as the Minister put on his heavy, dark-blue overcoat, paused and contemplated the scarf on the hook, decided against it, gave his wife's offered cheek a kiss and opened the door into Belgrave Square. The Afghan and au pair led the way down the steps to the pavement, then the children and after a moment the Minister and his wife. To his right he saw the black Austin Princess turning out of Halkin Street, seventy-five yards away, to pick him up. The children, dog and au pair walked left towards Chapel Street, and across the road a short, dark-haired man who had been leaning against the square's fence stiffened and moved forward.

The Minister's huge voice bellowed after his children: 'Have a nice day, darlings, and don't do any damage with those sticks.' He was still smiling at the over-the-shoulder grimace from the elder girl down the street, when he saw the rifle come from under the coat of the man across the street and move to his shoulder. He was out on the pavement now and some yards

away from the house as he turned and looked for the sanctuary of the door in front of which his wife was standing, intent on her children.

He had started to shout a warning to her when the man fired his first shot. For the Minister the street exploded in noise, as he felt the sledge-hammer blow of the 7.62 mm shell crashing into his chest, searing into the soft flesh on its way through a splintered rib cage, puncturing the tissue of his lungs, gouging muscle and bone from his backbone, and bursting out through his clothes, before, a shapeless mass of lead, it buried itself in the white façade of the house. The force of that first shot spun and felled the Minister, causing the second shot to miss and fly into the hallway, fracturing a mirror beside the lounge door. As the man aimed for his third shot – 'Keep steady, aim,' they'd told him, 'don't blaze, and for Christ's sake be quick' – he heard the screaming. The Minister's wife was crawling down the steps to where her husband writhed in his attempt to get away from the pain. The man fired two more shots. This time there were no misses, and he watched with detached fascination as the back of the sleek, groomed head disintegrated. It was the last chance he had to see the target before the woman who had been screaming flung herself over it, swamping it from his view. He looked to his left and saw the big car stranded, its engine racing, in the middle of the road. To the right on the pavement he saw the children, immobile like statues, with the dog straining at its leash to escape the noise.

Automatically the man flicked the safety catch to 'on', deflated the catch at the top of the stock, bent the shoulder rest back alongside the barrel and dropped the weapon into the sheath they'd built to be strapped under his coat. Then he ran, jumping out of the way of a woman as he went. He turned into Chapel Street, sprinting now. Right next into Grosvenor Place. Must get across the road, get a line of traffic between you and them, he told himself. Alongside him was the high, spiked wall of Buckingham Palace. People saw him coming and moved out of his path. He clutched his unbuttoned coat tight to his body. The

rifle was awkward now, with the curved magazine digging into his ribs. As he was running he was vulnerable, he knew that. His mind didn't tell him that no-one had cause to stop him, but focused almost exclusively on the road, the traffic, and at what moment he would see a hole in the river of buses and cabs and lorries. Get across Buckingham Palace Road and then into the safety and anonymity of the tube station at Victoria. Hard out of breath he stumbled into the station. He took a ten-pence piece from his pocket. Relaxed now, he could take his place in the queue. He pushed the coin into the automatic machine. Remember, they'd said, the law will expect a car; you're better on the tube. They'd given him a route, Victoria to Oxford Circus on the Victoria Line, then the Bakerloo Line to Baker Street, then the Metropolitan Line to Watford. He was on a train and moving and his watch showed 9.12.

The sirens of the patrol cars blotted out the screaming of the Minister's wife as she lay over the body. They'd been diverted there just ninety seconds before with the brief message, 'Man shot in Belgrave Square.' The two constables were still mentally tuned to the traffic blockages at the Knightsbridge underpass as they spilled out into the street. George Davies, twenty-two years old and only three years in the Metropolitan police, was first out. He saw the woman, the body of the man under her, and the brain tissue on the steps. The sight stopped him in mid-stride as he felt nausea rising into his mouth. Frank Smith, twice his age, screamed, 'Don't stop, *move*,' ran past him to the huddle on the steps, and pulled the Minister's wife from her husband's body. 'Give him air,' he yelled, before he took in the wrecked skull, the human debris on the flagstones and the woman's housecoat. Smith sucked in the air, mumbled inaudibly, and turned on his knees to the pale-faced Davies ten paces behind him. 'Ambulance, reinforcements, tell 'em it's big, and move it fast.' When Smith looked again at the Minister's wife he recognized her. 'It's Mrs Danby?' he whispered. It was a statement, but he put the question into it. She nodded.

'Your husband?' She nodded again. She was silent now and the children had edged close to her.

Smith took the scene in. 'Get them inside, Ma'am.' It was an instruction, and they obeyed, slowly and numbly going through the door and off the street.

Smith got up off his knees and lumbered back to the squad car.

'Davies, don't let anyone near him. Get a description.'

On the radio he put out a staccato message: 'Tango George, in Belgrave Square. Henry Danby has been shot. He's dead, from all I can see. Ambulance and reinforcement already requested.'

The street was beginning to fill. The Ministry driver of the Austin Princess had recovered from the initial shock and was able to move the car into a parking-meter bay. Two more police cars pulled up, lights flashing, uniformed and CID men jumping clear before they'd stopped. The ambulance was sounding the warning of its approach on the half-mile journey from St George's Hospital at Hyde Park Corner. The Special Patrol Group Land-Rover, on standby at Scotland Yard, blocked the south side of the square. One of its constables stood beside it, his black, short-barrelled Smith & Wesson .38 calibre in his hand.

'You can put that away,' said his colleague, 'we're light years too bloody late.'

At Oxford Circus the man debated quickly whether to break his journey, head for the Gents and take the magazine off his Kalashnikov. He decided against it, and ran for the escalator to bring him up from the Victoria Line to the level of the Central Line. He thought there would be time to worry about the gun later. Now distance concerned him. His mind was still racing, unable to take in the violence of the scene behind him. His only reaction was that there had been something terribly simple about it all, that for all the work and preparation that had gone into it the killing should have been harder. He remembered the woman over the body, the children and the

dog on the pavement, the old woman he had avoided on the pavement outside the house. But none of them registered: his only compulsion now was to get clear of the city.

The first reports of the shooting reached the Commissioner's desk a mile away at Scotland Yard at 9.25. He was slipping out of his coat after the chauffeured drive from Epsom when his aide came in with the first flashes. The Commissioner looked up sharply, noting there had been no knock on his door, before the young officer was in front of him, thrusting a piece of paper at him. As he read the message he saw it was torn at the bottom, ripped off a teleprinter. He said, 'Get me CI, Special Branch and SPG, here in five minutes.' He went over to his desk, pressed the intercom button, announced sharply, 'Prime Minister, please,' and flicked the switch back.

When the yellow light flashed in the centre of the console the Commissioner straightened a little in his seat, subconsciously adjusted his tie, and picked up his phone. A voice remote, Etonian and clipped, said on the line, 'Hello, Commissioner, we're just raking him up, won't be a second.' Then another click. 'Yes, right, you've found me. Good morning, Commissioner, what can I do for you?'

The Commissioner took it slowly. First reports, much regret, your colleague Henry Danby, dead on arrival in hospital. Seems on first impression the work of an assassin, very major police activity, but few other details available. He spoke quietly into the phone and was heard out in silence. When he finished the voice at the end of the line, in the first-floor office overlooking Downing Street and the Foreign Office arch, said 'Nothing else?' 'No, sir. It's early, though.' 'You'll shout if you want help – army, air force, intelligence, anything you need?'

There was no reply from the Commissioner. The Prime Minister went on: 'I'll get out of your hair – call me in half an hour. I'll get one of our people to put it out to the Press Association.'

The Commissioner smiled to himself bleakly. A press release straight away – the political mind taking stock. He grimaced,

putting his phone down as the door opened and the three men he'd summoned came in. They headed critical departments: CI – the élite crime investigation unit; the Special Branch – Scotland Yard's counter-terrorist and surveillance force; and the Special Patrol Group – the specialist unit trained to deal with major incidents. All were Commanders, but only the head of the SPG was in uniform.

The Commissioner kept his office spartan and without frills, and the Commanders collected the armless chairs from the sides of the room and brought them towards the desk.

He spoke first to the Special Patrol Group Commander and asked him abruptly what was known.

'Not much, sir. Happened at 9.07. Danby comes down his front steps regular time, regular everything – he's waiting for the Ministry car. A man steps into the street on the other side, and lets fly, fires several shots, multiple wounds, and runs for it in the direction of Victoria. Not much good for eye-witnesses at this stage, not much about. There's a woman on the pavement had a good look at him, but she's a bit shocked at the moment. We've got he's about five-eight, younger than middle-aged, say thirtyish, and what she calls so far a pinched sort of face, dark hair. Clothes aren't much good – dark trousers under a biscuit-coloured mac. That's it.'

'And the gun?'

'Can't be definite.' It was the Special Branch man. 'Seems from what the woman said it's an AK47, usually called a Kalashnikov. Russians use it, VC in Vietnam, the Aden people, the Black September crowd. It's Czech-designed, quite old now, but it's never showed up here before. The IRA have tried to get them into Ulster, but always failed. The *Claudia* – that fishing boat up to the gills in arms – was running them when intercepted. It's a classic weapon, semi-automatic or virtually automatic – 400 rounds a minute, if you could get that many up the spout. Muzzle velocity around 2000 feet a second. Effective killing range comfortable at half a mile. The latest version has a folding stock – you could get it into a big briefcase. It's accurate and doesn't jam. It's a hell of a weapon for this sort of thing. Its calibre is fractionally bigger than ours so it fires Iron Curtain

ammo, or ours at a pinch. We've found four shell cases, but no detail on them yet. It's got a noise all of its own, a crack that people who've heard it say is distinctive. From what the woman said to the people down there it fits with the Kalashnikov.'

'And the conclusion?'

'It's not an amateur's weapon. We haven't traced them coming in here yet. If it is a Kalashnikov we're not up against second division. If they can get one of these things then they're big and know what they're about.'

That struck the chord. All four stayed quiet for a moment; it was a depressing thought. A professional political assassin on their hands. It went through the Commissioner's mind before he spoke that a man who troubled to get the ideal gun for the killing, the most popular terrorist weapon in the world, would spend time on the other details of the operation.

He lit his first cigarette of the day, two hours ahead of the schedule he'd disciplined himself to after his last medical check, and broke the silence.

'He'll have thought out his escape route. It'll be good. Where are we, how do we block him?'

The murder squad chief took it up. 'Usual, sir, at this stage. Ports, ferries, airports, private strips as soon as we can get men to them. Phone calls ahead to the control towers. I've got as many men as possible concentrated on tube stations, and particularly exit points on the outskirts. He went towards Victoria, could be the tube, could be the train. We're trying to seal it, but that takes a bit . . .'

He tailed away. He'd said enough. The Commissioner drummed his desktop with the filter of his cigarette. The others waited, anxious now to get the meeting over and get back to their desks, their teams and the reports that were beginning to build.

The Commissioner reacted, sensing the mood.

'Right, I take it we all accept Danby was the target because of his work in Northern Ireland, though God knows a less controversial Minister I never met. Like a bloody willow tree. It's not a nut, because nutters don't get modern Commie assault rifles to

run round Belgrave Square. So look for a top man, in the IRA. Right? I'm putting Charlie in overall control. He'll co-ordinate. By this afternoon I want the whole thing flooded, get the manpower out. Bank on Belfast, we'll get something out of there. Good luck.'

The last was a touch subdued. You couldn't give a pep talk to the three men he had in the room, yet for the first time since he'd eased himself into the Commissioner's chair he'd felt something was required of him. Stupid, he thought, as the door closed on the Special Patrol Group Commander.

His yellow light was flashing again on the telephone console. When he picked up his phone his secretary told him the Prime Minister had called an emergency Cabinet meeting for 2.30, and would require him to deliver a situation report to Ministers at the start of their meeting.

'Get me Assistant Commissioner Crime, Charlie Henderson,' he said, after he'd scribbled down the message from Downing Street on his memory pad.

At a quarter to eleven the BBC broke into its television transmissions to schools, and after two seconds of blank screen went to a 'Newsflash' caption. It then dissolved to a continuity announcer, who paused, hesitated for a moment, and then, head down on his script, read:

> *Here is a newsflash. Just after nine this morning a gunman shot and killed the Secretary of State for the Social Services, Mr Henry Danby. Mr Danby was about to leave his Belgrave Square home when he was fired on by a man apparently on the other side of the street. He was dead on arrival in hospital. Our outside broadcast unit is now outside Mr Danby's home and we go over there now to our reporter, James Lyons.*

It's difficult from Belgrave Square to piece together exactly what happened this morning, as Mr Henry Danby, the Social Services Minister, left his home and was ambushed on his front doorstep. The police are at the moment keeping us a hundred

yards back from the doorway as they comb the street for clues, particularly the cartridge cases of the murder weapon. But with me here is a lady who was walking her dog just round the corner of the Square when the first shot was fired.

Q. What did you see?
A. Well, I was walking the dog, and I heard the bang, the first bang, and I thought that doesn't sound like a car. And I came round the corner and I saw this man holding this little rifle or gun up to his—
Q. Could you see the Minister – Mr Danby?
A. I saw him, he was sort of crouched, this man in his doorway, he was trying to crawl, then came the second shot. I just stood there, and he fired again and again, and the woman—
Q. Mrs Danby?
A. The woman in the doorway was screaming. I've never heard such a noise, it was dreadful, dreadful . . . I can't say any more . . . he just ran. The poor man was lying there, bleeding. And the woman just went on screaming . . . it was awful.
Q. Did you see the man, the gunman?
A. Well, yes and no, he came past me, but he came fast, he was running.
Q. What did he look like?
A. Nothing special, he wasn't very tall, he was dark.
Q. How old, would you guess?
A. Not old, late twenties, but it was very fast.
Q. And what was he wearing? Could you see?
A. He had a brown mac on, a sort of fawn colour. I saw it had a tartan lining. I could see that he put the gun inside, in a sort of pouch. He just ran straight past me. I couldn't move. There's nothing more.

They'd told the man that simplicity would see him through. That if they kept it easy, with no frills, they'd get him back. He got off the train at Watford, and began to walk towards the barrier, eyes going 180° in front of him. The detectives he spotted

were close to the ticket barrier, not looking down the platform, but intent on the passengers. He walked away from the barrier towards the Gents, went into the graffiti-scrawled cubicle, and took off the coat. He hung it carefully behind a door. He unfastened the shoulder strap, unclipped the magazine from the gun, took off his jacket and put the improvised holster back on. With the jacket over the top, the rifle fitted unseen close to his armpit. It gave him a stockiness that wasn't his, and showed his jacket as a poor fit; but that was all. Trembling again in his fingers, he walked towards the barrier. The CID men, both local, had been told the Minister had been shot at home in Belgrave Square, they'd been told the man might have got away by Underground, they'd been told he was in a fawn-brown macintosh and was carrying an automatic rifle. They hadn't been told that, if the killer was on the tube, his ticket might not have been issued at Victoria – could have been bought at another station during the journey. Nor had they been told the Kalashnikov could be folded. They ruled him out in the five yards before he handed over his ticket.

He walked away from them, panting quietly to himself, his forehead cold with sweat, waiting for the shout behind him, or the heavy hand falling on his shoulder, and felt nothing. He walked out of the station to the car park, where the Avis Cortina waited. He stowed the gun under his driving seat and set off for Heathrow. There's no way they'll get you if you stay cool. That was the advice.

In the late morning traffic the journey took him an hour. He'd anticipated it would, and he found he'd left himself ninety minutes for his flight when he'd left the car in the No. 1 terminal car park. He locked the car, leaving the rifle under his seat with its magazine along with it.

The police were staked out at all corners of the terminal. The man saw the different groups, reflected in their shoulder markings: Airport Police – AP, T. Division of the Metropolitan – T, and the Special Patrol Group men – CO. He knew the last were armed, which gave him a chilled feeling in his belly. If they

shouted and he ran, would they shoot him? . . . He clenched his fist and walked up to the BEA ticket desk.

'The name is Jones . . . you've a ticket waiting for me. The one o'clock to Amsterdam, BE 467.'

The girl behind the counter smiled, nodded, and began to beat out the instructions of the flight into her personal reservations computer. The flight was confirmed, and as she made the ticket out the terminal loudspeakers warned passengers of delays on all flights to Dublin, Cork, Shannon and Belfast. No reason was given. But that's where all the effort would be, they'd told him. They haven't the manpower for the lot.

The man brought out the new British passport supplied for him by his unit quartermaster and walked through immigration control.