

## *One*

They were waiting in the rain, in the darkness of a narrow alley forty yards south of the Czechoslovakian embassy gates. Newman was smoking, the damp cigarette cupped in the palm of his hand to conceal its soft glow. The rain was so fine it was a mist, and a street light further along the road showed a halo above it. A square-shaped London taxi passed and turned into the Uxbridge Road, the diesel engine knocking as the driver accelerated away from the corner. There was a policeman standing beyond the wrought-iron gates, the collar of his black overcoat buttoned right up, and his shoulders pressed back against the high wall as he tried to get as much shelter as he could manage from the bitter weather.

At one forty-five am, the police patrol car Newman had arranged through Special Branch, slid into the road and drew up opposite the duty constable. The man saw it coming and straightened himself. As the car stopped, he hunched his head forward and walked across the road, his movements stiff with cold. The police driver wound down his window and spoke; the conversation was unintelligible at that distance, but the watchers saw the constable reach down and pull open the rear door of the car, remove and shake his helmet, and climb inside. The door slammed and the car made a wide turn. Its tyres bit through the wet surface, then squeaked. In seconds the road was empty.

Ray Newman dropped his cigarette butt behind him, and ground it out with his heel. 'We've half an hour,' he said. 'Get your bloody fingers out.'

There were eight of them, and Newman's voice conjured the group from the shadows. Newman, Cauldy, Reagon, Ellik, Stey-Walker, Marley, Cato and Williamson. Cato was seconded from the CIA, and he and Williamson were the break-in specialists. Ellik was department photographer, and Reagon was along as extra muscle. Marley was street cover. Newman brained the operation and Cauldy felt that Stey-Walker and himself were stooges. It was an unpleasant thought. He had tried unsuccessfully to dodge the job; Newman had been insistent and leant heavily.

The embassy officials had flats to the north side of the white Victorian building which was the embassy itself. The flats and the embassy were enclosed by an eight-foot wall, topped by an additional two feet of cast-iron railings, its top bar armed with revolving sharpened spikes; which helped deter overenthusiastic demonstrators. The yard and driveway behind the wall were illuminated by a row of electrified gas lamps. Closed circuit television cameras guarded a ten-foot-wide strip of territory, to within a yard of the embassy wall. A limitation of lens spread caused this loss of cover, but a wild Doberman guard dog roamed the area.

At one time, photo-electric cells had been fitted to the top of the wall. They were now removed; the large numbers of London pigeons had made the system impractical.

Marley moved along the road and seemed to disappear in a patch of shadow near the corner. He would keep in touch by micro-transmitter.