

THE OSTERMAN WEEKEND

BY

ROBERT LUDLUM

_BANTAM BOOKS

TORONTO - NEW YORK - LONDON - SYDNEY

_FOR MICHAEL, JONATHAN, GLYNIS three extraordinary people who
possess. among

so many talents, the gifts of laughter and perception. .

THE OSTERMAN WEEKEND

A bantam Book / published by arrangement with

. . . the Author

Bantam edition / February 1982

2nd printing . . . May 1982 4th printing January 7QR3

3rd printing : . . August 1982 5th printing October 1983

All rights reserved.

Copyright (© 1972 by Robert Ludlum.

Cover art copyright (© 1983 by Twentieth Century-Fox.

This book may not be reproduced in whole or in part, by
mimograph or any other means, without permission.

For information address: Bantam Books, Inc.

ISBN 0-553-24040-4

Published simultaneously in the United States and Canada

Bantam Books are published by Bantam Books, Inc. Its trade mark, consisting of the words "Bantam Books" and the portrayal of a rooster, is Registered in U.S. Patent and Trademark Office and in other countries. Marca Registrada. Bantam Books, Inc., 666 Fifth Avenue, New York, New York 1003.

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

H14 13 12 11 10 9 8 7 6 5

—

_ 1

Saddle Valley, New Jersey, is a Village.

At least real estate developers, hearing alarm signals from a decaying upper middle-class Manhattan, found a Village when they invaded its wooded acres in the late 1930's.

The white, shield-shaped sign on Valley Road reads

SADDLE VALLEY

VILLAGE INCORPORATED 1862

Welcome

The "Welcome" is in smaller lettering than any of the words preceding it, for Saddle Valley does not really welcome outsiders, those Sunday afternoon drivers who like to watch the Villagers at play. Two Saddle Valley police cars patrol the roads on Sunday afternoon.

It might also be noted that the sign on Valley Road does not read

The Village does not acknowledge a higher authority; it is its own master.

Isolated, secure, inviolate.

On a recent July Sunday afternoon, one of the two Saddle Valley patrol cars seemed to be extraordinarily thorough. The white car with blue lines roamed the roads just a bit faster than usual. It went from one end of the Village to the other, cruising into the residential areas—in front of, behind and to the sides of the spacious, tastefully landscaped one-acre lots.

This particular patrol car on this particular Sunday afternoon was noticed by several residents of Saddle Valley.

It was meant to be.

It was part of the plan.

John Tanner, in old tennis shorts and yesterday's shirt, sneakers and no socks, was clearing out his two-car garage with half an ear cocked to the sounds coming from his pool. His twelve-year-old son, Raymond, had friends over, and periodically Tanner walked far enough out on the driveway so he could see past the backyard patio to the

_ pool and make sure the children were all right. Actually, he only walked out when the level of shouting was reduced to conversation--or periods of silence.

Tanner's wife, Alice, with irritating regularity, came into the garage through the laundry-room entrance to tell her husband what to throw out next. John hated getting rid of things, and the resulting accumulation of junk exasperated her. This time she motioned toward a broken lawn spreader which had lain for weeks at the back of the garage.

John noticed her gesture. "I could mount it on a piece of wrought iron and sell it to the Museum of Modern Art," he said. "Remnants of past inequities. Pre-gardener period."

Alice Tanner laughed. Her husband noted once again, as he had for so many years, that it was a nice laugh.

"I'll haul it to the curb. They pick up Mondays." Alice reached for the relic.

"That's okay. I'll do it."

"No, you won't. You'll change your mind halfway down."

Her husband lifted the spreader over a Briggs and Stratton rotary lawn mower while Alice sidled past the small Triumph she proudly referred to as her "status symbol." As she started pushing the spreader down the driveway, the right wheel fell off. Both of them laughed.

"That'd clinch the deal with the museum. It's irresistible."

Alice looked up and stopped laughing. Forty

_ yards away, in front of their house on Orchard Drive, the white patrol car was slowly cruising.

"The gestapo's screening the peasants this afternoon," she said.

"What?" Tanner picked up the wheel and threw it into the well of the spreader.

"Saddle Valley's finest is on the job. That's the second or third time they've gone down Orchard."

Tanner glanced at the passing patrol car. The driver, Officer Jenkins, returned his stare. There was no wave, no gesture of greeting. No acknowledgment. Yet they were acquaintances, if not friends.

"Maybe the dog barked too much last night."

"The baby-sitter didn't say anything."

"A dollar fifty an hour is hush money."

"You'd better get this down, darling." Alice's thoughts turned from the police car. "Without a wheel it becomes father's job. I'll check the kids."

Tanner, pulling the spreader behind him, went down the driveway to the curb, his eyes drawn to a bright light about sixty yards away. Orchard Drive, going west, bore to the left around a cluster of trees. Several hundred feet beyond the midpoint of the bend were Tanner's nearest neighbors, the Scanlans.

The light was the reflection of sun off the patrol car. It was parked by the side of the road.

The two policemen were turned around in their seats, staring out the rear window, staring, he was sure, at him. For a second or two, he remained

motionless. Then he started to walk toward the

10

car. The two officers turned, started the engine and sped off.

Tanner looked after it, puzzled, then walked slowly back toward his house.

The Saddle Valley police car raced out toward Peachtree Lane; there it slowed and resumed cruising speed.

Richard Tremayne sat in his air-conditioned living room watching the Mets blow a six-run lead. The curtains of the large bay windows were open.

Sudderdy Treniayne rose from his chair and went to the window. The patrol car was there again. Only now it was hardly moving.

"Hey, Ginny!" he called to his wife. "Come here a minute."

Virginia Tremayne walked gracefully down the three steps into the living room. "What is it? Now you didn't call me to tell me your Mets or Jets hit somethina?"

"When John and Alice were over last night were he and I ... all right?

I mean, we weren't too loud or a aything, were we?"

"You were both plastered. But pleasant. Why?"

"I know we were drunk. It was a lousy week. But we didn't do ~mything outlandish?"

"Of course not. Attorneys and newsmen are models of decoruin. Why do you ask?"

"Goddarrin police car's gone by the house for the fifth time."

"Oh." Virginia felt a knot in the pit of her stomach. "Ar-, you sure?"

"You can't miss that car in the sunlight."

"No, I guess you can't. . . . You said it was a rotten week. Would that awful man be trying to. . ."

"Oh, Jesus, no! I told you to forget that. He's a loudmouth. He took the case too personally." Tremayne continued looking out the window. The police car was leaving.

"He did threaten you, though. You said he did. He said he had connections. . . ."

Tremayne turned slowly and faced his wife. "We all have connections, don't we? Some as far away as Switzerland?"

"Dick, please. That's absurd."

"Of course it is. Car's gone now . . . probably nothing. They're due for another raise in October. Probably checking out houses to buy. The bastards! They make more than I did five years out of law school."

"I think you're a little edgy with a bad head. That's what I think."

"I think you're probably right"

Virginia watched her husband. He kept staring out the window. "The maid wants Wednesday off. We'll eat out, all right?"

"Sure." He did not turn around.

His wife started up into the hall. She looked back at her husband; he was now looking at her. Beads of perspiration had formed on his forehead. And the room was cool.

The Saddle Valley patrol car beaded east toward Route Five, the main link with Manhattan twenty-

_ six miles away. It stopped on a road overlooking Exit 10A. The patrolman to the right of the driver took a pair of binoculars from the glove compartment and began scanning the cars coming off the exit ramp. The binoculars had Zeisq-Ikon lenses.

After several minutes he tapped the sleeve of the driver, Jenkins, who looked over through the open window. He motioned the other man to give him the binoculars, and put them to his eyes, tracking the automobile specified by his fellow officer. He spoke one word: "Confirmed."

Jenkins started the car and headed south. He picked up the radio phone. "Two car calling in. Heading south on Register Road. Tailing green Ford sedan. New York plates. Filled with niggers or P.R.'s.

The (racking reply came over the speaker. "Read you, two car. Chase 'em. the hell out."

"Will do. No sweat. Out."

The patrol car then turned left and sped down the long incline into Route Five. Once on the highway, Jenkins pressed the accelerator to the floor and the car plunged forward on the smooth surface. In sixty seconds the speedometer read ninety-two.

Four ininutes later the patrol car slowed down rounding a long curve. A few hundred yards beyond the curve stood two aluminum-framed telephone booths, glass and metal reflecting the harsh glare of the July sun.

The police car came to a stop and Jenkins' companion climbed out.

_ "Got a dime?"

"Oh, Christ, McDermott!" Jenkins laughed. "Fifteen years in the field and you don't carry the charge to make contact."

"Don't be a smartass. I've got nickels, but one of them's an Indian head."

"Here." Jenkins took a coin from his pocket and handed it to McDermott. "An ABM could be stuck and you wouldn't use a Roosevelt dime to alert operations."

"Don't know that I would." McDermott walked to the phone booth, pushed in the squeaky, shiny door, and dialed "0". The booth was stifling, the still air so close that he kept the door open with his foot.

"I'll head down to the U-turn," yelled Jenkins from the car window. "Pick you up on the other side."

"Okay. . . . Operator. A collect call to New Hampshire. Area Code three-one-two. Six-five-four-oh-one. The name is Mr. Leather."

There was no mistaking the words. McDermott had placed a call to the state of New Hampshire and the telephone operator put it through. However, what the operator could not know was that this particular number did not cause a telephone to ring in the state of New Hampshire. For somewhere, in some underground complex housing thousands of trunk lines, a tiny relay was activated and a small magnetized bar fell across a quarter-inch space and made another connection. This connection caused-not a bell-but a low h

_ sound to emanate from a telephone two hundred and sixty-three miles south

of Saddle Valley, New Jersey.

The telephone was in a second-floor office in a red brick building fifty yards inside a twelve-foot-high electrified fence. The building was one of perhaps ten, all connected with one another to form a single complex. Outside the fence the woods were thick with summer foliage. The location was McLean, Virginia. The complex was the Central Intelligence Agency. Isolated, secure, inviolate.

The man sitting behind the desk in the second-floor office crushed out his cigarette in relief. He'd been waiting anxiously for the call. He noted with satisfaction that the small wheels of the recording device automatically started revolving. He picked up the telephone.

"Andrews speaking. Yes, operator, I accept the charges."

"Leather reporting," came the words rerouted from the state of New Hampshire.

"You're cleared. Tape going, Leather."

"Confirming the presence of all suspects. The Cardones just arrived from Kennedy Airport."

"We knew he landed. . . ."

"Then why the hell did we have to race down here?!"

"That's a rotten highway, Route Five. He could have an accident."

"On Sunday afternoon?"

"Or any other time. You want the statistics on accidents for that route?"

Andrews shrugged. Men in the field were always irritated over one thing or another. "As I read you, all three suspects are present. Correct?"

"Correct. Tanners, Tremaynes and the Cardones. All accounted for. All waiting. The first two are primed. We'll get to Cardone in a few minutes."

"Anything else?"

"Not for now."

"How's the wife?"

"Jenkins is lucky. He's a bachelor. Lillian keeps looking at those houses and wants one."

"Not on our salary, McDermott."

"That's what I tell her. She wants me to defect."

For the briefest of seconds Andrews reacted painfully to McDermott's joke.

"The pay's worse, I'm told."

"Couldn't be.... There's Jenkin . Be in touch."

Joseph Cardone drove his Cadillac into the circular drive and parked in front of the stone steps leading to the huge oak door. He turned off the engine and stretched, bending his elbows beneath the roof. He sighed and woke his boys of six and seven. A third child, a girl of ten, was reading a comic book.

Sitting beside Cardone was his wife, Betty. She looked out the window at the house. "It's good to get away, but it's better to get home."

Cardone laughed and put his large hand on his wife's shoulder. "You must mean that."

_ "I do. 99

"You must. You say it every time we come home, The exact words."

"It's a nice home."

Cardone opened the door. "Hey, Princess ... get your brothers out and help your mother with the smaller bags." Cardone reached in and withdrew the keys from the ignition. He started toward the trunk. "Where's Louise?"

"She probably won't be here till Tuesday. We're three days early, remember? I gave her off till then."

Cardone winced. The thought of his wife's cooking was not pleasant. "We eat out."

"We'll have to today. It takes too long to defrost things." B,--tty

Cardone walked up the stone steps, taking the front-door key out of her purse.

Joe dismissed his wife's remark. He liked food and he did not like his wife's preparation of it. Rich debutantes from Chestnut Hill couldn't begin to cook like good South Side Italian mamas from Philadelphia.

One hour later he had the central air-conditioning going full blast throughout the large house, and the stuffy air, unchanged for nearly two weeks, was becoming bearable again. He was aware of such things. He'd been an exceptionally successful athlete-his route to success, both social and financial. He stepped out on the front porch and looked at the lawn with the huge willow tree centered in the grass within the circular drive. The gardeners had kept it all up nicely. They should.

_ Their prices were ridiculous. Not that price ever concerned him any more.

Suddenly there it was again. The patrol car. This was the third time he'd seen it since leaving the highway.

"Hey, you! Hold it!"

The two officers in the car looked briefly at one another, about to race away. But Cardone had run to the curb.

"Hey!"

The patrol car stopped.

"Yes, Mi. Cardone?"

"What's with the police routine? Any trouble around here?"

"No, Mr. Cardone. It's vacation time. We're just checking against our schedules when residents return. You were due this afternoon, so we just wanted to make sure it was you. Take your house off the check list."

Joe watched the policemen carefully. He knew the officer was lying, and the policeman knew he knew.

"You earn your money."

"Do our best, Mr. Cardone."

"I'll bet you do."

"Good day, sir." The patrol car sped off.

Joe looked after it. He hadn't intended to go to the office until mid-we-ek, but that had to be changed now. He'd go into New York in the morning.

On Sunday afternoons, between the hours of five

and six, Tanner closeted himself in his study, a walnut-paneled room with three television sets, and watched three different interview shows simultaneously.

Alice knew her husband had to watch. As Director of News for Standard Mutual, it was part of his job to be aware of the competition. But Alice thought there was something sinister about a man sitting alone in a half-lit room watching three television sets at the same time, and she constantly chided him for it.

Today, Tanner reminded his wife that he'd have to miss next Sunday-Bernie and Leila would be there, and nothing ever disturbed an Osterman weekend. So he sat in the darkened room, knowing all too well what he was going to see.

Every Director of News for every network had his favorite program, the one to which he gave extra attention. For Tanner it was the Woodward show. A half hour on Sunday afternoon during which the best news analyst in the business interviewed a single subject, usually a controversial figure currently in the headlines.

Today Charles Woodward was interviewing a substitute, Undersecretary Ralph Ashton from the State Department. The Secretary himself was suddenly unavailable, so Ashton had been recruited.

It was a gargantuan mistake by the Department. Ashton was a witless, prosaic former businessman whose main asset was his ability to raise money. That he was even considered to represent the Administration was

a major error on someone's part.

19

_ Unless there were other motives.

Woodward would crucify him.

As Tanner listened to Ashton's evasive, hollow replies, he realized that a great many people in Washington were soon going to be telephoning each other. Woodward's polite inflections couldn't hide his growing antagonism toward the Undersecretary. The reportorial instinct was being frustrated; soon Woodward's tones would turn to ice and Ashton would be slaughtered. Politely, to be sure, but slaughtered nevertheless.

It was the sort of thing Tanner felt embarrassed watching.

He turned up the volume of the second set. In ponderous, nasal tones a moderator was describing the backgrounds and positions of the panels of experts who were about to question the U.N. delegate from Ghana. The black diplomat looked for all the world as if he were being driven to the guillotine in front of a collection of male Madame Defarges. Very white, well-paid Madame Defarges.

No competition there.

The third network was better, but not good enough. No competition there either.

Tanner decided he had had enough. He was too far ahead to worry, and he'd see Woodward's tape in the morning. It was only five-twenty, and the sun was still on the pool. He heard his daughter's shouts as she returned from the country club, and the reluctant departure of Raymond's friends from the backyard. His family was together. The three of them were

probably sitting outside waiting till

20

he finished watching and started the fire for the steaks.

He'd surprise them.

He turned off the sets, put the pad and pencil on his desk. It was time for a drink.

Tanner opened the door of his study and walked into the living room.

Through the rear windows, he saw Alice and the children playing follow-the-leader off the pool diving board. They were laughing, at peace.

Alice deserved it. Christ! She deserved it!

He watched his wife. She jumped-toes pointed -into the water, bobbing up quickly to make sure that eight-year-old Janet would be all right when she followed her.

Remarkable! After all the years he was more in love with his wife. than ever.

He remembered the patrol car, then dismissed the thought. The policemen were simply finding a secluded spot in which to rest, or listen to the ball game undisturbed. He'd heard that policemen did that sort of thing in New York. Then why not in Saddle Valley? Saddle Valley was a lot safer than New York.

Saddle Valley was probably the safest place in the world. At least it seemed that way to John Tanner on this particular Sunday afternoon.

Richard Tremayne turned off his one television set within ten seconds after

John Tanner had shut off his three. The Mets had won it after all.

His headache had left him and with it his irrita-

21

_ bility. Ginny had been right, he thought. He was simply edgy. No reason to take it out on the family. His stomach felt stronger now. A little food would fix him up again. Maybe he'd call Johnny and Ali and take Ginny over for a swim in the Tanners' pool.

Ginny kept asking why they didn't have one of their own. Heaven knew they had an income several times that of the Tanners. Everybody could see that.

But `1 remayne knew why.

A pool would be that one symbol too much. Too much at age forty-four. It was enough that they had moved into Saddle Valley when he was only thirty-eight.. A seventy-four-thousand-dollar house at thirty-eight years of age. With a fifty-thousand-dollar down payment. A pool could wait until his forty-fifth birthday. It would make sense then.

Of course what people --- clients---didn't think about was that he had graduated from Yale Law in the top five percent of his class, had clerked for Learned liand, had spent three years at the bottom of his present firm's ladder before any real money came his way. When it came, however, it came rapidly.

Tremayrie walked out to the patio. Ginny and their thirteen-year-old daughter Peg were cutting roses near a white arbor. His entire backyard, nearly half an acre, was cultivated and manicured. There were flowers everywhere. The garden was Ginny's pastime, hobby, avocation-next to sex,

her passion. Nothing really replaced sex, thought her husband with an unconscious chuckle.

22

"Here! Let me give you a hand," shouted Tremayne as he walked toward his wife and daughter.

"You're feeling better," said Virginia smiling.

"Look at these, daddy! Aren't they beautiful?" His daughter held up a bunch of red and yellow roses.

"They're lovely, sweetheart."

"Dick, did I tell you? Bernie and Leila are flying east next week.

They'll be here Friday."

"Johnny told me. . . . An Osterman weekend. I'll have to get in shape."

"I thought you were practicing last night."

Tremayne laughed. He never apologized for getting drunk, it happened too seldom, and he was never really difficult. Besides, last night he had deserved it. It had been a rotten week.

The three of them walked back to the patio. Virginia slipped her hand under her husband's arm. Peggy

., growing so tall, her father thought, smiled brightly. The patio phone rang.

"I'll get it!" Peg dashed ahead.

"Why not?" shouted her father in mock exasperation. "It's never for us!"

"We've simply got to get her her own telephone." Virginia Tremayne pinched her husband's arm playfully.

"You're both driving me on welfare."

"It's for you, mother. It's Mrs. Cardone." Peggy suddenly covered the receiver with her hand. "Please don't talk too long, Mother. Carol Brown said she'd call me when she got home. You know, I told you. The Choate boy."

23

— Virginia Tremayne smiled knowingly, exchanging a conspiratorial look with her daughter. "Carol won't elope without telling you, darling. She may need more than her week's allowance."

"Oh, mother!"

Richard watched them with amusement. It was comfortable and comforting at the same time. His wife was doing a good job with their child. No one could argue with that. He knew there were those who criticized Ginny, said she dressed a little . . . flamboyantly. He'd heard that word and knew it meant something else. But the kids. The kids all flocked around Ginny. That was important these days. Perhaps his wife knew something most other women didn't know.

Things . . . "things" were working out, thought Tremayne. Even the ultimate security, if Bernie Osterman was to be believed.

It was a good life.

He'd get on the phone with Joe if Ginny and Betty ever finished with their conversation. Then he'd call John and Ali. After Johnny's television shows were over. Perhaps the six of them could go over to the Club for the Sunday buffet.

Suddenly the memory of the patrol car flashed across his mind. lie

dismissed it. He had been nervous, edgy, hung over. Let's face it, he thought. It was Sunday afternoon and the town council had insisted that the police thoroughly check out the residential areas on Sunday afternoons.

Funny, he mused. He didn't think the Cardones were due back so early. Joe must have been

24

_ called by his office to get in on Monday. The market was crazy these days. Especially commodities, Joe's specialty.

Betty nodded yes to Joe's question from the telephone. It solved the dinner problem. The buffet wasn't bad, even if the Club had never learned the secret of a good antipasto. Joe kept telling the manager that you had to use Genoa salami, not Hebrew National, but the chef had a deal with a Jewish supplier, so what could a mere member do? Even Joe, probably the richest of them all. On the other hand he was Italian-not Catholic, but nevertheless Italian-and it had only been a decade since the Saddle Valley Country Club first let Italians join. One of these days they'd let Jews in-that'd be the time for some kind of celebration.

It was this silent intolerance-never spelled out -that caused the Cardones, the Tanners and the Tremaynt~s to make it a special point to have Bernie and Leila Osterman very much in evidence at the Club whenever they came east. One thing could be said for the six of them. They weren't bigots.

It was strange, thought Cardone as he hung up the phone and started toward the small gym on the side of his house, strange that the Tanners, had brought them all together. It had been John and Ali Tanner who had known the Ostermans in Los Angeles when Tanner was just starting out. Now Joe wondered whether John and Ali really understood the bond between Bernie Osterman and

25

him and Dick Tremayne. It was a bond one didn't discuss with outsiders. Eventually it would spell out the kind of independence every man sought, every worried citizen might pray for; there were dangers, risks, but it was right for him and Betty. Right for the Tremaynes and the Ostermans. They had discussed it among themselves, analyzed it, thought it through carefully, and collectively reached the decision.

It might have been right for the Tanners. But Joe, Dick and Bernie agreed that the first signal had to come from John himself. That was paramount.

Enough hints had been dropped and Tanner had not responded.

Joe closed the heavy, matted door of his personal gymnasium, turned on the steam dials and stripped. He put on a pair of sweatpants and took his sweatshirt off the stainless-steel rack. He smiled as he noticed the embroidered initials on the flannel. Only a girl from Chestnut Hill would have a monogram sewn on a sweatshirt.

J. A. C.

Joseph Ambruzzio Cardone.

Guiseppe Ambruzzio Cardione. Second of eight children from the union of Angela and Umberto Cardione, once of Sicily and later South Philadelphia.

Eventually, citizens. American flags alongside countless, cosmeticized pictures of the Virgin Mary holding a cherubic Christ-child with blue eyes and red lips.

Giuseppe Ambruzzio Cardione grew into a large, immensely strong young man who was just about

26

the best athlete South Philadelphia High had ever seen. He was president of his senior class and twice elected to the All-City Student Council.

Of the many college scholarships offered he chose the most prestigious, Princeton, also the nearest to Philadelphia. As a Princeton halfback he accomplished the seemingly impossible for his alma mater. He was chosen All-American, the first Princeton football player in years to be so honored.

Several grateful alumni brought him to Wall Street. He'd shortened his name to Cardone, the last vowel pronounced very slightly. It had a kind of majesty, he thought. Like Cardozo. But no one was fooled; soon he didn't care. The market was expanding, exploding to the point where everyone was buying securities. At first he was merely a good customers' man. An Italian boy who had made good, a fellow who could talk to the emerging new-rich with money to spend; talk in ways the new-rich, still nervous about investments, could understand.

And it had to happen.

The Italians are sensitive people. They're more comfortable doing business with their own kind. A number of the construction boys-the

Castelanos, the Latronas, the Battellas-who had made fortunes in industrial developments, gravitated to Cardone. Two syllables only. "Joey Cardone," they called him. And Joey found them tax shelters, Joey found them capital gains, Joey found them security.

27

...ne money poured in. The gross of the brokerage house nearly doubled, thanks to Joey's friends. Worthington and Bennett, members, N. Y. Stock Exchange, became Worthington, Bennett and Cardone. From that point it was a short leap to Bennett-Cardone, Ltd.

Cardone was grateful to his compares. But the reason for his gratitude was also the reason why he shuddered just a bit when a patrol car appeared too frequently around his house. For a few of his compares, perhaps more than a few, were on the fringes-perhaps more than the fringes---of the underworld.

He finished with the weights and climbed on his rowing machine. The perspiration was pouring out and he felt better now. The menace of the patrol car began to diminish. After all, ninety-nine percent of the Saddle Valley families returned from vacations on Sunday. Who ever heard of people coming back from a vacation on a Wednesday? Even if the day were listed as such at the police station, a conscientious desk sergeant might well consider it in error and change it to Sunday. No one returned on Wednesday. Wednesday was a business day.

And who would ever take seriously the idea that Joseph Cardone had anything to do with the Cosa Nostra? He was the living proof of the work ethic. The American Success Story. A Princeton AllAmerican.

Joe removed his sweatsuit and walked into the steam room, now dense with vapor. He sat on the

28

_ bench and breathed deeply. The steam was purifying. After nearly two weeks of French-Canadian cooking, his body needed purifying.

He laughed aloud in his steam room. It was good to be home, his wife was right about that. And Tremayne told him the Ostermans would be flying in Friday morning. It'd be good to see Bernie and Leila again. It had been nearly four months. But they'd kept in touch.

Two hundred and fifty miles south of Saddle Valley, New Jersey, is that section of the nation's capital known as Georgetown. In Georgetown the pace of IUe changes every day at 5:30 P.m. Before, the pace is gradual, aristocratic, even delicate. After, there is a quickening-not sudden, but with a growing momentum. The residents, for the most part men and women of power and wealth and commitments to both, are dedicated to the propagation of their influence.

After fi ve-thirty, the games begin.

After five-thirty in Georgetown, it is time for stratagem.

Who is where? ... Why are they there?

Except on Sunday afternoon, when the powerbrokers SL.rvey their creations of the previous week, and take the time to restore their strength for the next six days of strategy.

Let there be light and there was light. Let there be rest and there is

rest.

Except, again, not for all.

For instance, not for Alexander Danforth, aide

29

to the President of the United States. An aide without portfolio and without specified activities.

Danforth was the liaison between the all-securities communications room in the underground levels of the White House and the Central Intelligence Agency in McLean, Virginia. He was the complete power-broker because he was never in evidence, yet his decisions were among the most important in Washington. Regardless of administrations, his quiet voice was heeded by all. It had been for years.

On this particular Sunday afternoon, Danforth sat with the Central Intelligence Agency's Deputy Administrator, George Grover, beneath the bougainvillea tree on Danforth's small backyard patio, watching television. The two men had reached the same conclusion John Tanner had reached two hundred and fifty miles north: Charles Woodward was going to make news tomorrow morning.

"State's going to use up a month's supply of toilet tissue," Danforth said.

"They should. Whoever let Ashton go on? He's not only stupid, he looks stupid. Stupid and slippery. John Tanner's responsible for this program, isn't he?"

"He is."

"Smart son of a bitch. It'd be nice to be certain he's on our side,"

Grover said.

"Fassett's assured us." The two men exchanged looks. "Well, you've seen the file. Don't you agree?"

"Yes. Yes, I do. Fassett's right."

30

_"He generally is."

There were two telephones on the ceramic table in front of Danforth. One was black with an outdoor plug-in jack on the ground. The other was red and a red cable extended from inside the house. The red phone hummed-it did not ring. Danforth picked it up.

"Yes. . . . Yes, Andrews. Good. . . . Fine. Ring Fassett on Redder and tell him to come over. Has Los Angeles confirmed the Ostermans? No change? . Excellent. We're on schedule."

Bernard Osterman, C.C.N.Y., Class of '46, pulled the page out of his typewriter and glanced at it. Adding it to the bottom of a thin sheaf of papers, he stood up. He walked around his kidneyshaped pool and handed the manuscript to his wife, Leila, who sat naked in her lounge chair.

Osternian was naked too.

"You know, wi undressed woman's not particularly attractive in sunlight."

"You think you're a portrait in beige? ... Give." She took the pages and reached for her large, tinted glasses. "Is this the finish?"

Bernie nodded. "When are the kids getting home?"

"They'll call from the beach before they start back. I told Marie to make

sure they phone. I wouldn't want Merwyn to find out about naked girls in sunlight at his age. There's enough aversion to that in this town."

"You've got a point. Read." Bernie dove into the

31

pool. He swam back and forth rapidly for three minutes . . . until he was out of breath. He was a good swimmer. In the Army they made him a swimming instructor at Fort Dix. "Speed-Jew" they had called him at the Army pool. But never to his face. He was a thin man, but tough. If C.C.N.Y. had had a football team instead of a joke, he would have been its captain. An end. Joe Cardone told Bernie he could have used him at Princeton.

Bernie had laughed when Joe told him that. In spite of the surface democratization of the Army experience---and it was surface-it had never occurred to Bernard Osterman, of the Tremont Avenue Ostermans, Bronx, New York, to vault timehonored barriers and enter the Ivy League. He might have been able to, he was bright and there was the G.I. Bill, but it simply never entered his thinking.

It wouldn't have been comfortable then-in 1946. It would be now; things had changed.

Osterman climbed up the ladder. It was good that he and Leila were going to the east coast, back to Saddle Valley for a few days. It was somehow akin to taking a brief, concentrated course in pleasant living whenever they returned. Everyone always said the east was hectic, pressurized-far more so than Los Angeles; but that wasn't so. It only seemed that way because the area of action was more confined.

Los Angeles, his Los Angeles, which meant Burbank, Hollywood, Beverly

Hills, was where the real insanity was practiced. Men and women racing

32

_crazily up and down the aisles of a palm-lined drug store. Everything on sale, everything labeled, everyone competing in their psychedelic shirts and orange stacks.

There were times when Bernie just wanted to see someone dressed in a Brooks Brothers suit and a buttondown broadcloth. It didn't really mean anything, not actually; he didn't give much of a damn what costumes the tribes of Los Angeles wore. Perhaps it was just the continual, overbearing assault on the eyes.

Or perhaps he was entering one of his downswings again. He was wearying of it all.

Which was unfair. The palm-lined drug store had treated him very well.

"How is it?" he asked his wife.

"Pretty good. You may even have a problem."

"What?" Bernie grabbed a towel from a stack on the table. "What problem?"

"You could be stripping too many layers away. Too much pain, maybe." Leila flipped over a page as her husband smiled. "Be quiet a minute and let me finish. Perhaps you'll snap out of it."

Bernie Osterman sat down in a webbed chair and let the warm. California sun wash over his body. There was still a smile on his lips; he knew what his wife meant and it was comforting to him. The years of formula writing hadn't destroyed his ability to strip away the layers-when he wanted to.

And there were times when there was nothing more important to him than to

want to. To prove to himself that he could still do it. The way he

33

_ used to back in the days when they lived in New York.

They were good days. Provocative, exciting, filled with commitment and purpose. Only there was never anything else really-just commitment, just purpose. A few flattering reviews written by other intense young writers. He'd been called penetrating then; perceptive, incisive. Once, even, extraordinary.

It hadn't been enough. And so he and Leila came to the palm-lined drug store and willingly, happily trained their talents for the exploding world of the television residual.

Someday, though. Someday, thought Bernard Osterman, it would happen again. The luxury of sitting down with all the time in the world to really do it. Make a big mistake if he had to. It was important to be able to think like, that.

"Bernie?"

"Yes?"

Leila draped a towel over her front and pushed the latch on the lounge chair so the back raised itself. "It's beautiful, sweetie. I mean really very beautiful, and I think you know it's not going to work."

"It does work!"

"They won't sit still for it"

"Fuck 'em! "

"We're being paid thirty thousand for a onehour drama, Bernie. Not a two-hour exorcism ending in a funeral home."

"It's not an exorcism. It happens to be a sad

34

_ story based on very real conditions, and the conditions don't change. You want to drive down to the barrio and take a look?"

"They won't buy it. They'll want rewrites."

"I won't make therril"

"And they'll hold the balance. There's fifteen thousand coming to us."

"Son of a bitch!"

"You know I'm right."

"Talk! All Goddamned talk! This season we'll have meaning! Controversy!

... Talk!"

"They look at the figures. A rave in The Times doesn't sell deodorant in Kansas."

"Fuck 'em. "

"Relax. Take another swim. It's a big pool." Leila Osterman looked at her husband. He knew what that look meant and couldn't help smiling. A little sadly.

"O.K., fix it then."

Leila reached for the pencil and yellow pad on the table next to her chair. Bernie stood up and approached the edge of the pool.

"You think Tanner might want to join us? You think maybe I can approach him?"

His wife put down her pencil and looked up at her husband. "I don't know. Johnny's different from us. . . "

"Different from Joe and Betty? Dick and Ginny? I don't see he's so different."

"I wouldn't jump at him. He's still a newshawk. Vulture they used to call him, remember? The vulture of San Diego. He's got a spine. I wouldn't want to bend it. It might snap back."

35

— "He thinks like we do. He thinks like Joe and Dick. Like us."

"I repeat. Don't jump. Call A the well-advertised woman's intuition, but don't jump. . . . We could get hurt."

Osterman dove into the pool and swam thirtysix feet under water to the far end. Leila was only half right, he thought. Tanner was an uncompromising newsman but he was also a sensible and sensitive human being. Tanner wasn't a fool, he saw what was happening-everywhere. It was inevitable.

It all came down to individual survival.

It reduced itself to being able to do what one wanted to do. To write an "exorcism" if he was capable of it. Without worrying about deodorants in the state of Kansas.

Bernie surfaced and held onto the side of the pool, breathing deeply.

He pushed himself off and slowly breast-stroked back toward his wife.

"Did I box, you into a corner?"

"You never could." Leila spoke while writing on the yellow pad. "There was a time in my life when I thought thirty thousand dollars was all the money in the world. Brooklyn's house of Weintraub was not Chase Manhattan's biggest client." She tore off a page and secured it under a

Pepsi-Cola bottle.

"I never had that problem," said Bernie treading water. "The Ostermans are really a silent branch of the Rothschilds. "

"I know. Your racing colors are puce and pumpkin orange."

36

"Hey!" Bernie suddenly grasped the ledge and looked excitedly at his wife. "Did I tell you? The trainer called this morning from Palm Springs. That two-year-old we bought did three furlongs in fortyone seconds!"

Leila Osterman dropped the pad on her lap and laughed. "You know, we're really too much! And you want to play Dostoyevski!"

"I see what you mean.... Well, someday."

"Sure. In the meantime keep one eye on Kansas and the other on those cockamarnie horses of yours."

Osterrran chuckled and plunged toward the opposite side of the pool. He thought once more about the Tanners. John and Ali Tanner. He'd cleared their names with Switzerland. Zurich was enthusiastic.

Bernard Osterman had made up his mind. Somehow he'd convince his wife.

He wai going to talk seriously to John Tanner next weekend.

Danforth walked through the narrow front hallway of his Georgetown house and opened the door. Laurence Fassett, of the Central Intelligence Agency, smiled and extended his hand.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Dwiforth. Andrews called me from McLean. We've only met once beforeI'm sure you don't remember. It's an honor, sir."

Danforth looked at this extraordinary man and returned he smile. The C.I.A. dossier said Fassett was forty-seven, but to Danforth he seemed much

37

_younger. The broad shoulders, the muscular neck, the unwrinkled face beneath the short-cropped blond hair: this all reminded Danforth of his own approaching seventieth birthday.

"Of course I remember. Come in, please."

As Fassett stepped into the hallway, his gaze fell on several Degas watercolors on the wall. He took a step closer. "These are beautiful."

"Yes, they are. Are you an expert, Mr. Fassett?"

"Oh, no. Just an enthusiastic amateur. . . . My wife was an artist. We used to spend a lot of time in the Louvre."

Danforth knew he shouldn't dwell on Fassett's wife. She had been German-with ties in East Berlin. She had been killed in East Berlin.

"Yes, ye,,, of course. Come this way, please. Grover's out back. We were watching the Woodward program on the patio."

The two men walked out onto the flagstone and brick back yard. George Grover rose from his chair.

"Hello, Larry. Things are beginning to move."

"Looks that way. It can't be too quick for me."

"Nor for any of us, I shouldn't think," said Danforth. "Drink?"

"No, thank you, sir. If you don't mind, I'd rather make this as quick as possible."

The three men sat down around the ceramic table. "Then let's pick up from

where we are right now," Danforth said. "What is the immediate plan?"

Fassett looked bewildered. "I thought it had all been cleared through you."

38

"Oh, I've read the reports. I just want the information firsthand from the man in charge."

"All right, sir. Phase one is complete. The Tanners, the Tremaynes and the Cardones are all in Saddle Valley. No immediate vacations planned, they'll be there throughout the coming week. This information is confirmed from all our sources. There are thirteen agents in the town and the three families will be under constant surveillance. . . . Intercepts have been placed on all telephones. Untaceable.

"Los Angeles has established the Ostermaier flight on Friday to be Number 509, arriving Kennedy at 4:50 Eastern Daylight Time. Their usual procedure is to take a taxi directly out to the suburbs. The cab will be followed, of course. . . ."

"If, by then, they're adhering to normal patterns," interrupted Grover.

"If they're not, they won't be on that plane.

Tomorrow we bring Tanner down to Washington.¹⁹

"He has no inkling at the moment, does he?" asked Danforth.

"None at all—other than the patrol car, which we'll use if he balks tomorrow morning."

"How do you think he'll take it?" Grover leaned forward on his seat.

"I think it'll blow his mind."

"He may refuse to cooperate," Danforth said.

"That's not likely. If I do my job, he won't have a choice."

Danforth looked at the intense, muscular man who spoke so confidently.

"You're anxious that we

39

_ succeed, aren't you? You're very committed."

"I have reason to be." Fassett returned the old man's stare. When he continued it was in a matter-of-fact tone. "They killed my wife. They ran her down on the Kurfdrstendamm at two o'clock in the morning-while I was being 'detained.' She was trying to find me. Did you know that?"

"I've read the file. You have my deepest synipathy. . . ."

"I don't want your sympathy. Those orders came from Moscow. I want them. I want Omega."

40

_ !k-

I

_ 2

Monday-10:15 A.M.

Tanner left the elevator and walked down the thickly carpeted corridor toward his office. He'd spent twenty-five minutes in the screening room watching the Woodward tape. It confirmed what the newspapers had reported: Charles Woodward had exposed Undersecretary Ashton as a political hack.

There had to be a lot of embarrassed men in Washington, he thought.

"Quite a show, wasn't it?" his secretary said.

"Out-of-sight, as my son would put it. I don't think we can expect many dinner invitations to the White House. Any calls?"

"From all over town. Mainly congratulations; I left the names on your desk."

"That's comforting. I may need them. Anything else? "

"Yes, sir. The F.C.C. called twice. A man called Fassett."

"Who?91

43

_ "Mr. Laurence Fassett."

"We've always dealt with Cranston down there."

"That's what I thought, but he said it was urgent."

"Maybe the State Department's trying to get us arrested before sundown."

"I doubt it. They'd at least wait a day or two; it'd look less political."

"You'd better get him back. To the F.C.C. everything's urgent." Tanner crossed into his office, sat down at his desk, and read through the messages. He smiled; even his competition had been impressed.

The telephone intercom buzzed. "Mr. Fassett's on one, sir."

"Thanks." Tanner pushed the appropriate button. "Mr. Fassett? Sorry I was out of the office when you called."

"It's my place to apologize," said the polite voice at the other end of the line. "It's just that I have a difficult schedule today, and you're

a priority-,,

"What's the problem?"

"Routine but urgent is the best way I can describe it. The papers you filed with us in May for Standard's news division were incomplete."

"What?" John remembered something F.C.C.'s Cranston had said to him a few weeks ago. He also recalled that Cranston had said it was unimportant. "What's missing?"

"Two signatures of yours for one thing. On pages seventeen and eighteen. And the breakdown

44

_ of projected public service features for the sixmonth period commencing in January."

John Tanner did remember now. It had been Cranston's fault. Pages seventeen and eighteen had been missing from the folder sent from Washington for Tanner's signature-a point which the network's legal department had made to Tanner's office-and the service feature blanks were to be left open for another month, pending network decisions. Cranston, again, had agreed.

"If you'll check, you'll find your Mr. Cranston omitted the pages you refer to and the specific service features were postponed. He agreed to that."

There was a momentary pause from Washington. When Fassett spoke his voice held a touch less politeness than it had previously.

"In all deference to Cranston, he had no authority to make such a decision.

Surely you have the information now." It was a statement.

"Yes, as a matter of fact, we do. I'll send it out Special Delivery."

"I'm afraid that's not good enough. We'll have to ask you to get down here

this afternoon."

"Now, wait a minute. That's kind of short notice, isn't it?"

"I don't make the rules. I just carry them out. As of two months ago Standard Mutual Network is operating in violation of the F.C.C. code. We can't allow ourselves to be put in that position. Regardless of who's responsible, that is a fact. You're in violation. Let's get it cleared up today."

"All right. But I warn you, if this action is in any

45

way a harassment emanating from the State Department, I'll bring down the network attorneys and label it for what it is."

"I not only don't like your insinuation, but I don't know what you're talking about."

"I think you do. The Woodward Show yesterday afternoon."

Fassett laughed. "Oh, I heard about that. The Post did quite a story on it. . . . And I think you can put your mind at ease. I tried to reach you twice last Friday."

"You did?"

"Yes."

"Wait a minute." Tanner pushed the hold button and then the local.

"Norma? Did this Fassett try to get me Friday?"

There was a short silence while Tanner's secretary checked Friday's call sheet. "Could be. There were two calls from Washington, an Operator thirty-six in D. C. for you to reach if you returned by four. You were

in the studio till five-thirty."

"Didn't you ask who was calling?"

"Of course I did. The only answer I got was that it could wait until Monday."

"Thanks " Tanner got back on the line with Fassett. "Did you leave an operator's number?"

"Operator three-six, Washington. Till 4:00 P.m."

"You didn't give your name or identify the agency. . . ."

"It was Friday. I wanted to get out early. Would you have felt better if I'd left an urgent call you couldn't return?"

46

_"Okay, okay. And this can't wait for the mails?"

"I'm sorry, Mr. Tanner. I mean I'm really very sorry, but I have my instructions. Standard Mutual's not a small local station. This filing should have been completed weeks ago. . . . Also," here Fassett laughed again, "the way you keep stepping on exposee toes, I wouldn't want to be you if some wheels in the State Department found out your whole damn news department was in violation. . . . And that's no threat. It couldn't be. We're both at fault."

John Tanner smiled at the telephone. Fassett was right. The filing was overdue. And there was no sense risking bureaucratic reprisals. He sighed. "I'll catch the one o'clock shuttle and be at the F.C.C. by three or a little after. Where's your office?"

"I'll be with Cranston. We'll have the papers, and don't forget the schedules. They're only projections, we won't hold you to them."

"Right. See yoti then." Tanner pushed another button and dialed his home number.

"Hi, darling."

"I've got to hop down to Washington this afternoon."

"Any problems?"

"No. 'Routine but urgent' was the description. Some F.C.C. business. I'll catch a shuttle back to Newark by seven. I just wanted you to know that I'd be I ate."

"Okay, darling. Do you want me to pick you UP?99

47

_ "No, Ill get a cab."

"Sure?"

"Very. It'll make me feel good to think Standard's paying the twenty bucks."

"You're worth it. By the way, I read the reviews on the Woodward Show. You're a regular triumph."

"That's what I wrote across my jacket. Tanner the Triumpb."

"I wish you would," said Alice quietly.

Even in jest she could never let, it go. They had no real money problems, but Alice Tanner forever thought her husband was underpaid. It was the only serious argument between them. He could never explain that to seek more from a corporation like Standard Mutual meant just that much more obligation to the faceless giant.

"See you tonight, Ali."

"Bye. I love you."

As if in silent deference to his wife's complaint, Tanner commandeered one of the news cars to take him to LaGuardia Airport in an hour. No one argued. Taimer was, indeed, a triumph this morning.

During the next forty-five minutes, Tanner tied together a number of administrative loose ends. His last order of business was a call to Standard Mutual's legal department.

"Mr. Harrison, please. . . . Hello, Andy? John Tanner. I'm in a hurry, Andy; I've got to catch a plane. I just want to find out something. Do we have anything pending with the F.C.C. I don't

48

_ know about? Any problems? I know about the public service features but Cranston said we could hold on those. . . . Sure, I'll wait." Tanner fingered the telephone cord, his thoughts still on Fassett. "Yes, Andy, I'm here Pages seventeen and eighteen. The signatures I see. Okay. Thanks. No, no problems here. Thanks again."

Tanner replaced the phone and got out of his chair slowly. Harrison had added fuel to his vague suspicions. It all seemed just a bit too contrived. The F.C.C. filing had been complete except for the final two pages on the fourth and fifth copies of the document. They were merely duplicates, important to no one, easily Xeroxed. Yet those pages had been missing from the file. Harrison had just commented:

"I remember, John. I sent you a memo about it. It looked to me as though they had been deliberately left out. Can't imagine why. . .

Neither could Tanner.

49

_ 3 ,

Monday-3:25 P.m.

To Tanner's amazement, the F.C.C. sent a limousine to meet his plane.

Cranston's offices were on the sixth floor of the F.C.C. Building; at one time or another every major network news director had been summoned there.

Cranston was a career man-respected by the networks as well as the changing administrationsand because of this Tanner found himself resenting the unknown Laurence Fassett, who could say with indignation, ". . . Cranston had no authority to make such a decision."

He'd never heard of Laurence Fassett.

Tanner pushed open the door to Cranston's waiting room. It -was empty. The secretary's desk was bare-no pads, no pencils, no papers of any kind. What light there was came from Cranston's office door. It was open and he could hear the quiet whirr of an air conditioner. The window shades in the office were down, probably to keep out the summer surdight. And then, against the office

50

_ wall, he saw the shadow of a figure walking towards the door.

"Good afternoon," said the man as he came into view. He was shorter than Tanner by several inches, probably five ten or eleven, but very broad in

the shoulders. His blond hair was cut short, his eyes set far apart beneath bushy light-brown eyebrows. He was, perhaps, Tanner's age, but without question a more physical man. Even his stance had a potential spring to it, thought Tanner.

"Mr. Fassett?"

"That's right. Won't you come in?" Fassett, instead of retreating into Cranston's office, crossed in front of Tanner to the door and locked it.

"We'd rather not have any interruptions."

"Why not?" asked Tanner, startled.

Laurence Fassett looked about the room. "Yes. Yes. I see what you mean.

Good point. Come in, please." Fassett walked in front of Tanner into Cranston's office. The shades of the two windows overlooking the street were pulled all the way down; Cranston's desk was as bare as his secretary's, except for two ashtrays and one other item. In the center of the cleared surface was a small Wollensak tape recorder with two cords—one in front of Cranston's chair, the other by the chair in front of Cranston's desk.

"Is that a tape recorder?" asked the news director, following Fassett into the office.

"Yes, it is. Won't you sit down, please?"

John Tanner remained standing. When he spoke it was with quiet anger. "No, I will not sit

down. I don't like any of this. Your methods are very unclear, or maybe too clear. If you intend putting anything I say down on tape, you know perfectly

well I won't allow it without the presence of a network attorney."

Fassett stood behind Cranston's desk. "This is not F.C.C. business. When I explain, you'll understand my ... methods."

"You'd better explain quickly, because I'm about to leave. I was called by the F.C.C. to deliver the public service hours projected by Standard Mutual-which I have in my briefcase-and to sign two copies of our filing which your office omitted sending. You made it clear that you would be with Cranston when I arrived. Instead, I find an office which obviously is not in use. . . . I'd say you'd better have a good explanation or you'll be hearing from our attorneys within an hour. And if this is any kind of reprisal against Standard Mutual's news division, I'll blast you from coast to coast."

"I'm sorry.... These things are never easy."

"They shouldn't be!"

"Now hold it. Cranston's on vacation. We used his name because you've dealt with him before."

"You're telling me you intentionally lied?"

"Yes. The key, Mr. Tanner, is in the phrase you employed just now . . . 'I was called by the F.C.C.,' I believe you said. May I present my credentials?" Laurence Fassett reached into his breast pocket and withdrew a small black plastic case. He held it across the desk.

52

_ Tanner opened it.

The top card identified Laurence C. Fassett as an employee of the Central

Intelligence Agency.

The other car was Fassett's priority permit to enter the McLean complex at any hour of day or night.

"What's this all about? Why am I here?" Tanner handed back Fassett's identification.

"That's the reason for the tape recorder. Let me show you. Before I explain our business I have to ask you a number of questions. There are two switches which can shut off the machine. One here by me, the other there by you. If at any time I ask you a question you do not care to answer, all you have to do is push the OFF switch and the machine stops. On the other hand-and, again, for your protection-if I feel you are including private information which is no concern of ours, I shall stop the machine." Fassett started up the recorder with his switch and then reached across the desk for the cord in front of Tanner's chair and stopped it. "See? Quite simple. I've been through hundreds of these interviews. You've got nothing to worry about."

"This sounds like a pretrial examination without benefit of counsel or mandate of subpoena. What's the point? If you think, you're going to intimidate me, you're crazy!"

"The point is one of completely positive identification. . . . And you're absolutely right. If it was our intention to intimidate anyone, we picked about as vulnerable a subject as J. Edgar Hoover. And

Tanner looked at the C.I.A. man standing politely behind Cranston's desk.

Fassett had a point. The C.I.A. wouldn't allow itself to use so blatant a tactic on someone in his position.

"What do you mean, 'completely positive identification'? You know who I am."

"It should give you some idea of the magnitude of the information I'm empowered to deliver. Just extraordinary precaution in line with the importance of the data. . . . Did you know that in the Second World War an actor—a corporal in the British army, to be exact—impersonated Field Marshall Montgomery at high-level conferences in Africa and even some of Montgomery's Sandhurst classmates didn't catch on?"

The news director picked up the cord and pushed the ON and OFF switches.

The machine started and stopped. John Tanner's curiosity mingled with fear—was growing. He sat down. "Go ahead. Just remember, I'll shut off the tape and leave any time I want to."

"I understand. That's your privilege—up to a point."

"What do you mean by that? No qualifications, please."

"Trust me. You'll understand." Fassett's reassuring look served its purpose.

"Go ahead," said Tanner. The C.I.A. man picked up a manila folder and opened it. He then started the machine.

54

— "Your full name is John Raymond Tanner?"

"Incorrect. My legal name is John Tanner. The Raymond was a baptismal name and is not registered on my birth certificate."

Fassett smiled from across the desk. "Very good."

"Thank you."

"You currently reside at 22 Orchard Drive, Saddle Valley, New Jersey?"

"I do."

"You were born on May 21, 1924, in Springfield, Illinois, to Lucas and Margaret Tanner?"

"Yes."

"Your family moved to San Mateo, California, when you were seven years old?"

46yes.99

"For what purpose?"

"My father's firm transferred him to Northern California. He was a personnel executive for a department-store chain. The Bryant Stores."

"Comfortable circumstances?"

"Reasonably so."

"You were educated in the San Mateo public school system?"

"No. I went through the second year of San Mateo High and transferred to a private school for the final two years of secondary school. Winston Preparatory."

"Upon graduation you enrolled at Stanford University?"

"Yes."

"Were you a member of any fraternities or clubs?"

can't recall. . . . Photography club, I think-, but I didn't stay. I worked on the campus magazine, but quit."

"Any reason?"

Tanner looked at the C.I.A. man. "Yes. I strenuously objected to the Nisei situation. The prison camps. The magazine supported them. My objection still stands."

Fassett smiled again. "Your education was interrupted?"

"Most educations were. I enlisted in the Army at the end of my sophomore year."

"Where were you trained?"

"Fort Benning, Georgia. Infantry."

"Third Army? Fourteenth Division?"

"Yes."

"You saw service in the European theatre of operations?"

"Yes."

"Your highest rank was First Lieutenant?"

"Yes."

"O.C.S. training at Fort Benning?"

"No. I received a Field Commission in France."

"I see you also received several decorations."

"They were unit citations, battalion commendations. Not individual."

"You were hospitalized for a period of three weeks in St. L6. Was this a result of wounds?"

Tanner looked momentarily embarrassed. "You know perfectly well it wasn't. There's no Purple Heart on my Army record," he said quietly.

56

"Would you explain?"

"I fell out of a jeep on the road to St. L6. Dislocated hip."

Both men smiled.

"You were discharged in July of 1945 and returned to Stanford the following September?"

"I did. . . . To anticipate you, Mr. Fassett, I switched from an English major to the journalism school. I graduated in 1947 with a Bachelor of Arts degree."

Laurence Fassett's eyes remained on the folder in front of him. "You were married in your junior year to one Alice McCall?"

Tanner reached for his switch and shut off the machine. "This may be where I walk out."

"Relax, Mr. Tanner. Just identification."

"We don't subscribe to the theory that the sins of the parents are visited upon their daughters. A simple yes or no will suffice."

Tanner started the machine again. "That is correct."

At this point, Laurence Fassett picked the cord off the desk and pushed the OFF switch. Tanner watched the reels stop, and then looked at the C.I.A. man.

"My next two questions concern the circumstances leading up to your

marriage. I presume you do not care to answer them."

"You presume correctly."

"Believe me, they aren't important."

"If you told me they were, I'd leave right now." Ali had been through enough. Tanner would not

57

_allow his wife's personal tragedy to be brought up again, by anyone.

Fassett started the machine again. "Two children were born to you and Alice Mc . . . Tanner. A boy, Raymond, now age thirteen, and a girl Janet, now eight."

"My son is twelve."

"His birthday is day after tomorrow. To go back a bit, your first employment after graduation was with The Sacramento Daily News."

"Reporter. Rewrite man, office boy, movie critic and space salesman when time permitted."

"You stayed with the Sacramento paper for three and a half years and then obtained a position with The Los Angeles Times?"

"No. I was in Sacramento for ... two and a half years-I had an interim job with the San Francisco Chronicle for about a year before I got the job at The Times."

"On The Los Angeles Times you were quite successful as an investigative reporter. . . ."

"I was fortunate. I assume you're referring to my work on the San Diego waterfront operations."

"I am. You were nominated for a Pulitzer, I believe."

"I didn't get it."

"And then elevated to an editorial position with The Times?"

"An assistant editor. Nothing spectacular."

"You remained with The Times for a period of five years. . . ."

"Nearer six, I think."

58

— "Until January of 1958 when you joined Standard Mutual in Los Angeles?"

"Correct,"

"You remained on the Los Angeles staff until March of 1963 when you were transferred to New York City. Since that time you have received several promotions?"

"I came east as a network editor for the seven o'clock news program. I expanded into documentaries and specials until I reached my present position."

"Which is?"

"Director of News for Standard Mutual."

Laurence Fassett closed the folder and shut off the tape recorder. He leaned back and smiled at John Tanner. "That wasn't so painful, was it?"

"You mean that's it?"

"No, not . . . it, but the completion of the identity section. You passed. You gave me just enough slightly wrong answers to pass the test."

"What?"

"These things," Fassett slapped the folder, "are designed by the Interrogations Division. Fellows with high foreheads bring in other

fellows with beards and they put the stuff through computers. You couldn't possibly answer everything correctly. If you did it would mean you had studied too hard. . . . For instance, you were with The Sacramento Daily Neivs for three years almost to the day. Not two and a half or three and a half. Your family moved to San Mateo when you were eight years, two months, not seven years old."

59

_ '711 be Goddamned. . . ."

"Frankly, even if you had answered everything correctly, we might have passed you. But it's nice to know you're normal. In your case, we had to have it all on tape.... Now, I'm afraid, comes the tough part."

"Tough compared to what?" asked the news editor.

"Just rough. . . . I have to start the machine now." He did so and picked up a single sheet of paper. "John Tanner, I must inform you that what I am about to discuss with you comes under the heading of classified information of the highest priority. In no way is this information a reflection on you or your family and to that I do so swear. The revealing of this information to anyone would be against the interests of the United States Government in the severest sense. So much so that those in the government service aware of this information can be prosecuted under the National Security Act, Title eighteen, Section seven-ninethree, should they violate the demands of secrecy.

. Is everything I've said so far completely clear?"

"It is.... However, I am neither bound nor am I indictable."

"I realize that. It is my intention to take you in three stages toward the essential, classified information. At the end of stages one and two you may ask to be excused from this interview and we can only rely on your intelligence and loyalty to your government to keep silent about what has been said. However, if you agree to the third stage,

60

_ in which identities are revealed to you, you accept the same responsibility as those in government service and can be prosecuted under the National Security Act should you violate the aforementioned demands of secrecy. Is this clear, Mr. Tanner?"

Tanner shifted in his seat before speaking. He looked at the revolving wheels of the tape recorder and then up at Fassett. "It's clear, but I'll be damned if I agree to it. You don't have any right calling me down here under false pretenses and then setting up conditions that make me indictable."

"I didn't ask if you agreed. Only if you understood clearly what I said."

"And if that's a threat, you can go to hell."

"All I'm doing is spelling out conditions. Is that a threat? Is it any more than you do every day with contracts? You can walk out any time you like until you give me your consent to reveal names. Is that so illogical?"

Tanner reasoned that it wasn't, really. And his curiosity now had to be satisfied.

"You said earlier that whatever this thing is, it has nothing to do with my family? Nothing to do with my wife? ... Or me?"

"I swore to it on this tape." Fassett realized that Tanner had added the

"or me" as an afterthought. He was protecting his wife.

"Go ahead."

Fassett rose from the chair and walked toward the window shades. "By the way, you don't have to stay sitting down. They're high-impedance microphones. Miniaturized, of course."

61

"I'll sit."

"Suit yourself. A number of years ago we heard rumors of a Soviet NKVD operation which could have widespread, damaging effects on the American economy should it ever amount to anything. We tried to trace it down, tried to learn something about it. We couldn't. It remained rumor. It was a better-kept secret than the Russian space program.

"Then in 1966 an East German intelligence officer defected. He gave us our first concrete knowledge of the operation. He informed us that East German Intelligence maintained contact with agents in the West--or a cell-known only as Omega. I'll give you the geographical code name in a minute ... or maybe I won't. It's in step two. That's up to you. Omega would regularly forward sealed files to East German Intelligence. Two armed couriers would fly them to Moscow under the strictest secrecy.

"The function of Omega is as old as espionage itself, and extremely effective in these days of large corporations and huge conglomerates. . . . Omega is a doomsday book."

"A what?"

"Doomsday book. Lists containing hundreds, perhaps by now thousands, of

individuals marked for the plague. In this case not bubonic, but blackmail.

The men and women on these lists are people in decision-making positions in scores of giant companies in key fields. Many have enormous economic power.

Purchasing as well as refusal-to-pur-

62

_chase power. Forty or fifty, acting in concert, could create economic chaos."

"I don't understand. Why would they? Why should they?"

"I told you. Blackmail. Each of these people is vulnerable, exploitable for any of a thousand reasons. Sex, extracurricular or deviate; legal misrepresentation; business malpractice; price-fixing; stock manipulations; tax evasion. The book touches a great many people. Men and women whose reputations, businesses, professions, even their families could be destroyed. Unless they comply."

"It's also a pretty low view of the business world, and I'm not at all sure it's an accurate one. Not to the extent you describe it. Not to the point of economic chaos."

"Oh? The Crawford Foundation made an indepth study of industry leadership in the United States from 1925 to 1945. The results are still classified a quarter of a century later. The study determined that during this period thirty-two percent of the corporate financial power in this country was obtained by questionable, if not illegal, means. Thirty-two percent!"

"I don't believe that. If it's true it should be made public."

"Impossible. There'd be legal massacre. Courts and money are not an

immaculate combination. . . . Today it's the conglomerates. Pick up the newspaper any day. Turn to the financial pages and read about the manipulators. Look at the charges and countercharges. It's a mother lode for Omelga.

63

_ A directory of candidates. None of those boys lives in a deep freeze. Not one of them. An unsecured loan is granted, a stock margin is expanded-temporarily-girls are provided to a good customer. Omega digs just a little with the right people and a lot of slime gets in the bucket. It's not very hard to do. You just have to be accurate. Enough so to frighten."

Tanner looked away from the blond man who spoke with such precision. With such relaxed confidence. "I don't like to think you're right."

Suddenly, Fassett crossed back to the table and turned off the tape recorder. The wheels stopped. "Why not? It's not just the information uncovered -that could be relatively harmless-but the way it's applied.

Take you, for instance. Suppose, just suppose, a story based on occurrences around twenty some-odd years ago outside Los Angeles were printed in the Saddle Valley paper. Your children are in school there, your wife happy in the community. How long do you think you'd stay there?"

Tanner lurched out of his chair and faced the shorter man across the desk. His rage was such that his hands trembled. He spoke with deep feeling, barely audible.

"That's filthy!"

"That's Omega, Mr. Tanner. Relax, I was only making a point." Fassett turned the recorder back on and continued as Tanner returned warily to his chair. "Omega exists. Which brings me to the last part of ... stage one."

64

— "What's that?"

Laurence Fassett sat down behind the desk. He crushed out his cigarette, while Tanner reached into his pocket and withdrew a pack. "We know now that there's a timetable for Omega. A date for the chaos to begin. . . . I'm not telling you anything you don't know when I admit that my agency is often involved in exchange of personnel with the Soviets "

"Nothin a I don't know."

"One of ours for two or three of theirs is the normal rat.,o. . . ."

"I know that, too."

"Twelve months ago on the border of Albania such an eKchange took place. Forty-five days of haggling. I was there, which is why I'm here now. During the exchange our team was approached by several members of the Soviet Foreign Service. The best way I can describe them to you is to call them moderates. The same as our moderates."

"I understand what our moderates oppose. What do the Soviet moderates oppose?"

"Same thing. Instead of a Pentagon-and an elusive mijitary-industrial complex--it's the hardliners in the Presidium. The militarists."

"I see."

"We were informed that the Soviet militarists have issued a target date

for the final phase of Operation Omega. On that date the plan will be implemented. Untold hundreds of powerful executives in the American business community will be reached and threatened with personal destruction

65

if they do not follow the orders given them. A major financial crisis could be the result. An economic disaster is not impossible. . . . It's the truth.

"That is the end of stage one."

Tanner got out of his chair, drawing on his cigarette. He paced up and down in front of the desk. "And with that information I have the option to get out of here?"

"You do. "

"You're too much. Honest to Christ, you're too much! ... The tape's running. Go on."

"Very well, 11. Stage two. We knew that Omega was made up of the very same type of individual it will attack. It had to be, otherwise the contacts could never have been made, the vulnerabilities never established. In essence, we basically knew what to look for. Men who could infiltrate large companies, men who worked either in or for them, who could associate with their subjects. . . . As I mentioned previously, Omega is a code name for a cell or a group of agents. There is also a geographical code name; a clearing house for the forwarding of information. Having passed through this source, the authenticity is presumably established

because of its operational secrecy. The geographical code name for Omega is difficult to give an accurate translation of, but the nearest is

'Chasm of ... Leather' or 'Goat Skin.'

"Chasm of Leather?" Tanner put out his cigarette.

"Yes. Remember, we learned this over three years ago. After eighteen months of concentrated

66

research we pinpointed the 'Chasm of Leather' as one of eleven locations throughout the country 11

"One of them being Saddle Valley, New Jersey?"

"Let's not get ahead of ourselves."

"Am I right?"

"We placed agents within these communities," continued the CIA man, disregarding Tanner's question. "We ran checks on thousands of citizens - a very expensive exercise - and the more we researched, the more evidence we turned up that the Village of Saddle Valley was the 'Chasm of Leather.' It was a thorough job. Watermarks on stationery, and analysis of dust particles the East German officer brought out in the sealed folders he gave us when he defected, a thousand different items checked and rechecked.... But mainly, the information about certain residents unearthed in the research.

"

"I think you'd better get to the point."

"That will be your decision. I've just about concluded stage two." Tanner remained silent, so Fassett continued. "You are in a position to give us incalculable assistance. In one of the most sensitive operations in

current U.S.-Soviet relations, you can do what no one else can do. It might even appeal to you, for as you must have gathered from what I've said, the moderates on both sides are at this moment working together."

"Please; clarify that."

"Only fanatics subscribe to this type of in-

67

urgency. It's far too dangerous for both countries. There's a power struggle in the Soviet Presidium. The moderates must prevail for all our sakes. One way to accomplish this is to expose even part of Omega and kill the target date."

"How can I do anything?"

"You know Omega, Mr. Tanner. You know Omega very well."

Tanner caught his breath. For a moment he believed his heart had stopped.

He felt the blood rush to his head. He felt, for an instant, somewhat sick.

"I find that an incredible statement."

"I would, too, if I were you. Nevertheless, it's true."⁹⁹

"And I gather this is the end of stage two?"

"You bastard. You son of a bitch!" Tanner spoke hardly above a whisper.

"Call me anything you like. Hit me if you want to. I won't hit back. . . .

I told you, I've been through this before."

Tanner got out of the chair and pressed his fingers against his forehead.

He turned away from Fassett, then whipped around. "Suppose you're wrong?"

he whispered. "Suppose you Goddamn idiots have made another mistake!"

"We haven't.... We don't claim to have flushed Omega out completely.

However, we have narrowed it down. You're in a unique position."

Tanner walked to the window and started to pull up the shade.

"Don't touch that! Hold it down!" Fassett leaped

68

from his chair and grabbed Tanner's wrist with one hand and the string of the shade with his other. Tanner looked into the agent's eyes.

"And if I walk out of here now, I live with what you've told me? Never knowing who's in my house, who I'm talking to in the street? Living with the knowledge³ that you think someone might fire a rifle into this room if I lift up the shade?"

"Don't over-dramatize. These are merely precautions."

Tanner walked back to his side of the desk but did not sit down. "Goddamn you," he said softly. "You know I can't leave. . . ."

"Do you accept the conditions?"

"I do."

"I must ask you to sign this affidavit." He took out a page from the manila folder and placed it in front of Tanner. It was a concise statement on the nature and penalties of the National Security Act. It referred to Omega in unspecific terms--Exhibit A, defined as the tape recording. Tanner scribbled his name and remained standing, staring at Fassett.

"I shall now ask you the following questions." Fassett picked up the folder and flipped to the back pages. "Are you familiar with the individuals I now specify? Richard Tremayne and his wife, Virginia.... Please reply."

Astounded, Tanner spoke softly, "I am."

"Joseph Cardone, born Guiseppe Ambruzzio Cardione, and his wife, Elizabeth?"

641 am.91

69

_"Bernard Osterman and his wife, Leila?"

"Yes.

"Louder, please, Mr. Tanner."

"I said, yes."

"I now inform you that one, two, or all three of the couples specified are essential to the Omega operation."

"You're out of your mind! You're insane!"

"We're not.... I spoke of our exchange on the Albanian border. It was made known to us then that Omega, Chasm of Leather, operated out of a Manhattan suburb--and that confirmed our analysis. That Omega was comprised of couples--men and women fanatically devoted to the militaristic policies of the Soviet expansionists. These couples were well paid for their services. The couples specified--the Tremaynes, the Cardones, and the Ostermans---currently possess coded bank accounts in Zurich, Switzerland, with amounts far exceeding any incomes ever reported."

"You can't mean what you're saying!"

"Even allowing for coincidence, and we have thoroughly researched each party involved, it is our opinion that you are being used as a very successful cover for Omega. You're a newsman above reproach.

"We don't claim that all three couples are involved. It's conceivable that one or possibly two of the couples are being used as decoys, as you are. But it's doubtful. The evidence—the Swiss accounts, the professions, the unusual circumstances

70

—of your association—point to a cell."

"Then now did you disqualify me?" asked Tanner neutrally.

"Your life from the day you were born has been microscopically inspected by professionals. If we're wrong about you, we have no business doing what we're doing."

Tanner, exhausted, sat down with difficulty in the chair. "What do you want me to do?"

"If our information is correct, the Ostermans are flying east on Friday and will stay with you and your family over the weekend. Is that right?"

"It was."

"Don't change it. Don't alter the situation."

"That's impossible now. . . ."

"It's the only way you can help us. All of us."

"Why?"

"We believe we can trap Omega during this coming weekend. If we have your cooperation. Without it, we can't."

"How?"

"There are four days remaining before the Ostermans arrive. During this period our subjects—the Ostermans, the Tremaynes, and the Cardons—will be harassed. Each couple will receive untraceable telephone calls,

cablegrams routed through Zurich, chance meetings with strangers in restaurants, in cocktail lounges, on the street. The point of all this is to deliver a common message. That John Tanner is not what he appears to be. You are something else. Perhaps a double agent, or a Politbureau informer, or even a bona fide member of

71

my own organization. The information they receive will be confusing, designed to throw them off balance."

"And make my family a set of targets. I won't permit it! They'd kill us!"

"That's the one thing they won't do."

"Why not? If anything you say is true—and I'm by no means convinced that it is. I know these people. I can't believe it!"

"In that event, there's no risk at all."

"Why not?"

"If they—any one or all couples—are not involved with Omega, they'll do the normal thing. They'll report the incidents to the police or the F.B.I.

We'll take over then. If one or two couples make such reports and the other or others do not, we'll know who Omega is."

"And . . . supposing you are right. What then? What are your built-in guarantees?"

"Several factors. All fool-proof. I told you the 'information' about you will be false. Whoever Omega is will use his resources and check out what he learns with the Kremlin itself. Our confederates there are prepared. They will intercept. The information Omega gets back from Moscow will be the

truth. The truth until this afternoon, that is. You are simply John Tanner, news director, and no part of any conspiracy. What will be added is the trap. Moscow will inform whoever runs a check on you to be suspicious of the other couples. They may be defectors. We divide. We bring about a confrontation and walk in."

72

"That's awfully glib. It sounds too easy."

"If any attempt was made on your life or the lives of your family, the entire Omega operation would be in jeopardy. They're not willing to take that risk. They've worked too hard. I told you, they're fanatics. The target date for Omega is less than one month away."

"That's not good enough."

"There's something else. A minimum of two armed agents will be assigned to each member of your family. Twenty-four-hour surveillance. They'll never be more than fifty yards away. At any time."

"Now I know you're insane. You don't know Saddle Valley. Strangers lurking around are spotted quickly and chased out! We'd be sitting ducks."

Fassett smiled. "At this moment we have thirteen men in Saddle Valley.

Thirteen. They're daily residents of your community."

"Sweet Jesus!" Tanner spoke softly. "Nineteen eighty-four is creeping up on us, isn't it?"

"The times we live in often call for it."

"I don't have a choice, do I? I don't have a choice at all." He pointed to the tape recorder and the affidavit lying beside it. "I'm hung now,

aren't I?~

"I think you're over-dramatizing again."

"No, I'm not. I'm not dramatizing anything. ... I have to do exactly what you want me to do, don't I? I have to go through with it The only alternative I have is to disappear . . . and be hunted. Hunted by you and-if you're right-by this Omega."

73

_ Fassett returned Tanner's look without a trace of deceit. Tanner had spoken the truth and both men knew it.

"It's only six days. Six days out of a lifetime."

74

_ 4

Monday-8:05 P.M.

The flight from Dulles Airport to Newark seemed surreal. He wasn't tired. He was terrified. His mind ~cept darting from one image to another, each visual picture pushing the previous one out into the distance. There were the sharp staring eyes of Laurence Fassett above the tape recorder's turning reels. The drone of Fassett's voice asking those interminable questions; then the voice growing louder and louder.

"Omega!"

And the faces of Bernie and Leila Osterman, Dick and Ginny Tremayne, Joe and Betty Cardone.

None of it made sense! He'd get to Newark and suddenly the nightmare would be over and he'd remember giving Laurence Fassett the public service features and signing the absent pages of the F.C.C. filing.

Only he knew he wouldn't.

The hour's ride from Newark to Saddle Valley

75

— was made in silence, the taxi driver taking his cue from his fare in the back seat who kept lighting cigarettes — and who hadn't answered him when he'd asked how the flight had been.

SADDLE VALLEY

VILLAGE INCORPORATED 1862

Welcome

Tanner stared at the sign as it caught the cab's headlights. As it receded he could only think of the words "Chasm of Leather."

Unreal.

Ten minutes later the taxi pulled up to his house. He got out and absently handed the driver the fare agreed upon.

"Thanks, Mr. Tanner," said the driver, leaning over the seat to take the money through the window.

"What? What did you say?" demanded John Tanner.

"I said 'Thanks, Mr. Tanner.'"

Tanner leaned down and gripped the door handle, pulling the door open with all his strength.

"How did you know my name? You tell me how you know my name!"

The taxi driver could see beads of perspiration rolling down his passenger's face, the crazy look in the man's eyes. A weirdo, thought the driver. He carefully moved his left hand toward the floor beneath his feet.

He always kept a thin lead pipe there.

76

"Look, Mac," he said, his fingers around the pipe. "You don't want nobody to use your name, take the sign off your lawn."

Tanner stepped back and looked over his shoulder. On the lawn was the wrought-iron lantern, a weatherproof hurricane lamp hanging from a crossbar by a chain. Above the lamp, reflected in the light, were the words:

THE TANNERS

22 ORCHARD DRIVE

He'd looked at that lamp and those words a thousand times. The Tanners. 22 Orchard Drive. At that moment they, too, seemed unreal. As if he had never seen them before.

"I'm sorry, fella. I'm a little on edge. I don't like flying." He closed the door as the driver began rolling up the window. The driver spoke curtly.

"Take the train then, Mister. Or walk, for Christ's sake!"

The taxi roared off, and Tanner turned and looked at his house. The door opened. The dog bounded out to meet him. His wife stood in the hall light, and he could see her smile.

77

_ 3

Tuesday-3:30 A.M. California Time

The white French telephone, with its muted Hollywood bell, had rung at least five times. Leila thought spitefully that it was foolish to have it on Bernie's side of the bed. It never woke him, only her.

She nudged her husband's ribs with her elbow. "Darling... Bernie.

Bernie! It's the phone."

"What?" Osterman opened his eyes, confused. "The phone? Oh, the Goddamn phone. Who can hear it?"

He reached over in the darkness and found the thin cradle with his fingers.

"Yes? . . . Yes, this is Bernard Osterman.

Long distance?" He covered the phone with his hand and pushed himself up against the headboard. He turned toward his wife. "What time is it?"

Leila snapped on her bedside lamp and looked at the table clock.

"Three-thirty. My God!"

"Probably some bastard on that Hawaiian series. It's not even midnight there yet." Bernie was lis-

_tenuing at the phone, "Yes, operator, Im waiting. . . . it's V(-,ry long distance, honey. If it is Hawaii, they can put that producer on the typewriter; we've had it. We never should have touched it.

Yes, operator? Please hurry, will you?"

"You said you wanted to see those islands without a uniform on, remember?"

"I apologize. . . . Yes, operator, this is Bernard Osterman, damn it!

Yes? Yes? Thank you, operator.... Bello? I can hardly hear you. Hello?

. . . Yes, that's better. Who's this? . . . What? What did you say? . .

. Who is this? What's your name? I don't understand you. Yes, I heard you, but I don't understand. . . . Hello? . . . Hello! Wait a minute! I

said wait a minute!" Osterman shot up and flung his legs over the side of the bed. He blankets came after him and fell on the floor at his feet. He began punching the center bar on the white French telephone.

"Operator! Operator! The Goddamn fine's dead!"

"Who was it? Why are you shouting? What did they say?"

"He . . . the son of a bitch grunted like a bull. He said, he said we were to watch out for the . . . Tan One. 'That's what he said. He made sure I heard the words. The Tan One. What the hell is that?"

"The what?"

"The Tan One! That's all he kept repeating!"

"It doesn't make sense.... Was it Hawaii? Did the operator say where the call came from?"

Osterman stared at his wife in the dim light of the bedroom. "Yes. I

heard that clearly. It was over-

79

— seas. . . . It was Lisbon. Lisbon, Portugal."

"We don't know anyone in Portugal!"

"Lisbon, Lisbon, Lisbon . . ." Osterman kept repeating the name quietly to himself. "Lisbon. Neutral. Lipbon was neutral."

"What do you mean?"

"Tan One..."

"Tan . . . tan. Tanner. Could it be John Tanner? John Tanner!"

"Neutral!"

"It's John Tanner," said Leila quietly.

"Johnny? ... What did he mean, 'Watch out'? Why should we watch out? Why place a call at three-thirty in the morning?"

Leila sat up and reached for a cigarette. "Johnny's got enemies. The San Diego waterfront still hurts because of him."

"San Diego, sure! But Lisbon?"

"Daily Variety said last week that we're going to New York," continued

Leila, inhaling smoke deeply. "That we'd probably stay with our ex-neighbors, the Tanners."

46SO?97

"Perhaps, we're too well advertised." She looked at her husband.

"Maybe I'll call Johnny." Osterman reached for the phone.

Leila grabbed his wrist. "Are you out of your mind?"

Osterman lay back down.

Joe opened his eyes and glanced at his watch: six-twenty-two. Time to get up, have a short work-

80

_ out in his gym and perhaps walk over to the Club for an hour's practice on the golf range.

He was an early riser, Betty the opposite. She would sleep till noon whenever she had the chance. They had two double beds, one for each of them, because Joe knew the debilitating effects of two separate body temperatures under the same set of covers. The benefits of a person's sleep were diminished by nearly fifty percent when he shared a bed all night with somebody else. And since the purpose of the marriage bed was exclusively sexual, there was no point in losing the benefits of sleep.

A pair of double beds was just fine.

He finished ten minutes on the exercycle and five with seven-and-a-half-pound handbells. He looked through the thick glass window of the steam bath and saw that the room was ready.

A panel light above the gym's wall clock flashed on. It was the front doorbell. Joe had the device installed in case he was home alone and working out.

The clock read six-fifty-one, much too early for anyone in Saddle Valley to be ringing front doorbells. He put the small weights on the floor and walked to his house intercom.

"Yes? 'Who is it?"

"Telegram, Mr. Cardione.-

"Who?"

"Cardione, it says."

"The name is Cardone."

"Isn't this Eleven Apple Place?"

"I'll be right there."

81

— He flicked off the intercom and grabbed a towel from the rack, draping it around him as he walked rapidly out of the gym. He didn't like what he had just heard. He reached the front door and opened it. A small man in uniform stood there chewing gum-

"Why didn't you telephone? It's pretty early, isn't it?"

"Instructions were to deliver. I had to drive out here, Mr. Cardione.

Almost fifteen miles. We keep twenty-four-hour service."

Cardone signed for the envelope. "*Why fifteen miles? Western Union's got a branch in Ridge Park."

"Not Western Union, Mister. This is a cablegram ... from Europe."

Cardone grabbed the envelope out of the uniformed man's hand. "Wait a minute." He didn't want to appear excited, so he walked normally into the living room where he remembered seeing Betty's purse on the piano. He took out two onedollar bills and returned to the door. "Here you are. Sorry about the trip." He closed the door and ripped open the cablegr .

L'UOMO BRUNO PALIDO NON V AMICO DEL ITALIANO. GUARDA BENE VICINI DI QUESTA

MANIERA. PROTECIATE PER LA FINA DELLA SETTIMANA.

DA VINCI

Cardone walked into the kitchen, found a pencil

82

_ on the telephone shelf and sat down at the table. He wrote out the translation on the back of a magazine.

Tli-, light-brovm man is no friend of the Itadan. Be cautious of such neighbors. Protect yourself against the end of the week. Da Vinci.

What did it mean? What "light-brown ... neighbors"? There were no blacks in Saddle Valley. The message didn't make sense.

Suddcnly Joe Cardone froze. The light-brown neighbor could only mean John Tanner. The end of the week-Friday-the Ostermans were arriving. Someone in Europe was telling him to protect himself against John Tanner and the upcoming Osterman weekend.

He snatched up the cablegram and looked at the dateline.

Zurich.

Oh, J,-sus Christ! Zurich!

Someone in Zurich-someone who called himself Da Vinci, someone who knew his real name, who knew John Tanner, who knew about the Ostermans-was warning him!

Joe Cardone stared out the window at his backyard lawn. Da Vinci, Da Vincil LeonLxdo.

Artist, soldier, architect of war-all things to all men.

Mafia!

83

_ Oh, Christ! Which of them?

The Costellanos? The Batellas? The Latronas, maybe.

Which of them had turned on him? And why? He was their friend!

His hands shook as he spread the cablegram on the kitchen table. He read it once more. Each sentence conjured up progressively more dangerous meanings.

Tanner!

John Tanner had found out something! But what?

And why (lid the message come from Zurich?

What would any of them have to do with Zurich?

Or the Ostermans?

What had Tanner discovered? What was he going to do? . . . One of the

Battella men called Tanner something once; what was it?

"Vulturno~"

Vulture.

". . . no friend of the Italian. . . . Be cautious.

. Protect yourself. . . ."

How? From what? Tanner wouldn't confide in him. Why should he?

He, Joe Cardone, wasn't syndicate; he wasn't famiglia. What could he know?

But "Da Vinci's" message had come from Switzerland.

And that left one remaining possibility, a frightening one. The Cosa Nostra

had learned about Zurich! They'd use it against him unless he was able

_ to control the "light-brown man," the Italian's enemy. Unless he could stop whatever it was John Tanner was about to do, he'd be destroyed.

Zurich! The Ostermans!

He had done what he thought was right! What he had to do to survive.

Osterman had pointed that out in a way that left no doubts. But it was in other hands now. Not his. He couldn't be touched any more.

Joe Cardone walked out of the kitchen and returned to his miniature gymnasium. Without putting on gloves he started pounding the bag. Faster and faster, harder and harder.

There was a screeching in his br

"Zurich! Zurich! Zurich!"

Virginia Tremayne heard her husband get out of bed at six-fifteen, and knew immediately that something was wrong. Her husband rarely stirred that early.

She waited several minutes. When he didn't return, she rose, put on her bathrobe, and went downstairs. He was in the living room standing by the bay window, smoking a cigarette and reading something on a piece of paper.

"What are you doing?"

"Look at this," he answered quietly.

"At what?" She took the paper from his hand.

Take extreme caution with your editorial friend. His friendship does not extend beyond his zeal. He is not what he appears to be. We

_may have to report his visitors from California. Blackstone

"What is this? When did you get it?"

"I heard noises outside the window about twenty minutes ago. Just enough to wake me up. Then there was the gunning of a car engine. It kept racing up and down. . . . I thought you heard it, too. You pulled the covers up."

"I think I (lid. I didn't pay any attention.

"I came down and opened the door. This envelope was on the doormat."

"What does it mean?"

"I'm not sure yet.19

"Who's Blackstone?"

"The commentaries. Basis of the legal system. . . ." Richard Tremayne flung himself down in an armchair and brought his hand up to his forehead. With the other he rolled his cigarette delicately along the rim of an ashtray.

"Please.... Let me think."

Virginia Tremayne looked again at the paper with the cryptic message.

"'Editorial friend.' Does that mean?.. ."

"Tanner's onto something and whoever delivered this is in panic. Now they're trying to make me panic, too."

66Why? 19

"I don't know. Maybe they think I can help them. And if I don't, they're threatening me. All of us."

"The Ostermans."

86

— "Exactly. They're threatening us with Zurich."

"Oh, my God! They know! Someone's found out!"

"It looks that way."

"Do you think Bernie got frightened? Talked about it?"

Tremayne's eye twitched. "He'd be insane if he did. He'd be crucified on both sides of the Atlantic.... No, that's not it."

"What is it, then?"

"Whoever wrote this is someone I've either worked with in the past or refused to handle. Maybe it's one of the current cases. Maybe one of the files on my desk right now. And Tanner got wind of it and is making noises. They expect me to stop him- If I don't, I'm finished. Before I can afford it. ... Before Zurich goes to work for us."

"They couldn't touch you!" said Tremayne's wife with fierce, artificial defiance.

"Come on, darling. Let's not kid each other. In polite circles I'm a merger analyst. In the boardrooms I'm a corporate raider. To paraphrase Judge Band, the merger market is currently insane with false purchase. False.

That means fake. Buying with paper. Pieces of fiction."

"Are you in trouble?"

"Not really-I could always say I was given wrong information. The courts like me."

"They respect you! You've worked harder than any man I know. You're the best damned lawyer there is!"

"I'd like to think so."

87

_"You are!"

Richard Tremayne stood at the large bay window looking out at the lawn of his seventy-fourthousand-dollar ranch house. "Isn't it funny. You're probably right. I'm one of the best there is in a system I despise. .

. . A system Tanner would rip apart piece by piece on one of his programs if he knew what really made it go. That's what the little message is all about."

"I think you're wrong. I think it's someone you've beaten who w4nts to get even. Who's trying to frighten you."

"Then he's succeeded. What this ... Blackstone is telling me isn't anything I don't know. What I am and what I do makes me Tanner's natural enemy. At least, he'd think so. . . . If only he knew the truth."

He looked at her and forced a smile. "They know the truth in Zurich."

88

_6

Tuesday--9:30 A.M. California Time

Osterman wandered aim-flessly around the studio lot, trying, to get his mind off the pre-dawn phone call. He was obsessed by it.

Neither he nor Leila had slept again. They'd kept trying to narrow down the

possibilities and when those were exhausted they explored the more important question of why.

Why had he been caRed? What was behind it? Was Tanner onto another one of his expos6s?

If he was, it had nothing to do with him. Nothing; to do with Bernie Osterman.

Tanner never talked in specifics about his work. Only in generalities. He had a low pressure point when it came to what he considered injustice, and since the two men often disagreed on what constituted fdr game in the marketplace, they avoided specifics.

Bernie thought of Tanner as a crusader who had never traveled on foot. He'd never -one through the experience of watching a father come

89

_ home and announce he had no job the next day. Or a motncr staying up half the night sewing wonders into a v,,orn-out garraent for a chUd going to schoc4 in the morning. Tanner could afford his indignation, and he had done Fine work. But there were some things he would never understand. It was why Bernie had never discussed Zurich with him.

"Hey, T~ernie! Wait a minute!" Ed Pomfret, a middle-aged, rotund, insecure producer, caught up with him (,,i the sidewalk.

"Hello, 17ddie. How's everything?"

"Great! I tried reaching you at your office. Ile girl said you were ont."

"Nothins, to do."

"I got ',he word, guess you did, too. It'll be good work, ng with you."

"Oh? . . . No, I didn't get the word. What are we working on?"

"What's this? Jokes?" Pomfret was slightly defensive. As if he was aware that Osterman thought he was a second-rater.

"No joRes. I'm wrapping up here this week. What are you talking about? Who gave you the word?"

"That new man from Continuity phoned me this morning. I'm handling half of the segments on The Interceptor series. He said you were doing four running shots. I Ue the idea."

"What idea?"

"The sto~y outline. Thn~e men working on a big, quiet deal in Switzerland.

Right away it grabbed me.ps

90

_ Osterman stopped walking and looked down at Pomfret.

"Who r-ut you up to this?"

"Put mo up to what?"

"There's no four shots. No outlines. No deal. Now tell me what you're trying to say."

"You've, got to be joking. Would I kid powerhouses like you and Leila?

I was tickled to death. Continuity told me to phone you, ask for the outlines!"

"Who called you?"

"What',s his nanie. That new exec Continuity brought from New York."

"Who?"

"He told me his name. . . . Tanner. That's I Tanner. Jim Tanner, John Tanner., ."

"John Tanner doesn't work here! Now, who told you to tell me this?" He grabbed Pomfret's arm. "Tell me, you son of a bitch!"

"Take your hands off me! You're crazy!"

Osterman recognized his mistake: Pomfret was no more than a messenger boy. He let go of the producer's arm. "I'm sorry, Eddie. I apologize. .

. . I've got a lot on my mind. Forgive me, please. I'm a pig."

"Sure, sure. You're uptight, that's all. You're very uptight, man."

"You say this fellow-Tanner-called you this morning?"

"About two hours ago. To tell you the truth, I didn't know him."

"Listen. This is some kind of a practical joke.

91

_ You know what I mean? I'm not doing the series, believe me.... Just forget it, okay?"

"A joke?"

"Take my word for it, okay? ... Tell you what; they're talking to Leila and me about a project here. I'll insist on you as the money-man, how about it?"

"Hey, thanks!"

"Don't mention it. Just keep this little joke between the two of us, right?"

Osterman didn't bother to wait for Pomfret's grateful reply. He hurried away down the studio street, toward his car. He had to get home to Leila.

A huge man in a chauffeur's uniform was sitting in the front seat of his car! He got out as Bernie approached and held the back door open for him.

"Mr. Osterman?"

"Who are you? What are you doing in .

"I have a message for you."

"But I don't want to hear it! I want to know why you're sitting in my car!"

"Be very careful of your friend, John Tanner. Be careful what you say to him."

"What in God's name are you talking about?"

The chauffeur shrugged- "I'm just delivering a message, Mr. Osterman. And now would you like me to drive you home?"

"Of course not! I don't know you! I don't understand. . . ."

The back door closed gently. "As you wish, sir. I was simply trying to be friendly." With a smart salute, he turned away.

Bernie stood alone, immobile, staring after him.

92

_ 7

Tuesday--10:00 A.M.

"Are any of the Mediterranean accounts in trouble?" Joe Cardone asked.

His partner, Sam Bennett, turned in his chair to make sure the office door was shut. "Mediterranean" was their code word for those clients both partners knew were lucrative but dangerous investors. "Not that I know of," he said. "Why? Did you hear something?"

"Nothing direct. . . . Perhaps nothing at all."

"That's why you came back early, though?"

"No, not really." Cardone understood that even for Bennett not all explanations could be given. Sam was no part of Zurich. So Joe hesitated.

"Well, partly. I spent some time at the Montreal Exchange."

"What did you hear?"

"That there's a new drive from the Attorney General's office; that the S.E.C. is handing over everything they have. Every possible Mafia connection with a hundred thousand or more is being watched."

93

"That's nothing new. Where've you been?"

"In Montreal. That's where I've been. I don't like it when I hear things like that eight hundred miles from the office. And I'm Goddamned reluctant to pick up a telephone and ask my partner if any of our clients are currently before a grand jury. . . . I mean, telephone conversations aren't guaranteed to be private any more."

"Good Lord!" Bennett laughed. "Your imagination's working overtime, isn't it?"

"I hope so."

"You know damned well I'd have gotten in touch with you if anything like that came up. Or even looked like it might come up. You didn't cut a vacation short on those grounds. What's the rest?"

Cardone avoided his partner's eyes as he sat down at his desk. "Okay. I won't lie. Something else did bring me in. . . . I don't think it has anything to do with us. With you or the company. If I find out otherwise, I'll come to you, all right?"

Bennett got out of the chair and accepted his partner's non-explanation.

Over the years he'd learned not to question Joe too closely. For in spite of his partner's gregariousness, Cardone was a private man. He brought large amounts of capital into the firm and never asked for more than a proper business share. That was good enough for Bennett.

Sam walked to the door, laughing softly. "When are you going to stop running from the phantom of south Philadelphia?"

94

Cardone returned his partner's smile. "When it stops chasing me into the Bankers' Club with a hot lasagna."

Bennett closed the door behind him, and Joe returned to the ten-day accumulation of mail and messages. There was nothing. Nothing that could be related to a Mediterranean problem. Nothing that even hinted at a Mafia conflict. Yet something had happened during those ten days; something that concerned Tanner.

He picked up his telephone and pushed the button for his secretary. "Is this everything? There weren't any other messages?"

"None you have to return. I told everyone you wouldn't be back until the end of the week. Some said they'd call then, the others will phone you Monday."

"Keep it like that. Any calls, I'll be back Monday."

He replaced the phone and unlocked the second drawer of his desk, in which he kept an index file of three-by-five cards. The Mediterranean clients.

He put the small metal box in front of him and started fingering through

the cards. Perhaps a name would trigger a memory, a forgotten fact which might have relevance.

His private telephone rang. Only Betty called him on that line; no one else had the number. Joe loved his wife, but she had a positive genius for irritating him with trivial matters when he wished no interruptions.

"Yes, dear?"

95

_ Silence.

"What 'Is it, honey? I'm jammed up."

Still his wife didn't answer.

Cardone was suddenly afraid. No one but Betty had that number!

"Betty? Answer me!"

The voice, when it came, was slow, deep and precise.

"John Tanner flew to Washington yesterday. Mr. Da Vinci is very concerned.

Perhaps your friends in California betrayed you. They've been in contact with Tanner.~

Joe Cardone heard the click of the disconnected telephone.

Jesus! Oh, JesiW Oh, Christ! It was the Ostermans! They'd turned!

But why? It didn't make sense! What possible connection could there be between Zurich and anything remotely Mafia? They were light-years apart!

Or were they? Or was one using the other?

Cardone; tried to steady himself but it was impossible. He found himself crushing the small metal box.

What could he do? Who could he talk to?

Tanner himself? Oh, God, of course not!

The Ostermans? Bernie Osterman? Chrisf, nol Notnow.

Tremayne. DickTremayne.

96

_ 8

Tuesday- 10:10 A.M.

Too shaken to sit in a commuter's seat on the Saddle Valley express,

Tremayne decided to drive into New York.

As he sped east on Route Five toward the George Washington Bridge, he noticed a light blue Cadillac in his rearview mirror. When he pulled to the left, racing ahead of the other cars, the Cadillac did the same. When he returned to the right, squeezing into the slower flow, so did the Cadillac -always-; several automobiles behind him.

At the bridge he neared a tollbooth and saw that the Cadillac, in a faster adjacent lane, came parallel. He tried to see who the driver was.

It was a woman. She turned her face away; he could only see the back of her head. Yet she looked vaguely familiar.

The Cadillac sped off before he could reflect further. Traffic blocked any chance he had to follow. He was certain the Cadillac had followed him, but just as surely, the driver did not want to be recognized.

97

_ Why? Who was she?

Was this woman "Blackstone"?

He found it impossible to accomplish anything in his office. He canceled the few appointments he had made, and, instead, reexamined the files of recent corporate mergers he had favorably gotten through the courts. One folder in particular interested him: The Cameron Woolens. Three factories in a small Massachusetts town owned for generations by the Cameron family. Raided from the inside by the oldest son. Blackmail had forced him to sell his share of the company to a New York clothing chain who claimed to want the Cameron label.

They got the label, and closed the factories; the town went bankrupt.

Tremayne had represented the clothing chain in the Boston courts. The Cameron family had a daughter. An unmarried woman in her early thirties.

Headstrong, angry.

The driver of the Cadillac was a woman. About the right age.

Yet to select one was to dismiss so many other possibilities. The merger builders knew whom to call when legal matters got sticky. Tremayne! He was the expert. A forty-four year old magician wielding the new legal machinery, sweeping aside old legal concepts in the exploding economy of the conglomerates.

Was it the Cameron daughter in the light blue Cadillac?

How could he know? There were so many. The Camerons. The Smythes of Atlanta. The Boyntons,

old families, the moneyed families. The old moneyed families pampered themselves, they were targets. Who among them might be Blackstone?

Tremayne got out of his chair and walked aimlessly around his office. He couldn't stand the confinement any longer; he had to go out.

He wondered what Tanner would say if he called him and suggested a casual lunch. How would Tanner react? Would he accept casually? Would he put him off? Would it be possible--if Tanner accepted--to learn anything related to Blackstone's warning?

Tremayne picked up the phone and dialed. His eyelid twitched, almost painfully.

Tanner was tied up in a meeting. Tremayne was relieved; it had been a foolish thing to do. He left no message and hurried out of his office.

On Fifth Avenue, a Checker cab pulled up directly in front of him, blocking his path at the corner crossing.

"Hey, mister!" The driver put his head out the window.

Tremayne wondered whom he was capping--so did several other pedestrians.

They all looked at one another.

"You, mister! Your name Tremayne?"

"Me? Yes...."

"I got a message for you."

"For me? How did you?..."

"I gotta hurry, the light's gonna change and I

Street. Just keep walking and a Mr. Blackstone will contact you."

Tremayne put his hand on the driver's shoulder. "Who told you? Who gave you. . ."

"What do I know? Some wack sits in my cab since nine-thirty this morning with the meter on. He's got a pair of binoculars and smokes thin cigars."

The "Don't Walk" sign began to blink.

"What did he say! ... Here!" Tremayne reached into his pocket and withdrew some bills. He gave the driver a ten. "Here. Now, tell me, please!"

"Just what I said, mister. He got out a few seconds ago, gave me twenty bucks to tell you to walk east on Fifty-fourth. That's all."

"That's not all!" Tremayne grabbed the driver's shirt.

"Thanks for the ten." The driver pushed Tremayne's hand away, honked his horn to disperse the jaywalkers in front of him, and drove off.

Tremayne controlled his panic. He stepped back onto the curb and retreated under the awning of the storefront behind him, looking at the men walking north, trying to find a man with a pair of binoculars or a thin cigar.

Finding nobody, he began to edge his way from store entrance to store entrance, towards Fiftyfourth Street. He walked slowly, staring at the passersby. Several collided against him going in the same direction but walking much faster. Several others, heading south, noticed the strange behavior

100

_ of the blond -man in his expensively cut clothes, and smiled.

On the Fifty-fourth Street comer, Tremayne stopped. In spite of the slight breeze and his lightweight suit, he was perspiring. He knew he had

to head east. There was no question about it.

One thing was clear. Blackstone was not the driver of the light blue

Cadillac. Blackstone was a man with binoculars and thin cigars.

Then who was the woman? He'd seen her before. He knew it.

He started east on Fifty-fourth, walking on the right side of the

pavement. He reached Madison and no one stopped him, no one signaled, no

one even looked at him. Then across Park Avenue to the center island.

No one.

Lexington Avenue. Past the huge construction sites. No one.

Third Avenue. Second. First.

No one.

Tremayne entered the last block. A dead-end street terminating at the

East River, flanked on both sides by the canopies of apartment house en-

trances. A few men with briefcases and women carrying department store

boxes came and went from both buildings. At the end of the street was a

light tan Mercedes-Benz sedan parked crossways, as if in the middle of

a turn. And near it stood a man in an elegant white suit and Panama hat.

He was quite a bit shorter than Tremayne. Even thirty yards away,

Tremayne could see he was deeply

—tanned. He wore thick, wide sunglasses and was looking directly at Tremayne

as Tremayne approached him.

"Mr.... Blackstone?"

"Mr. Tremayne. I'm sorry you had to walk such a distance. We had to be

sure, you see, that you were alone."

"Why wouldn't I be?" Tremayne was trying to place the accent. It was cultivated, but not the sort associated with the northeastern states.

"A man who's in trouble often, mistakenly, looks for company."

"What kind of trouble am I in?"

"You did get my note?"

"Of course. What did it mean?"

"Exactly what it said. Your friend Tanner is very dangerous to you. And to us. We simply want to emphasize the point as good businessmen should with one another. "

"What business interests are you concerned with, Mr. Blackstone? I assume Blackstone isn't your name so I could hardly connect you with anything familiar."

The man in the white suit and hat and dark glasses took several steps towards the Mercedes.

"We told you. His friends from California

"The Ostermans?"

"Yes."

"My firm has had no dealings with the Ostermans. None whatever."

"But you have, haven't you?" Blackstone walked in front of the hood and stood on the other side of the Mercedes.

102

"You can't be serious!"

"Believe me when I say that I am." The man reached for the door handle,

but he did not open the door. He was waiting.

"Just a minute! Who are you?"

"Blackstorie will do."

"No! . . . What you said! You couldn't.

"But we do. That's the point. And since you now know that we do, it should offer some proof of our considerable influence."

"What are you driving at?" Tremayne pressed his hands against the Mercedes' hood and leaned toward Blackstone.

"It's crossed our minds that you may have co~operated with your friend Tanner. That's really why we waited to see you. It would be most inadvisable. We wouldn't hesitate to make public your contribution to the Osterman interests."

"You're crazy! Why would I cooperate with Tanner? On what? I don't know what you're talking about."

Blackstone removed his dark glasses. His eyes were blue and penetrating, and Tremayne could see freckles about his nose and cheekbones. "If that's true then you have nothing to worry about."

"Of course it's true! There's no earthly reason why I should work with Tanner on anything!"

"That's logical." Blackstone opened the door of the Mercedes. "Just keep it that way."

"For God's sake, you can't just leave! I see Tanner every &ty. At the Club. On the train. What the hell am I supposed to think, what am I supposed to say? 19

"You mean what are you supposed to look for? If I were you, I'd act as if nothing had happened. . . . He may drop hints-if you're telling the truth-he may probe. Then you'll know."

Tremayne stood up, fighting to remain calm. "For all our sakes, I think you'd better tell me whom you represent. It would be best, it really would. 59

"Oh, no, counselor." A short laugh accompanied Blackstone's reply. "You see, we've noticed that you've acquired a disturbing habit over the past several years. Nothing serious, not at this time, but to be considered."

"What habit is that?"

"Periodically you drink too much."

"That's ridiculous!"

"I said it wasn't serious. You do brilliant work. Nevertheless, at such times you haven't your normal control. No, it would be a mistake to burden you, especially in your current state of anxiety."

"Don't go. Please! . . ."

"We'll be in touch. Perhaps you'll have learned something that will help us. At any rate, we always watch your . . . merger work with great interest."

Tremayne flinched. "What about the Ostermans? You've got to tell me."

"If you've got a brain in your legal head, you won't say a thing to the Ostermans! Or hint at anything! If Osterman is cooperating with Tanner, you'll find out. If he's not, don't give him any ideas about you."

Blackstone climbed into the driver's

_ seat of the Mercedes and started the motor. He said, just before he drove off, "Keep your head, Mr. Tremayne. We'll be in touch."

Tremayne tried to marshal his thoughts; he could feel his eyelid twitch.

Thank Christ he hadn't reached Tanner! Not being prepared, he might have said something-something asinine, dangerous.

Had Osterman been such a gargantuan fool or 'coward-to blurt out the truth about Zurich to John T.,mner? Without consulting them?

If that were the case, Zurich would have to be alerted. Zurich would take care of Osterman. They'd crucify him!

He had to find Cardone. They had to decide what to do. He ran to a corner telephone.

Betty told him Joe had gone into the office. Cardone's secretary told him

Joe was still on va~~cation.

Joe was playing games. ne twitch above Tremayne's left eye nearly blinded him.

Tuesday-7:00 A.M.

Unable to sleep, Tanner walked into his study, his eyes drawn to the gray glass of thr, thre television sets. There was something dead about them, empty. He lit a cigarette and sat down on the couch. He thought about

Fassett's instructions: remain calm, oblivious, and say nothing to Ali.

Fassett had repeated the last command several times.

The only real danger would come if Ali said the wrong thing to the wrong person. There was danger in that. Danger to Ali. But Tanner had never withheld anything from his wife. He wasn't sure he could do it. The fact that they were always open with each other was the strongest bond in their strong marriage. Even when they fought, there was never the weapon of unspoken accusations. Alice McCall had had enough of that as a child. Omega, however, would change their lives, for the next six days, at any rate. He had to accept that because Fassett said it was best for ALL

106

The sun was up now. The day was beginning and the Cardones, the Tremaynes and the Ostermans would soon be under fire. Tanner wondered what they'd do, how they'd react. He hoped that all three couples would contact the authorities and prove Fassett wrong. Sanity would return.

But it was possible that the madness had just begun. Whichever the case, he would stay home. If Fassett was right, he'd be there with Ali and the children. Fassett had no control over that decision.

He would let Ali think it was the flu. He'd be in touch with his office by phone, but he would stay with his family.

His telephone rang regularly; questions from the office. Ali and the children complained that the constant ringing of the telephone was enough to drive them crazy, so the three of them retreated to the pool. Except for a few clouds around noon, the day was hot-perfect for swimming. The white

patrol car passed the house a number of times. On Sunday Tanner had been concerned over it. Now he was grateful. Fassett was keeping his word.

The telephone rang again. "Yes, Charlie." He didn't bother to say hello.

"Mr. Tanner?"

"Oh, sorry. Yes, this is John Tanner."

"Fassett calling. . . ."

"Wait a minute! Tanner looked out his study window to make sure Ali and the children were still at the pool. They were.

107

"What is it, Fassett? Have you people started?"

"Can you talk?"

"Yes.... Have you found out anything? Has any of them called the police?"

"Negative. If that happens we'll contact you immediately. That's not why I'm calling you. . . . You've done something extremely foolish. I can't emphasize how careless."

"What are you talking about?"

"You didn't go in to your office this morning. . . ."

"I certainly did not!"

". . . But there must be no break from your normal routine. No altering of your usual schedule. That's terribly important. For your own protection, you must follow our instructions."

"That's asking too much!"

"Listen to me. Your wife and children are at this moment in the swimming pool behind your house. Your son, Raymond, did not go to his tennis les-

son...."

"I told him not to. I told him to do some work on the lawn."

"Your wife had groceries delivered, which is not customary."

"I explained that I might need her to take notes for me. She's (lone that before

"The main point is you're not doing what you usually do. It's vital that you keep to your day-today routine. I can't stress it enough. You cannot you must not call attention to yourself."

"I'm watching out for my family. I think that's understandable."

108

— "So are we. Far more effectively than you can. None of them have been out of our sight for a single minute. I'll amend that. Neither have you. You walked out into your driveway twice: at ninety-two and eleven-twenty. *four daughter had a friend over for lunch, one Joan Loomis, aged eight. We're extremely thorough and extremely careful."

The news director reached for a cigarette and lit it with the desk lighter.

"Guess you are."

"There's nothing for you to worry about. There's no danger to you or your family."

"Probably not. I think you're all crazy. None of them have anything to do with this Omega."

"That's possible. But if we're right, they won't take any action without checking further. They won't panic, too much is at stake. And when they do check further they'll immediately suspect each other. For heaven's sake, don't give them any reason not to. Go about your business as if nothing

happened. It's vital. No one could harm your family. They couldn't get near enough."

"All right. You're convincing. But I went out to the driveway three times this morning, not twice."

"No, you didn't. The third time you remained in the garage doorway. You didn't physically walk out onto the driveway. And it wasn't morning, it was twelve-fourteen." Fassett laughed. "Feeling better now?"

"I'd be an awful liar if I didn't admit it."

"You're not a liar. Not generally at any rate. Your file makes that very clear." Fassett laughed again. Even Tanner smiled.

109

— "You're really too much, you know that. IT go into the office tomorrow."

"When it's all over, you and your wife will have to get together with me and mine for an evening. I think they'd like each other. Drinks will be on me. Dewars White Label with a tall soda for you and Scotch on the rocks with a pinch of water for your wife."

"Good God! If you start describing our sex life. ..."

"Let me check the index..."

"Go to hell," Tanner laughed, relieved. "We'll take you up, on that evening."

"You should. We'd get along."

"Name the date, we'll be there."

"I'll make a point of it on Monday. Be in touch. You have the emergency number for after hours. Don't hesitate to call."

"I won't. I'll be in the office tomorrow."

"Fine. And do me a favor. Don't plan any more program on us. My employers didn't like the last one."

Tanner remembered. The program Fassett referred to had been a Woodward Show. The writers had come up with the phrase Caught in the Act for the letters C.I.A. It was a year ago, almost to the week. "It wasn't bad."

"It wasn't good. I saw that one. I wanted to laugh my head off but I couldn't. I was with the Director, in his living room. Caught in the Act!

Jesus!" Fassett laughed again, putting Tanner more at ease than the news director thought possible.