Esquire

MEN OF HONOR

To understand the Mafia, you have to go to Corleone. You have to walk the gray, dirty streets, and you have to hear what the Beast did to the Judge. By Richard Ben Cramer

FIRST YOU'LL HAVE TO BE RATIONAL. Giovanni Falcone, with his computer brain, divined that the Mafia was an organization of thoroughgoing logic.

Second, if you want to understand, you'll have to know about Sicily. Judge Falcone (every bit a Sicilian) said the values of Cosa Nostra were no more, no less, than the values of Sicily—taken, perhaps, to the extreme.

Third, and most important: You'll have to look upon the men of the Mafia with respect and empathy. Judge Falcone (the only one they'd talk to) said they played by the rules and they didn't lie. He said they were the only men who meant what they said absolutely, and who lived by their beliefs.

He said they were what they called themselves—Men of Honor.

How do we know the judge was right?

Because he and his wife and their bodyguards were blown to bits of char by a bomb planted under a highway by the boss of bosses, Totò Riina.

ANYWAY, THEY SUPPOSED IT WAS RIINA—the cops and judges who were supposed to know. Of course, no one could know for sure, because no one talks. That's the heart of the problem, *l'omertà*. The word is commonly rendered in English as "silence," or "code of silence." A literal translation is "manly stoicism," which offers a clearer idea of how Men of Honor see themselves. It's no accident that the Mafia code word for the law is feminine: *la somnambula*—"the sleepwalker." That gives a clear idea of how far out front was this one wakeful lawman.

Before Falcone it was perfectly acceptable for Sicilians (or big Italian pols, from the safety of Rome) to declare that there was no Mafia: It had died in the dim rural past or had withered in the fluorescence of modern Italian development. It was acceptable (even respectable) for judges to maintain the convenient and slumberous fiction that the Mafia *might exist*, but just as a handful of disparate bands—no better than hooligans . . . who mostly killed one another, anyway. (One such somnambulist was Judge Antonino Meli; the government made him Falcone's boss.)

It was Falcone's spectacular achievement to prove the existence and structure of the Sicilian mob, the mother of all mafias, as a unity. In fact, he created the entire code and hier-

archy of the Mafia, first in his head and then on paper, with such thoroughness and clarity that he could lead a panel of his peers past doubt. He did this through a feral decade's work, living always in mortal danger, unstoppably sifting and linking thousands of previously unconnected facts. That's why his colleagues recall his mind as a computer: Nothing got lost. But Falcone's work had less in common with technology than with art: Like a great novelist, he was God of the universe of his own imagining; he was so much master of the world under his pen that he could reconstruct whatever detail he required to make it come alive for all to see.

That it was a narrow and brutish universe he never had a doubt. Though he descried honor in it, risked his reputation and safety to defend its soldiers when they honored him, he never "went over." He remained always, in the halting English of one colleague, "a very, very judge." Falcone's words for himself were plain: "I am just a man of the State." The shrug that went along was not meant to diminish the job—to which, he was aware, he'd given up his life. It only showed he had found no choice, as the Men of Honor had found none in their lives. It was the measure of his comprehension that he saw even his own role in the drama, a role that could end only with his death.

In his 1991 book, based on his interviews with the French journalist Marcelle Padovani, he recalled the judges and police officials whom the Mafia had killed. Most, he said, died from ignorance or inattention; some gap in their knowledge proved fatal. Some simply failed to share their knowledge, which meant the Mafia could kill a whole investigation for a tiny price, the death of one man. Falcone always tried to surround himself with a team of judges; in the end, he tried and failed. "One usually dies because one is alone . . . because one is not given support. In Sicily, the Mafia kills the servants of the State whom the State has not been able to protect."

Some of these "illustrious corpses" underestimated the danger or tried to live a "normal" life. Falcone made no apologies for the armored door to his bunker office, his bulletproof Alfa Romeo, his siren-screaming escort of carabinieri soldiers in Kevlar vests. "I do not believe I should give a gift to the Mafia by offering myself as an easy target." (When he went for coffee, he'd order ten, then pick one to drink. No one could know which to poison.)

Yet, he knew, some few of the State's dead servants had perished not from lack of knowledge, or want of caution, or even isolation within a justice system that seemed not to care. One was a judge Chinnici, who brought Falcone into the anti-Mafia war and who was blown up by a car bomb outside his home in 1983. Falcone spoke of the case with characteristic dispassion. "Yes, Rocco Chinnici's was only to be expected. . . . Even though he couldn't improve on his tactics, he fell into a trap and lost his battle. The Mafia proved itself to be stronger and more able than he was."

You could say Falcone wrote his own last chapter there. He was the best. And he lost.

But it was also true that he'd been isolated; the State couldn't or wouldn't support him. It might be that even Falcone let his guard slip one fatal notch—once the pols and his fellow judges drove him from his Palermo bunker, gave him a fancy title and a "normal" life in Rome. Falcone might even have concluded, in the end, that he lost by failure of knowledge—or that he ran out of time: He could not learn enough, fast enough, about the Beast, Totò Riina. For instance, where was he?

CORLEONE DOESN'T look like the town we saw in *The Godfather*: those leafy villas, each with its soft-spoken don dozing in a chair on his sun-dappled patio (unaware of the knife blade flashing toward his neck). No, Corleone is a hard huddle of menace on a slope of gray rock. The houses are concrete, small, gray like the rock beneath, and ingrown, with their dirty blank backs turned to the narrow streets.

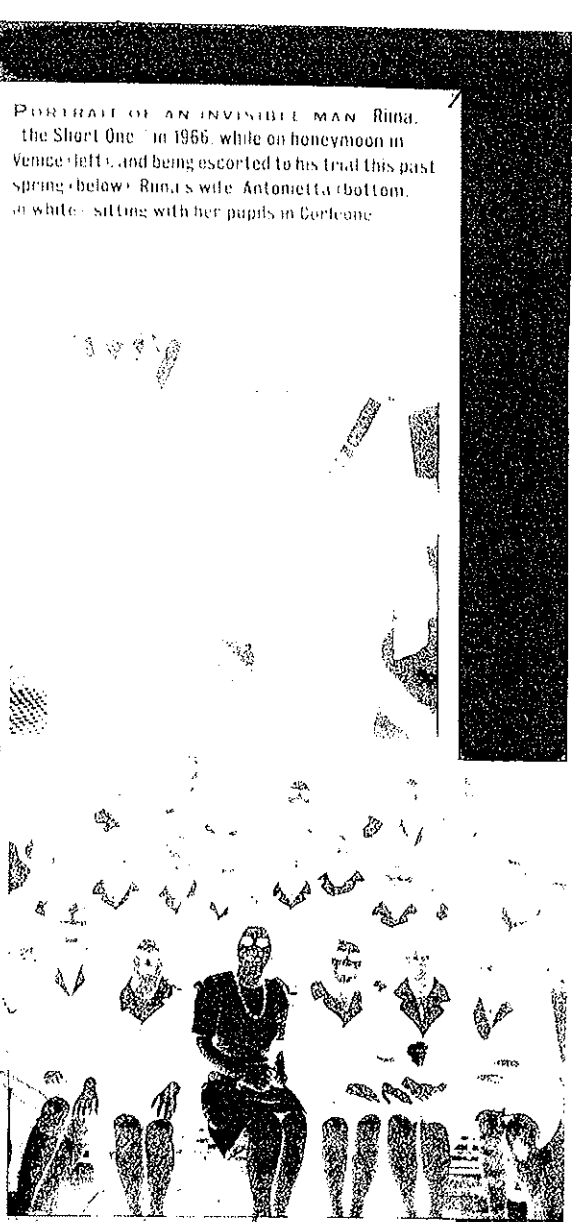
The only known photograph of Riina as a young man, circa 1958.

Ingrown is the structure of the place, the jumbled filigree of streets and houses crowding ever tighter into a fold of the mountain until (it seems perforce, by their pressure) there erupts, from the heart of town, an eerie o'ertowering outcrop of rock. Atop this forbidding, slag-colored butte stood for centuries the local jail, now converted into a monastery for barefoot Franciscans who beg alms on the stone streets below and feed in return the sullen conviction of the *Corleonesi* that their town is unfairly famed just for the Mafia: *Why will no one write about our monks?*

Unfairness is a birthright here, enforced not just by strangers—the trickle of tourists who gawk and leave (film fans frustrated by this cheerless mob theme park)—but reinforced daily by the old twisting risky roads that never got improved by the Italian State; by the promised jobs that never arrived; by the land reform that gave the peasants plots too small for survival; by the absolute inequality of the world in town to the world on TV. In the town of Corleone (population twelve thousand), there is not a restaurant, there is not a theater or a cinema (there is one porno house); there is no library, gallery, museum; there is not a nightclub, dance hall, pool hall, swimming pool, public gym, tennis court, basketball court; no place to court love, licit or illicit; there is no place to go, and no place to forgather in joy, save perhaps the church, with its bleeding saint in a glass case on the front wall.

Of course, it was worse in the '30s and '40s, when young Salvatore Riina came of age. That was before power and plumbing, so the matrons in their mourning black spent their hours with washtubs at the spigot that was called a fountain. That was before land reform, so at dawn the men had to hitch up their donkeys to carts full of tools and troop for miles to the great estates of the barons before they could start work—if there was work. One study estimated the average field hand found only ninety to one hundred days of paid work in a year. And that counted weeks for the harvests—grain in August, grapes in September, November for the olives—when men wouldn't get home at all: They'd take turns sleeping with a rifle at hand atop the day's work, to keep it from thieves. The shepherds got home less: They'd stay with their beasts weeks at a time on the baking rock hills, in endless hegira for grass that somehow survived the killing ten months of sun—nursing, meanwhile, the patent unfairness of all those acres gone to waste in grain and grapes. In Corelone, the Mafia could always count on shepherds to help settle scores with the all-encroaching farmer. Such a young shepherd was Salvatore Riina.

He had the normal upbringing—that is, a childhood without advantage. He left school in the fifth grade. He could read; that was plenty for a shepherd's son. He was just a few



PORTRAIT OF AN INVISIBLE MAN Riina, the Short One, in 1966, while on honeymoon in Venice (left), and being escorted to his trial this past spring (below). Riina's wife, Antonietta (bottom, in white), sitting with her pupils in Corleone

years out of school, hanging out with friends, playing bocce, when an argument turned into a fight. Riina pulled out a pistol and shot another boy in the leg. The boy died from loss of blood. Riina was fifteen when the court sent him to prison in Palermo, for six years . . . finishing school, in the view of the mob, or mobs, in his hometown.

Even in those days, just after Mussolini's war, Corleone was unfairly blessed with two Men of Respect, who represented two distinct styles, or as some would have it, the Mafia past and Mafia future. There was, already in place and pride, the traditional agrarian Mafia capo, who, like so many of his peers and predecessors, was a man of professional attainment, which set him apart from his peasant soldiers. This was Dr. Michele Navarra, the town's leading physician. At the same time, there returned to Corleone a younger, flashier exemplar of honor, one Lucciano Liggio, back from his youth in America, where his attainments ran more toward modernist improvements like striped suits, .38 Specials, and machine guns. Of course, they were great friends in those days, when there was so much business and power to divide: The mob had struck a deal with the U. S. Army to ease its wartime invasion of Sicily and in gratitude, in occupation, Uncle Sam turned over every town hall (along with precious gasoline and hundreds of firearms permits) to handpicked mafiosi who would, it was said, keep the peace.

For example, Dr. Navarra obtained from the Yanks enough transport for his civic-minded project to "organize a meat commerce" with Palermo. In other words, he got a stranglehold on meat for the capital . . . and, of course, Liggio helped out: He organized the shepherds (who flocked to *him*) to control the vast State-owned hills of the Ficuzza forest, where they grazed and guarded the stolen herds. Just for another example, Dr. Navarra wanted to become the director of Corleone's hospital. Liggio helped out as best he could . . . when he and a couple of shepherd-boy lieutenants killed the former director . . . and Dr. Navarra got the job. That was the way they stayed friends, though the doctor seemed hopelessly old-fashioned to the dashing Liggio, who also had great plans for the capital, Palermo . . . without all those stinking animals in trucks.

When it came, the trouble started with a woman. It happens often: Cosa Nostra is particular about the honor of women. In fact, one great cause of estrangement between the Sicilian mother-mob and its rich young American issue cropped up when the U. S. branch went into prostitution. That was unthinkable in Sicily, where tradition must be kept in mind. For example, Sicily's murder method of choice is the *lupara bianca*, the "white shotgun," which is not really any type of gun but disposal of the cadaver so it can never be found. The disappearance is significant and loathsome not because it protects the killers from discovery (the cops don't enter into this calculation) but because the absence of a corpse prevents the family females from kissing the wounds and vowing upon the beloved body: *Thus will we drink the blood of his killers.*

In the spring of 1958, the female in question was the lovely Leoluchina Sorisi, who had captured the heart of Lucciano Liggio. Alas, Leoluchina was already affianced to a local boy, also of note, named Placido Rizzotto. Rizzotto was one of those brave and lonely union types trying to organize the peasants to demand the breakup of great feudal estates. It was a tribute to his talent and grit that he was actually making progress. That's all the eager Liggio talked about when he proposed to old Dr. Navarra that they should rid the town of this union creep, who was putting strange ideas into peasant heads. Dr. Navarra consented. Liggio did the job—that was the easy part. Maybe Luccianuzzu took it a little too easy, because a boy from a neighboring village saw the whole thing, to the moment when Liggio dumped the corpse down a well. The boy was brought, prostrate from terror, to the local hospital, where Dr. Navarra administered a "sedative," and, strangely, the boy died. Still, it was trouble, because the boy's babbling sent the peasants to the well, whence they hauled to town the body of Rizzotto, upon which the lovely Leoluchina vowed: *I will eat the heart of the one who did this to you!* (It should be noted, however, that when Liggio was arrested, some years later, he was found at her house.)

Real trouble came when Dr. Navarra discovered that Liggio cared not a fig for unions . . . and that he, Michele Navarra, Man of Honor, had been gulled to countenance a murder for sinful purpose, i.e., the deflowering of a local female. He ordered Liggio killed. The doctor's men were sloppy, too. They got Luccianuzz' out of town, into the countryside, but when they tried to take care of him, he got to his gun and they shot it out in a bloody mess. Liggio, wounded, crawled to the next village, where he obtained the protection of some local Men of Honor and sent them as emissaries to beg reprieve from Dr. Navarra. Of course, it wasn't finished. But it ended that same year, when Liggio and two shepherd lieutenants—the best shot in town, Bernardo Provenzano, and his

BIRTH OF A MARTYR. Mourners at the judge's funeral (above) jeered at arriving politicians, calling them murderers. The tree in front of Falcone's apartment (left), now an impromptu shrine. Police survey the aftermath of the bomb that destroyed Falcone's entire motorcade (right). His car landed two hundred yards away.

friend, back from jail, *u Curtu* ("the Short One"), Totò Riina—pumped no bullets into Dr. Navarra. Liggio became the boss of the *Corleonesi*. Totò Riina became a made man.

THAT WAS THE YEAR, '58, when Giovanni Falcone had to make a choice. He made it wrong. He was unlucky, sometimes, when his heart got mixed up in things. Falcone made all his big decisions with his heart. He was coming out of high school and had to pick his path. He chose Livorno, the Italian naval academy. He'd decided to go to sea.

You had to know how the kid grew up—the air in his house. . . . Years later, when he was a Mafia-busting hero, people often said that Falcone understood because he was raised in an old quarter of Palermo, among the very people who would become his passion and prey. The Italian papers wove splendid fantasies about the young Giovanni, honing his young computer brain on the penny-ante black marketeering that was everywhere in the old *quartiere* in the years of scrambling and shortage after the war . . . all nonsense. There was never scrambling or shortage in the old *palazzo* of his mother's kin. There was plenty. There was duty. There was history.

That it loomed on a dark street in an old part of town—La Kalsa, near the sea, still bore an Arab name from a millennium past—only enhanced its distinction. It was the house of his mother's grandmother's brother, who was mayor of Palermo when the Italian State was young. It was a house built by and for the power of the State, as the nearby Church of the Magione had been raised to glorify another power. In nearer history, in tinted photographs on the walls of the tall dark rooms loomed two uncles: Both his mother and father had hero brothers who'd died in the Alps in World War I. No Falcone child could ever forget that the mother's brother had falsified his age, at seventeen, to give his life for Italy. But Giovanni and two sisters were not raised just in duty of death: Their father, doctor of chemistry, served the State every day as chief of the Office of Hygiene. In the neighborhood, therefore, he represented the State, and was accorded the admixture of respect and antipathy that Sicilians always reserve for authority (coming, as it always does, from outside their ken).

A little stranger, then, was Giovanni, the doctor's son—a bit apart and admirable in the *quartiere*; dutiful, as became the only boy; romantic, like any child who finds friends in books. Giovanni was devoted to the serial stories. His particular friends were the Beati Pauli, who were members of a monkish and sacred sect of adventurers who would meet in caves (always wearing hoods, so they never knew who the others were), who strove, by guile and swordsmanship, to protect the poor against the greedy rich and a neglectful State. . . . Them and Zorro. In the family's grand reception room, beneath the frescoed ceiling, the walls were cloaked in ornate cloth, which Giovanni, seven years old, further decorated with his wooden sword in a pattern of z's. (After his punishment, he complained to his sisters: "How did they know it was me?")

He was bright in school, reserved and correct. He was a pest protecting his older sisters. His sports were passionate solos: gymnastics, canoeing, swimming. He adored the sea. He would never quit. He used to say a man with his will could arrive at anything. And by his teenage years, he was rippled all over with the long muscles of the marathon waterman. That's when he decided that his duty, his destiny, called from the bridge of a ship of the line in the Italian fleet. So he took the naval-academy test. His score ranked fifth in the nation. He went to Livorno . . . and hated every minute.

The discipline was stupid. The officers were stupid.

He arrived in the fall; by Christmas he'd written to his father, asking, if it were not disgrace, if he would not lose a term, whether he might not, after all, enroll at university. His father wrote back that he was already enrolled—the doctor had seen to that, back in the fall. This naval business was crazy from the first. So Giovanni brought his destiny of duty to the faculty of law at the University of Palermo. And he did not lose time. He graduated at twenty-two. At twenty-three he took the test for magistrates—judges and prosecutors in the Italian courts. At twenty-four, he was a magistrate, the youngest, most avid servant of the State's law.

And there was love. Two loves, actually, for he also married at twenty-four. She was eighteen, another decision of his heart, a woman of understanding, he thought (she would become, by profession, a psychologist). . . . But after years, she would not be able to understand what he felt he had to do. In time, she would lose out to the longer, more passionate love of his life, the State. He was, even at the start, the most thorough young magistrate, meticulous in his preparation, exacting in his briefs and memorandums of sentence . . . informed, precise, relentless. He routinely put in twelve-hour days. He worked without breaks, with absolute focus . . . "like a panzer," they say in Sicily—where memory may fetch up an image of the swift and unstoppable German tank.

You could say he lived for the work, and in it, though the few hours outside might be pleasant enough: He still went to the sea, when he could; he loved to eat, though he cut back ruthlessly when his figure changed from *robusto* to stocky; he shaped himself to the role in every way. Or maybe he had no choice, it shaped him. His accustomed reserve sat well in a judge's robe (which counts in Italy, where magistrature is not just a job but a style). When youth was his hindrance, he grew a beard for "authority." (Years later, he'd shave to luxuriant moustaches, for the same goal.) Now he was ever *Il Dottore* Falcone, or *Professore*, or *Vostro Onore*—which seemed to him fitting. (Even in Palermo, he discouraged *Dottore* Giovanni, which smacked of false intimacy.) He became that "very judge" in the courthouse, and in life. His family always figured it cost him his wife, but that was later: Divorce came in '79; by then it was just a ratification.

By that time, Judge Chinnici had called. Falcone switched from the civil section to the criminal, the anti-Mafia war. What else could a romantic young judge from Palermo give his life to? What compared in importance? . . . And better still: He would become the founding member of an anti-Mafia pool of judges, who were all young legal adventurers, whose work was top secret, known only to themselves. They lived (so the papers dubbed it) *la vita blindata*, the hooded life; they'd meet, every day, in their bunker. . . .

Falcone was not unlucky with his true love.

THEY CALLED IT INCREDIBLE good fortune for Riina—no one could explain it—to win such a girl as Antonietta. It wasn't just her connections, though her family, the Bagarellas, was a potent local Mafia clan. The mystery was, Ninetta was so bright, educated as a teacher. She could have had a career, respect. What could she see in . . . him? The way they always tell the story, a friend told Riina that Ninetta's family would never accept him. "Well, then," he's supposed to have said, "I'll kill them all."

No one gave Riina credit for his brains. The hyper-eloquent and title-loving Italians are [*continued on page 120*]

[continued from page 80] always confusing intelligence with education. (The judges and police officials of Palermo would only credit Riina with *furbezza*, a sort of animal cunning, after he'd made monkeys out of *them* for twenty years.) But as usual, Riina had the long view. He and Antonietta were considered engaged when she was thirteen.

Riina had something better than diplomas, in Corleone—another sort of respect. He had power, after he helped to kill the boss, Dr. Navarra. In the world of Cosa Nostra, prestige attends such a killing; honor accrues to ruthlessness. As Falcone said in his book: "For the Men of Honor what counts is the courage displayed by the assassin, his professionalism. The more cruel, vicious, and crude a murder appears to our eyes as ordinary citizens, the prouder is the Man of Honor, and the more he will be praised for his valor from within the organization." In fact, though its business is profit, the organization is all about power. To see this difference—crime for power versus crime for profit—is to see the difference between Cosa Nostra and any other organized crime. If money were the goal, Sicily's most wanted could just take their millions and escape. They do not. They'd rather go underground on their own turf, with their power . . . as did Ninetta and Totò.

They were married in '66 (by a Mafia priest, a member of the Coppola clan); they honeymooned in Venice. A photo of Totò on the grand piazza there—a happy tourist, a pigeon on his arm—was the last picture anyone saw. They came back to Sicily, and soon . . . they disappeared.

It wasn't hard or even inconvenient. Many men disappeared, and never left town. So ingrained was the Sicilian habit of not seeing anything that was unhealthy to see, it didn't matter how often these fellows were seen. There were always stories in Palermo about this capo or that one, with a trapdoor in his office or a tunnel that led for miles to the sea (especially after one mafioso was caught in his skivvies as he tried to escape through a secret door in his shower). But it really was simpler. When Antonietta's brother, Leoluca Bagarella—feared and famous for his murders of a carabiniere colonel and the head of Palermo's police Flying Squad—was finally picked up in a random road check, the sum of his precautions was a false driver's license and a pair of shades. As for Totò, his children were born in Palermo's best clinic. (Two births were registered there under the surname Riina.) Later, those children were driven every day to private school . . . no matter: the Riinas were not seen.

But, in time, his hand would be everywhere apparent in the capital. When the *Corleonesi* moved in on Palermo, the whole city changed—much for the worse.

It was Liggio who won the first beachhead, the pool halls . . . and that was all for a while. Palermo already had ten Mafia families with the power to claim seats on the ruling Commission. They didn't want any help on their own territory. Liggio decided to help, anyway. And he had the power, with his two chief weapons—Bernardo Provenzano and Totò Riina. In fact, Liggio relied more on Provenzano—for good reason. "Provenzano shoots like a god," Liggio told one fellow mafioso. "It's a shame he has the brain of a hen. Riina, on the other hand, would like to bite off morsels bigger than his mouth."

Of course, back then, in the '70s, no one knew what Liggio said. Before Falcone and the pool got going, no one outside Cosa Nostra could be sure of the existence of the Commission . . . much less the upheaval in it when the boys from Corleone started making moves. There were murders and disappearances, sometimes in bunches. (These were chalked up to unspecified "factional conflict.") It was known, mostly from the protests of U. S. lawmen, that Sicilians were moving into the drug trade: They'd come to dominate the heroin traffic into North America. In Sicily, it was obvious the Mafia was pouring new, uncounted billions into "legitimate" business—construction, real estate. The profile of Palermo was physically changing. Where the capital had always hugged the plain between the sea and the mountains in quarters of ancient Arab geometry, the sky was now carved into dirty canyons by wall-to-wall apartment houses—ugly, cheap concrete boxes, oversized—all illegal, of course. Anyway, it should have been obvious: There was no more building control under the administration of Mayor Vito Ciancimino—previously a barber in the town of Corleone.

But on the largest scale, this cancerous "boom" was also not seen. If it was discussed, it was as a side effect of the long-awaited "development"—that is, as Sicily's cure. Italian law enforcement was focused on the Red Brigades, the threat to the State from terror. The few anti-Mafia triumphs ("Lucky" Liggio, for example, was sent to jail a couple of times) were often reversed by higher courts, without public or political protest. The fact was, the Mafia had purchased protection: There was a placid and profitable marriage between the ruling Christian Democrats and the mob—especially the Palermo families, who believed in taking care of business quietly. The State delivered fat public contracts and, when required, court rulings. The Mafia delivered untraceable cash and votes by the millions to keep the DC in power.

That was destined to change with the ascendance of Totò Riina. Jail time had begun to erode Liggio's influence. Riina was left on the outside to follow his own ambitions. That's when he started to show his penchant for the longer view. Slowly, and with a delicacy that even his fellow mafiosi never imagined in him (when his plan came clear they still protested: It must be Ninetta!) . . . he began to insinuate men faithful to him into the *Palermitano* families. By '81 he was ready, and Palermo awoke to a Mafia war that could not be ignored.

A thousand people would die in a year, and those were just the bodies that were left around to be counted. From Rome came vows: Such violence *must be stopped!* . . . It didn't stop. Riina was moving on the old Palermo families one by one; he'd promise peace whenever he needed time. He'd assassinate the boss and clean up the faithful who could be found. For the promise of peace, his own men in that family would move up to command of that territory. In April and May of '81, Riina killed the top two bosses of central Palermo, Stefano Bontade and Salvatore Inzerillo. His third nemesis, Gaetano Badalamenti, escaped Sicily with his life, but Riina's fatal influence extended overseas. According to information later developed by Falcone, John Gambino soon arrived in Sicily (as ambassador for the U. S. boss, Paul Castellano) and received the request—which was respected—to eliminate the escapees who had sought haven in America. Nothing was safe from Riina, not even tradition. Two bosses, Tommaso Buscetta and Salvatore Contorno, the only strongmen who might have contested Riina militarily, had their relatives killed, boys and women, too. There were fifty funerals within those two families.

Of course, there was the tradition of the Christmas amnesty. Even Riina could not ignore it. He declared a peace and hosted a spectacular party at a private villa. There must have been forty or fifty guests. He even invited the old Palermo boss, Saro Riccobono (with whom relations had been sour, owing to the disap-

pearance of a couple of Riccobono's friends) . . . and nothing was spared: There was music, food, wine—*feasting* . . . after which Riccobono, for one, stretched out on a couch in the living room to rest. Four of Riina's men set upon Riccobono. "Saruzz'," one was heard to mutter, "your story finishes here." They strangled him to death on that couch. At that moment, other Riina men ran through the house and garden, finishing with guns all the friends of Riccobono. In Palermo, that same evening, fifteen Riccobono men were gunned down at their homes, in bars, in garages, on the street . . . and brought to the villa, where they disappeared in a tank of acid.

There was another new wrinkle in Riina's rule: Gone were the days of private business quietly arranged through connections in government and politics. The provincial secretary of the DC was killed; he'd threatened the power of the friendly former barber, Ciancimino. Six months later, it was a former parliamentary deputy who'd come back to Palermo to "stamp out the Mafia." Five months later, the president of the region of Sicily who had vowed to clean up public contracts . . . then a particularly inflexible judge . . . then the Communist deputy who proposed a law permitting confiscation of Mafia profits. That was '82, at which point the government in Rome had to act, if only to silence the hostile press. The State sent to Palermo its hero, General Carlo Alberto Dalla Chiesa, the conqueror of the Red Brigades, *Uomo di Ferro*, Man of Iron . . . who was celebrating his one-hundredth day on the job, along with his pretty, pregnant wife and a bodyguard who was driving, when they all were shot to pulp by a hail of bullets from Totò Riina.

WHAT A STRANGE LIFE it was for the four young judges of the pool, squirreled away with their secrets in their corner of the Ministry of Justice building in Palermo, behind the steel doors with TV cameras to offer a view of the hallway outside, where the escorts sat splay-legged, cradling their submachine guns, waiting for the moment when their judge would emerge to trot through the echoing Fascist acre of marble to the front entrance, where ramps had been built so the armored Alfa sedans could roar up the steps, and their doors with the darkened windows would fly open, nearly touching the bulletproof Lexan of the building's doors so the judge would never stand exposed for one instant before the sirens wailed again and the engines screamed, as the soldiers at the wheel dumped their clutches and skidded down the ramp, leaving in the sunshine only ache in the ears and an acrid double track of burnt rubber . . . time for lunch.

Or maybe it was dinner, or breakfast, for there was no clock, and a schedule for more than a day or two was dangerous. Judge Chinnici had been blown up just at that moment of fatal regularity, when they knew (whoever they were) he would leave his apartment for the office. There were soldiers on the streets in front of the judges' houses thereafter, to make sure no one could leave more cars packed with TNT. Of course, that increased the judges' isolation: Now they [illegible] pitted against their neighbors on the desperate matter of parking. (The grateful citizens of Falcone's building signed a letter proposing that the State make alternative arrangements for the judge—a secure building somewhere, they suggested, perhaps a jail.) But it wasn't just neighbors. Politicians complained in print that the ministry's focus on *supposed organized crime* was feeding the ancient slanders against Sicily—this was another *attack from the North*. And it wasn't just politicians. Within the ministry, a high-ranking magistrate suggested to Falcone's boss: "Bury him under mountains of minor trials—that way, he'll leave us in peace."

It was clear Falcone was in the lead, though all four judges of the pool were within a year in age, all shared knowledge of investigations, all shared the same hobbled and hooded life. Something about Falcone drew attention—a self-possession, a self-sufficiency, a conviction about his worth and work caused envy, or admiration, curiosity at the very least, and . . . curious, too: That untouchable conviction of self-worth was the sign Sicilians had recognized for years—something they had to notice to stay out of the path and the business of their local Men of Honor.

It wasn't that he took on the values of the mob—quite the reverse. He was, if anything, less tolerant of the small complicities that were woven into the life of Palermo—things everyone did to get along: the "recommendations" for jobs, for contracts, for positions of advantage . . . the little *pizzo* paid to do business (the word is Sicilian for "beak," as in the phrase "just enough to wet my beak") . . . the all-pervasive habit of not seeing—*after all, everybody has to live*. It was as if the terminal unsureness of his hold on life required from him more conviction and correctness, a tense and inflexible certainty—of course he bothered people. At a party in Palermo one night, an old friend counseled him: "Giovanni, why don't you ease up—live and let live, enjoy!" Falcone turned on him with a chill that stopped the man in his tracks. "If I didn't know you," said the judge, "I'd say you were working for the other side."

The strange part was, he was enjoying; he was alive as some men never get to be. At last, he'd found a way to share his excitement—his wartime romance, his second wife, Francesca Morvillo. She was the daughter of the head of Palermo's Tribunale, another child of the State and now a judge herself—divorced, as was Falcone, committed and meticulous in work, as he was. She was beautiful, graceful, admired everywhere in the ministry (even where he was not) . . . but she understood exactly what he had to do. She was not confused about the life she was choosing to share: They would never be able to travel, never go out, never even take a stroll together. She, too, would live in constant danger—at least in a constant state of impending widowhood. The letters that arrived for him with bullets in the envelope . . . or a picture of his coffin with his date of birth and a date of death (always coming right up!) . . . or coded threats he'd hear from mafiosi ("You do a dangerous job. If I were you, I'd even take my bodyguards to the bathroom with me"). . . . These were confirmation for Falcone—he was getting warm, they were starting to sweat. These workdays of twelve, fourteen, sixteen hours, were what he was put on earth for. He gave a nickname to his pool colleague, Giuseppe Ayala, who'd get to work sometimes at 9:00 A.M.—Sleepyhead. Sometimes, at 10:00 or 11:00 P.M., Falcone would look up with a start from the stacks of paper on his desk and call down the hallway of the bunker: "Hey! It's night! Don't you think it's time we removed this thorn from the side of the State?" Then, with sirens wailing, he'd go home and talk about the Mafia with Francesca till 2:00 in the morning. What was the point of sleep?

Falcone was coming to know his opponents: This life-on-alert was their habit of existence; sureness of knowledge was their stock-in-trade. The difference between the Man of Honor and the population of sheep (whom he fleeced) was that he knew what happened, and why. Falcone had to match that sureness to survive.

For four years, he'd pieced together the few available facts. He figured that if the Mafia was making billions from the

drug trade, there had to be traces in Sicilian banks. That reasoning won him his first convictions. And he'd reasoned from the other traces the Mafia left behind: When ballistics tests on the bosses Bontade (killed with a shotgun and a Russian AK-47) and Inzerillo (also an AK-47), were compared with bullets from the body of Dalla Chiesa, it was clear the same Kalashnikov had been used in all three killings. To Falcone, then, it was also clear: There were two factions in the Mafia war and the winners had also killed the General.

Falcone's instinct was toward unity. His mind rebelled against the mess of rumor that washed up in the wake of every killing. It was not sufficient for him to list the profusion of Mafia names as so many mysterious flora, to speculate on their authority or their family connections, like some pre-Mendelian botanist monk. He knew better science was bound to reveal a structure in which the creatures dwelt. At the same time, he rejected the romance of grand conspiracy: the whispers that the Mafia was really led from Rome, from the government—these bosses were but puppets. (This theory gained steam from Dalla Chiesa's assassination: That hero was *allowed* to beat the Red Brigades, so the saying went, because they threatened the State from the outside; the Mafia, on the contrary, was the hand of the State itself . . . and so the Man of Iron had to die.)

At bottom, Falcone respected his foes: Why would Cosa Nostra—born as a struggle for control against the government—suddenly bow to orders from Rome, from men it could not control? That made no sense. . . . Nor did fantastic tales of "ritual killing," supposedly meant to terrorize the population. (Chinnici, according to this sort of theory, was car-bombed to show that the Mafia could "turn Palermo into Beirut.") No, Falcone assumed the Mafia killed as it was able. (Chinnici was car-bombed because that was the efficient way.) And killed only when it had to. The bosses were not puppets or monsters; their actions had to make sense in their world.

He came to think of them as "people like us," or maybe a bit better: They told the truth. As he explained in his book, the organization has an absolute respect for facts; truth telling is life and death. "If a mafioso does not respect the obligation to tell the truth in the presence of another Man of Honor, it is a sure sign that one or the other is soon to die." The Man of Honor speaks only when he is sure of the facts, when he has the right to speak, when the information concerns him. "Otherwise he places himself beyond the rules and at that point no one—nothing—will protect him." It occurred to Falcone, the Mafia state was much more efficient, more capable of requiring respect, than was his State, than the nest of half-truth and compromise that was his ministry. If other judges thought Falcone crazy when he claimed, "The Man of Honor is obliged always to tell the truth" . . . that did not matter: He knew what he knew.

It was respect he showed to mafiosi he interviewed. He wouldn't burst into their cells (as the cops liked to do) to demand that they talk, or else. Unlike so many elegant judges, he'd never use the contemptuous second-person pronoun, *tu*, but always the formal *lei*—as he expected them to call him Judge or Your Honor. He'd take care to acquaint himself with their "human situations," their families, their histories, relatives killed, their own situations within Cosa Nostra. He'd ask specific questions about specific crimes of which they had knowledge, and would never indulge in "fishing" ("Tell me what you know about this Mafia!"). He was Sicilian enough not to ask about things that weren't his business. . . . Sicilian enough, too, to understand their answers: the shrugs, silences, and cryptic sayings in dialect. Above all, he told the truth. "You can say whatever you like," he'd begin. "But remember, this interview will be a calvary for you, because I will try by any means to make you contradict yourself. If you manage to convince me of the truth of what you say, then and only then will I be able to consider the possibility of safeguarding your right to life—protecting you from the bureaucracy of the State and from Cosa Nostra."

It was respect that won Falcone his big break, in '84—the cooperation of Tommaso Buscetta. Buscetta was famous within the mob for his courage and ferocity, though he was not a *capofamiglia* (female trouble again: Buscetta had shown himself incapable of emotional control . . . he'd married three times). In the war with the *Corleonesi*, Buscetta was driven out of Sicily to Brazil—in fact, he was driven out of Cosa Nostra by the serial murders of his kin. Still, he never would have talked if he hadn't met Falcone.

He told the judge at the start: ". . . I don't trust anyone else. I don't believe the Italian State really intends to fight the Mafia." Then he added: "I warn you, Judge. After these interviews with me you will become a celebrity. But they will seek to destroy you, physically and professionally. And they'll do the same to me. Don't forget, an account opened with Cosa Nostra can never be closed. Do you still wish to interview me?"

They talked for months at a time. Buscetta was the first of the great *pentiti*, the "repentants" who were to teach Falcone the language, method, and manners. . . . Buscetta was the confirmation of all that Falcone had imagined in the Mafia—unity, rationality, control; the shortened distance between saying and doing (if they said, it was done). . . . And Buscetta was the turning point in another sense. Unlike the handful of mafiosi who had talked before, he didn't come to the State in a panic of self-preservation, but with the considered judgment that the values of Cosa Nostra were gone, trampled underfoot by the *Corleonesi* who had killed his two sons. In that he was a prophet: Falcone soon had other *pentiti* who found they could trust him more than their fellow Men of Honor. And he did not lose time. With his fellow members of the pool, he piled up interviews and evidence, thousands of pages. He filled his head with Cosa Nostra until he could see it whole . . . and then he indicted it whole.

In November '85, the judges of Palermo's pool issued an "instruction" accusing 476 defendants at once. They would mount the biggest trial in the history of Italy. They would construct an enormous concrete bunker-courtroom within the walls of Palermo's Ucciardone prison, with underground tunnels from the cell-blocks to steel-barred courtroom cages, in which the mafiosi would be on display.

There had never been anything like it in Palermo or anywhere else. The twenty-million-dollar *aula-bunker* was an international fascination, built in pieces, put together in a matter of months. As the trial approached—February '86—Palermo was rocked by a crime wave: muggings, robberies, murders, bomb threats . . . as the *Corleonesi* bosses tried to stir up nostalgia for the days when the mob kept matters in hand. Unemployed workers were sent to the streets to demonstrate for the good old days of the "boom." From every part of Italy, two thousand police and special agents were shipped to Palermo for "maxi-trial" security. Journalists came from everywhere in the world. They all wanted Falcone, of course; in that, they were all disappointed. Falcone and his closest colleague, Judge Paolo Borsellino, had been spirited from their apartments one night, taken for a pretrial "vacation" at the Asinara

prison on the island of Sardinia. There they could work their sixteen-hour days in peace—that is, without further exertion by Italy's security forces.

As the trial began, schools were empty; parents feared the Mafia would have to mount a massacre to strike back. Italy all but stopped while citizens watched TV to catch a glimpse of the faces that belonged to such well-known names of terror. There, in his cage, was the putative head of the Commission, Michele Greco, whom Liggio had nicknamed the Pope because he only stood there, to bless the business, while the *Corleonesi* ran things. There was old Liggio himself, pacing like a lion, an effect heightened by the ruff of fur collar on his leather coat. There were hundreds of Mafia "soldiers," button men, enforcers, drug couriers, drug chemists, drivers. . . . Just reading the roster of defendants and charges would occupy the first hour of every day in court.

And the trial would last for eighteen months. Every witness, every defendant, would be questioned in the dock on the minute particulars of Mafia life. ("So how was it decided that Mr. Michele Greco would be godfather to your second son? . . .") Then the question and the answer would be summarized by the presiding judge and taken down in longhand by clerks arrayed in front of the bench. Documents would run to a million pages. Every boss, every soldier, was considered by name, accused of specific crimes that Falcone proposed to prove. And not just the hundreds of defendants in court: By Italian law a criminal did not have to be in custody. Falcone would convict Totò Riina—still in hiding after twenty years—of three counts of murder, and would win from the jury three life jail terms.

In all, by late '87, the maxi-trial would sentence 338 defendants to total jail terms of almost three thousand years. But the individual convictions, even the massive totals, did not measure the triumph. For the first time in history, the Italian State had taken the measure of the Mafia. For the first time, Falcone had proved the methods and shape of the organization, its purposes, profits, logic, rigor, and chain of command. He robbed it of the mystery that made up so much of its power. Any schoolchild in Italy could now see in newspapers a chart detailing the members of the Commission, with x's next to eight of the eleven names to show the bosses then in jail.

And something else: There were no massacres, no bomb blasts, no litter of bodies in the streets. It was as if the octopus was stunned. From Rome, no less than Prime Minister Craxi proclaimed the demise of the Mafia. Falcone thought otherwise: He knew about the men still on the outside—Riina, the Beast, for one. Falcone knew the Mafia was clever enough, disciplined enough, to let the State beat its chest in triumph until the focus was lost . . . while the mob regrouped, while it cleaned itself of traitors and weak links, while it worked invisibly on judges of appeal who would reconsider the jail terms. Falcone insisted the work had just begun. Now was the time for the State to move fast, to take advantage of new *pentiti*—they were coming to him steadily now. (One of the best, Antonino Calderone, told the press: "I collaborated with Falcone because he is a Man of Honor.") Falcone insisted new pools must be formed, not just in Palermo, all over the nation . . . but for reasons that never quite came clear, it didn't matter what Falcone said anymore.

When the top job of his Office of Instruction came open in 1988, Falcone was the heir presumptive. Suddenly an older judge, Antonino Meli, was convinced (by unseen powers) to withdraw his application for the presidency of the Tribunale and apply instead for the Office of Instruction. Meli got the office and promptly voiced his opinion that the Mafia was not a unified command—just a collection of hooligans. At the same time, judges from other courts in Italy initiated learned and finicky reviews of procedure in the maxi-trial. Perhaps the convictions were not valid (so one theory went) because of the extraordinary length of proceedings; defendants were not judged with the promptness they deserved. In the Ministry of Justice building in Palermo, there was a growing school of thought that Falcone—good man, good worker—was nevertheless afflicted with delusions about the Mafia: He thought Cosa Nostra was involved in everything; he'd take over every investigation in Italy! By '89 the local papers were retailing, on the front page, anonymous letters (signed by "the Crow") that accused Falcone of using *pentiti* as "killers for the State." Courts of appeal were reversing the maxi-trial sentences. Greco was let free. Totò Riina was absolved. Of course, the government vowed to reappeal, in an effort to reinstate convictions . . . but no, perhaps not with the prosecutors from Palermo. That year, the pool was dissolved. Judge Meli said it was better to let individual magistrates work on individual cases—in their local jurisdictions, of course. That was the summer of 1989, when fifty sticks of dynamite were found in front of Falcone's beach house, minutes before he emerged for his morning swim.

Clearly he got the message. He was under attack. His credibility was steadily eroding. He was alone. . . . From Rome, the Minister of Justice was calling: Perhaps Falcone would consider another job—a splendid title, a coordinating position—Director of Penal Affairs. With a bitterness of which he never spoke in public, Falcone accepted transfer to Rome. Before he left, he got a bill from the State—room and board for his "vacation" in Asinara prison. Falcone paid . . . and demanded a receipt, which he framed and mounted, ever after, on his office wall.

ON MAY 23, a sunny Saturday in the spring of '92, Falcone decided on the spur of the moment that he and Francesca would fly down to Palermo. He called ahead for escorts. He got a secret-service plane. He arrived in high spirits. . . . Even he had to admit, a year or two outside the cauldron of Palermo hadn't been bad: He'd decompressed. He still lived with escorts, drove in armored cars. But he'd recaptured a few of life's pleasures—a meal in a restaurant, a stroll home from dinner. . . . Still, he could not give up his life's love.

From the ministry in Rome, he was pushing for a new anti-Mafia directorate (modeled on America's FBI), a new national superprosecutor, and a law (like the U. S. witness-protection act) to give his *pentiti* financial support, security, and new identities. Falcone was five days past his fifty-third birthday—still, a long way to go. He said the law would prevail, he had to keep faith. Just three months before, Italy's supreme tribunal, the Corte di Cassazione, had stunningly affirmed the verdicts of the maxi-trial, reinstating the convictions and jail terms for the bosses.

At the Palermo airport, Falcone greeted his escorts, then held out his hand for keys—he'd drive. He took off for the city on the eight-lane superhighway—gunned the Alfa up past eighty miles an hour . . . and that was the last he did.

As Falcone's car and two escort vehicles passed over a culvert in the road, a ton of dynamite exploded beneath them. The bomb was detonated by remote control from a hillside overlooking the highway. (Investigators would come to believe Totò Riina himself was on that hill.) The trap had been laid with such care that Mafia experts had padded the sides of the culvert with mattresses so all the force of the blast would shoot up through the road.

MEN OF HONOR

BY RICHARD BEN CRAMER

The road was gone, replaced in a split second by a twenty-foot crater. Falcone's car was twisted and mashed to a fatal steel brioche, hurled to earth in an olive grove, two hundred yards away. His two escort cars and two civilian vehicles were also blown away. Falcone died on his way to the hospital. Francesca died five hours later.

In the quick profusion of professions-of-grief, plans-of-action, promises-of-eternal-remembrance, there was a depressing familiarity. The ministry issued brave assurance that Falcone's work would go forward. Priests called for understanding that, of course, would not diminish our resolve. Political leaders weighed in with demands for an end to the system that would tolerate such tragedy. Italian officials had practiced this drill too many times—for police chiefs, carabiniere colonels, Judge Chinnici, General Dalla Chiesa . . . the awesome moral suasion of each death had faded, down to a phrase between commas in the paragraph about "illustrious corpses."

But three days after Falcone died, in a driving rain in Palermo, ten thousand people tried to push their way into the funeral mass for Falcone, Francesca, and their bodyguards. Politicians who came were hissed and spat upon. They had to sneak out a back door. In an electrifying display of grief, rage, and *Sicilianità*, the young widow of one bodyguard took the pulpit to demand that the Men of Honor get down on their knees before her, to beg forgiveness, to show they could change. She screamed to the crowd: "*But they never change!*" The citizens of Palermo, in the San Domenico Basilica, drowned out Mozart's *Requiem* with their cry: *Justice! Justice! Justice!*

THE CARABINIERE research team spent months getting settled into Palermo, learning the *quartieri* that were home to the Men of Honor . . . and picking out a few men to follow. That wasn't hard. You can always see the air of confidence on a mafioso.

So they studied each one—Whom did he meet? . . . Who was more important—he or the guy he met? . . . Who came over to whom to shake hands? . . . Who got up when that guy came to the table? . . .

The Special Operations Group, just two years old, was the sort of national strike force Falcone had been trying to create. They were pros, patient and careful. They studied the places the mafiosi went—that bar, that garage, that butcher shop (which never sold any meat). After months, they knew the places by heart—who lived there, who owned that . . . then they followed people from those places: Whom did they have to visit?

By the end of last year, they were bearing down. Carabiniere technicians mounted video cameras to survey that bar, this corner, that shop. . . . They had to work carefully. They'd install at night, with lookouts on nearby streets, in contact with radios. *(Stop. Here comes somebody—okay, go ahead.)* When they followed people, they'd break off early, so they'd never be "burned." If it happened, they were dead. Next day, they'd follow two minutes longer, one block farther, then they'd break off again. . . . They videotaped their hot spots twenty-four hours a day, then watched the tapes for patterns: It was behavior of submission they wanted to see.

Still, it could have gone on forever. No one knew what Riina looked like. The FBI computers in Washington had "aged" his last picture—that twenty-five-year-old snapshot from the grand piazza in Venice—but what if he'd had an operation? What if he'd left Palermo? What if he knew every move they'd made and was patiently watching them advance, block by block, into his trap? . . .

Then fortune descended, in the person of a Mafia "soldier" named DiMaggio—he got arrested and started to sing. Actually, it was more complicated: women trouble again. . . . Baldessarre DiMaggio was a mafioso in the town of San Giusepe Jato, part of the Giovanni Brusca clan, which owed allegiance to Riina and the *Corleonesi*. Doing well, DiMaggio was—a mechanic by trade, with a villa and a swimming pool—but then he fell in love with a girl from his town and left his wife and children. The wife went straight to the boss, Brusca, who called in DiMaggio and ordered him back to his family. DiMaggio refused. And so—for want of respect, as well as morals—Brusca banished him from Cosa Nostra. DiMaggio went to Riina to appeal his termination . . . and Riina refused him. That's when DiMaggio knew he was a dead man. Termination, to Riina, meant termination. So DiMaggio headed north and turned himself in to an officer he knew. After that, he was pointing out places and people for the cops.

And that's when Riina's luck changed: He ran into his own sort of female trouble. The carabinieri saw her, and they knew: It had to be Ninetta. Nobody knew what Totò looked like, but Ninetta Bagarella—she looked exactly the same. A little thicker, maybe, lines around the mouth, but she kept her hair black . . . same eyes . . . same expression.

From headquarters in Rome, Colonel Mario Mori gave the order to lock onto her. Watch her house, never let it go. They didn't have to wait long. The next morning, 8:30, the first car that drove in was a silver Citroën. A man came out of the house, got into the shotgun seat—a gray-haired short man.

The carabinieri were stunned. Is that him?

Got to be him.

Jesus! It's him!

They followed. Up the street, a second chase-car swung in behind. At the first light, the lead carabiniere car pulled up next to the Citroën; the Special Ops glanced over . . . he didn't look like their picture.

Who else could it be? . . .

Orders came straight from Mori: Take him—now.

The third light was the circle at the Motel Agip—always miserable traffic. The Citroën got stuck between a truck and a bus. The carabinieri jumped out and surrounded the car, covered every window with submachine guns.

They didn't ask, they told him: *You are Totò Riina. . . .*

They were yelling. *Riina! Out of the car!*

He protested, there must be some mistake. He presented an identity card in the name of Vincenzo Bellomo.

Out of the car!

They cuffed him, frisked him, told him he was under arrest. After twenty-five years, it was over in five minutes. He never even raised his voice. In their car, when they hit the siren and got out, he murmured, yes, he was Riina. Later, as he left their station house for jail, he turned to his captors and told them quietly: "Congratulations."

IN FRONT OF Falcone's apartment building in Palermo, there is a tree, a tall, curving ficus that rises alone, unlikely, from a patch of dirt between slabs of broken concrete. Without declaration, unbidden by any committee or official, Sicilians made this his shrine. Cut flowers and bouquets carpet the concrete, fresh batches every day. To the tree trunk are pinned pictures of Falcone, with what Sicilian women call his eyes of velvet, and a smile that fills his cheeks around his moustaches. And there are pictures of people he never knew. They put their likenesses on the tree with messages to him: "Falcone, we want to hope again." There are multipage ballads from Sicily's

poets, and two-line letters from school kids: "You didn't want children! I would have wanted you for a father." Every tree-inch is covered with greeting cards, rosaries, crosses, and pictures of saints, banners made on computer printers, paintings, drawings . . . and there is one placard, bold writing on poster board, nailed to the tree. It's dated January 16, 1993, the day after Riina's capture.

"Giovanni: Your tree has borne its first fruit."

Riina's new picture has become an Italian icon, too. There he is, in the carabiniere station, with a framed portrait of the martyred General Dalla Chiesa looking down upon him. Riina stands, head bowed, hands folded, like a peasant who's been called to the padrone's house to talk about next year's crop. The newspapers ran the photo day after day, with stories that trumpeted the triumph of the State:

MAFIA: THE END OF THE LINE?

Riina is on trial now, facing a series of murder charges that will occupy him and the judges for the rest of this century. He comes from his cell to the *aula-bunker* every day, and sits in his cage. He's a sawed-off, stocky figure, maybe five foot three. A new law prohibits courtroom TV cameras from showing a defendant's face, so when Riina breaks in on the proceedings, Italian viewers see only a digitized fuzz where his head should be, and two hands leaping and stabbing the air in indignation.

Riina says he knows nothing about Cosa Nostra. It's all an invention of newspapers and TV.

No one seems too upset about that. Italy is in a crisis of investigation already. One sixth of the Parliament is under suspicion of corruption—along with businessmen, bankers, party officials, bureaucrats . . . while the archetype of Christian Democrat power, the seven-time prime minister, Giulio Andreotti, is being investigated for links to the mob. In the ministry building in Palermo, they say if Riina talks now, the Mafia would crumble . . . but so would Italy.

For the moment, the State is safe.

Ninetta took the children back to Corleone, to the house of her sister, behind one of those blank walls. She'll be safe there; people will take care of her. But it's not just her safety. As Falcone said: "Everything is a message, everything is charged with meaning in the world of Cosa Nostra." Ninetta's presence in Corleone is Riina's guarantee: He will not tell the law anything.

Anyway, to whom would he talk? ■

[*continued from page 90*] exercise his option to buy Speer's twelve broadcast stations.

While FCC regulations still prevent Malone from owning cable and broadcast stations in the same market, insiders say he is planning to start a fifth network using QVC and Speer's broadcast stations, with Diller at the helm. A year from now, Diller could be based in New York, creating news and entertainment programming and looking to purchase part of Turner, NBC—as he attempted to do last summer—or a studio, like MGM.

"The issue is whether Malone needs to spend several billion dollars to buy a network [G.E.'s asking price for NBC had been between $3.5 and $4 billion] when he already has the TV stations and the most capable TV executive," says Frank Biondi, chairman of Viacom International. "He could make his own network, in effect, cheaper than he could buy it. And he already has every studio in Hollywood calling and asking to be a partner."

Brian Roberts, head of the Comcast Corporation, the fourth-largest cable company in the country, and Malone's partner in the QVC venture, makes no secret of what he, Malone, and Diller are up to. "Rupert Murdoch built a multimedia empire," says Roberts. "Barry is ready to do that."

Malone's top programming executive, Peter Barton of Liberty Media, is cagier. "If I told you, I'd have to shoot you afterward," he says, adding almost apologetically, "I don't ordinarily talk to reporters. It's not that I don't like them, but I'm kind of reclusive." It runs in the company.

At the very least, the merging of HSN and QVC, if it comes off, would give Malone a dominant position in the $2-billion-a-year television-merchandising industry, a programming niche that is headed for explosive growth in the next few years. "We're talking about an essentially debt-free company that has $2 billion in revenue in its embryonic stages," says Gordon Crawford of Capital Research, one of the largest investors in the media industry. "Anything is possible."

Sure, but given that most people over the age of twelve still can't operate their VCRs, it's not at all certain that this tech-