

ONE

September 1961. New York. Wall Street. *Center of the universe.* Bounding up from the subway, Alec Brno sails forth.

He's noticed and noticing, this gangly young man, his longish face questioning, his brown hair awry. Heading toward Water Street into the sun, he pauses at Broad. Rivers of boaters—white straw hats with bright silk bands—stream on currents of lawyers and brokers. And there are guys rushing, like Alec: hatless, eager. Guys thinking, *I'm ready!* Depression babies in their ill-fitting suits.

To the magazine columnists, they are “The Silent Generation,” which misses the point while unintentionally abetting it. Graduates of the Fifties aren't shouting slogans down the corridors of power. They're too busy quietly taking over what the Establishment has.

And Alec Brno is especially motivated. He's a poor kid from Queens with an unpronounceable last name—the Czechs, for obscure reasons, having disdained the need to make explicit indispensable vowel sounds. To those in power, a person with such a name coming from such a place has sizable obstacles to overcome—a fact of life of which Alec is well aware.

In point of fact, Alec's family is more Organized Labor than ethnic. Union Socialists, almost Communists, for whom Wall Street has particular abhorrence. These are people, Alec has always known, with big hearts, intolerance for injustice, and little understanding of economics. They would regard the firm employing him as the Mecca of depravity, and its presiding partner, former judge of the federal court of appeals Ben Braddock, as the socialist equivalent of the Antichrist. By their standards, those

assessments would be dead accurate. Kendall, Blake, Steele & Braddock is not simply the most-feared legal weapon wielded by American big business; in important respects, it runs the institutions it services.

Two years earlier, Alec had signed on with Kendall, Blake right out of law school. Then, the firm had been housed at 25 Broad Street—a squat pile of some twenty floors, deco in style, serviced by elevators that made a great deal of clanking noise and took forever to go in either direction. But new buildings continually arise in the city, and its successful inhabitants grow into them. Now, every morning, Alec speeds soundlessly to the heights of a sixty-story glass tower on Water Street. He has his own small office on the fifty-eighth floor with a spectacular view of almost the entirety of Manhattan.

Alec is drawn to that view as soon as he enters his office and stands admiring it for some minutes before settling down at his desk. The partner he works for, Frank Macalister, is in Miami, finishing a trial. It's the only Macalister case Alec isn't assigned to, which means he's expected to deal with the rest of Mac's caseload. It can be time-consuming, keeping everything from blowing up in his face, but it's a lot easier dealing with Mac's opponents and co-counsel than with Mac himself.

For the last several days, Alec has been covering for Mac, representing Biogram Pharmaceuticals in a five-defendant price-fixing trial, one of the few government actions brought under the state antitrust laws. Normally, Alec would be in court an hour beforehand to get everything ready for the first chair. As it is, he has to swing by the office first for Mac's letters and messages. He leafs through them, then moves the stack to a corner of his desk. None requires immediate attention. He's got the luxury of a few minutes to think about what the morning might bring about.

He leans back and visualizes the courtroom. He sees, facing the bench, a semicircle made up of six small tables. Behind each will sit the senior trial counsel for each party accompanied by one

or more junior partners, or in the case of the state attorney general's office, several less senior trial attorneys. Behind them will be their associates, and behind them, patent counsel, for there are charges in the case of monopolization by the fraudulent procurement of patents. And behind each of those tiers there will come and go the various experts, paralegals, and other support personnel for each team. At the table for Biogram, in splendid isolation, Alec Brno will reign: a second-year associate, first chair temporarily, at the first trial he's ever seen firsthand, much less participated in.

The witness for the day, and probably several more, will be J.J. Tierney, the chief executive of Pharmex Pharmaceuticals, holder of the principal patent. According to the government, it was Tierney who masterminded the price fix. The possibilities that Alec might cross-examine the case's pivotal witness in Mac's absence are slim to none. What Tierney will say on direct examination has been heavily negotiated and agreed upon. If Alec were to speak at all, it would most likely be to read the statement that Mac wrote out for him with a smirk: "No questions for this witness, your Honor." Alec hopes he can manage to get that out without embarrassing himself.

One of these days, he thinks, he'll head up a litigation team and be comfortable enough in court to command attention, not let it command him. At his present level of inexperience, however, his view of trial practice is still influenced by the movies.

He packs his black leather litigation ("lit") bag and makes for the elevators. The image in his head is of Raymond Burr's district attorney in *A Place in the Sun*, slamming his cane on the counsel table. Were such histrionics even conceivable in *State of New York vs. Pharmex Pharmaceuticals, et al.*? Emerging from the elevator, Alec laughs out loud, almost in the face of Judge Braddock, a long, gaunt, white-haired man in a black homburg, waiting to get on. Disapproval flickers in the judge's sharp gaze, with no sign he knows or cares who Alex is.

TWO

At a tower window of an oil storage facility in Bayonne, New Jersey, manager Whitman Poole stands riveted, watching. It is one thirty-seven in the morning.

Miles of marshland breathe in the night. Moonlight flares the tops of marsh reeds. In the yard, thirty-foot-high storage tanks row up like a mustering of UFOs.

Eventually, an oil truck appears, bumping along the potholed road to the facility. Front gates swing wide. The truck splashes through puddles and sidles up to a tank. Two men jump out. They attach a truck nozzle to the tank and open a tank valve. With each exertion, their breath fogs the air. They work fast, with an occasional glance over their shoulders.

Poole, a tanned, hair-combed-back dandy, observes intently. He looks jumpy, displeased that the men below aren't moving faster.

Poole's attention is diverted by a silver Cadillac Eldorado pulling into the compound. He remains fixed on the car as it stops near the tower. The driver springs forth to open the passenger door. Uncoiling from the seat is a tall, black-haired figure in a leather jacket, who, with indifference to his surroundings, carries a lighted cigar. As he looks up to Poole's window, the power and pathology of the man are evident on his broad, flat face.

Poole, anxious to please, jerks his thumb upward in a gesture of success. The tall man grimaces, flips the cigar away in a splash of embers, and gets back in his car. His driver scurries to stamp out the sparks.

"Where to, Phil?" the driver asks through the open back

window of the vehicle.

“I’m staying in town. Call a meeting for the morning—nine thirty.”

“Sure.” Still thinking, settling into the driver’s seat. “What’s up, boss?”

“Just call the meeting, Vito, all right?”

Vito blinks several times and cranes around. He’s a pear-shaped man with a large head, but with the sort of bulging muscularity that suggests serious devotion to a workout routine. He knows he’s slower than his boss in comprehending most anything, but he does like to have things explained.

“His face, Vito. I don’t like his face.”

“That’s it?” says Vito.

Phil’s frown shows the edge of his patience. “We’ve let it go too long. Everyone’s too fucking greedy. And smug. Okay?”

“Whatever you say, boss.”

“And another loose end.”

“How’s that?”

“Aaron Weinfeld,” says Phil.

“The lawyer?”

“He’s in Narragansett, Rhode Island. I’ll want you to go up there this weekend. The boat’s up there. The fifteen-footer. Or it’ll be out of Newport by the time you arrive. You can use the boat.”

“The boat,” repeats Vito.

“You know what I’m talking about, *use the boat?*”

“Like last time.”

“Exactly... like last time.”

“Why’s he in Rhode Island?”

Phil summons his patience. “He’s scared, Vito.”

“What’s he done?”

“I’ve seen the transcripts. He’s lost my trust. I think he knows.”

Vito heaves a sigh. “Okay.”

“Start the fucking car, will you?”