

# THE PIRANHAS

A NOVEL

NEW YORK

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TOKYO

SINGAPORE

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THE STORYTELLER  
DESCENT FROM XANADU  
SPELLBINDER  
GOODBYE, JANETTE  
MEMORIES OF ANOTHER DAY  
DREAMS DIE FIRST  
THE LONELY LADY  
THE PIRATE  
THE BETSY  
THE INHERITORS  
THE ADVENTURERS  
WHERE LOVE HAS GONE  
THE CARPETBAGGERS  
STILETTO  
79 PARK AVENUE  
NEVER LEAVE ME  
A STONE FOR DANNY FISHER  
THE DREAM MERCHANTS  
NEVER LOVE A STRANGER

FOR JANN,  
WITH ALL MY LOVE AND GRATITUDE





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# THE FUNERAL

IT WAS PISSING RAIN at eleven o'clock in the morning in front of St. Patrick's Cathedral. The police had blocked all traffic down Fifth Avenue from Fifty-fourth Street to Forty-ninth Street except buses, and they were only in a single line close to the sidewalk near Rockefeller Center across from the Cathedral. The street itself was crowded with blackened-window stretch limousines. The sidewalk and the steps leading up to the entrance of the Cathedral were jammed with television cameras, reporters, and the morbidly curious crowd that always managed to show up for death and destruction.

Inside the Cathedral all the pews were filled with black-dressed mourners, some very expensively dressed and others in threadbare black—but each looked down toward

the altar to the front of the ornate gold coffin with a simple wreath of flowers at the foot. There was an expectant air as they waited to hear the mass that would be given by Cardinal Fitzsimmons. They wanted to hear what he had to say, because he had always hated the dead man.

I was seated in the first seat off the aisle reserved only for relatives of the deceased. I glanced over at the open coffin. My uncle looked fit and relaxed. Better, actually, than he usually had in life. Even as a child I realized that he was taut and always thinking. But most of all, I could always see, peering over his left shoulder, the Angel of Death, who would disappear the moment my uncle would talk to me. There were five other members of the family in the pew with me. Among them were my Aunt Rosa, the sister of my uncle and my father, who had been his brother. Then there were Rosa's married daughters and their husbands. I had trouble remembering their names because over the many years we had rarely seen each other. I think their names were Cristina and Pietro, and Luciana and Thomas; the latter couple had two young children of their own.

Across the aisle, also in the front pew, were the important people and close friends of my uncle. My uncle had many friends. He had to have many friends because he died in bed of a massive cardiac seizure and not by a bullet as was the usual form of death for his compatriots. I looked across the aisle. I recognized some of the men, somber in black suits, white shirts, and black ties. Next to the aisles, Danny and Samuel were seated. They were young, maybe about my age, fortyish. They were my uncle's bodyguards. The man sitting next to them I recognized from his photographs in newspapers and magazines. He was very handsome, with silver-gray hair, and wearing