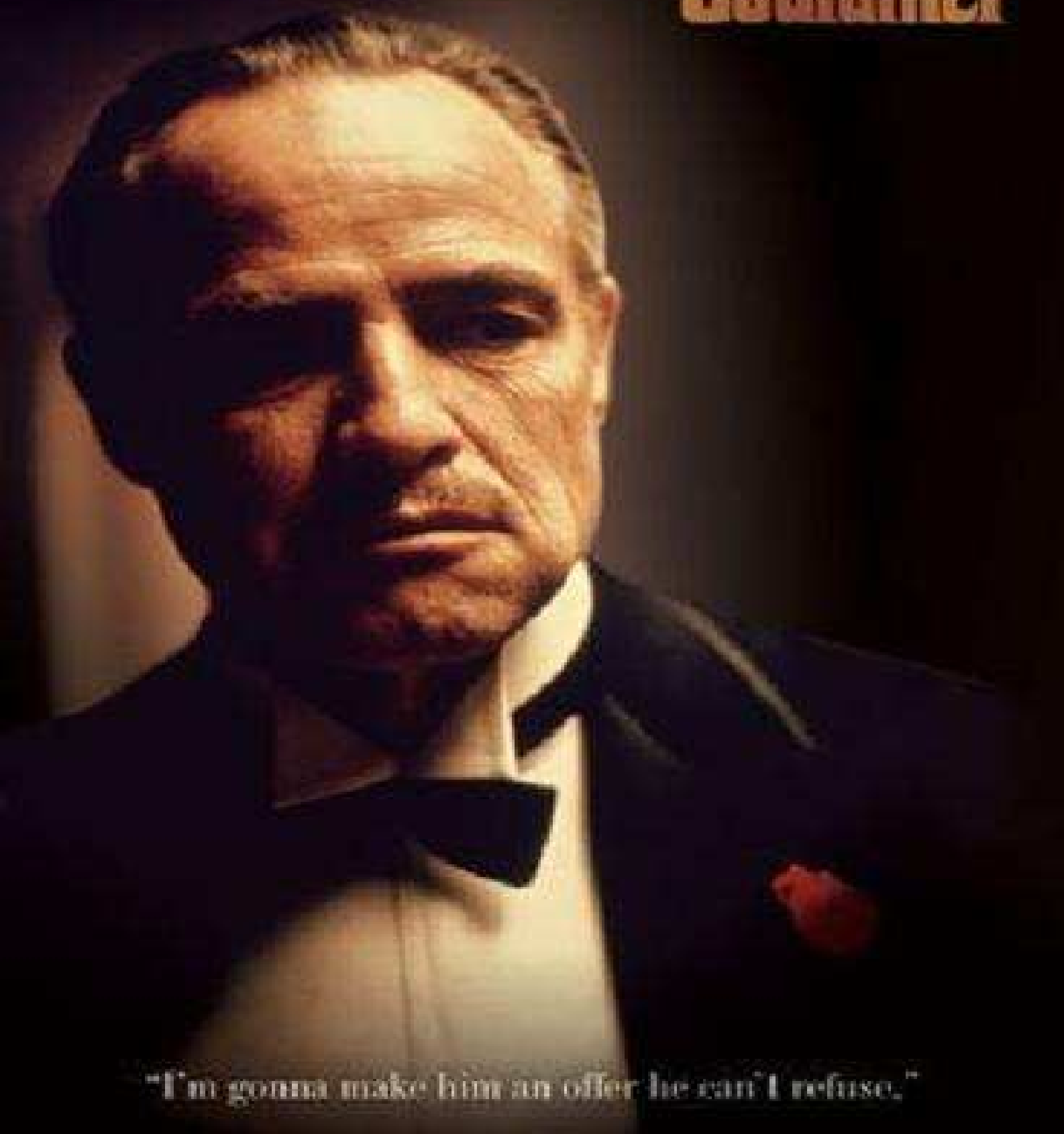


# The Godfather



"I'm gonna make him an offer he can't refuse."

# **THE GODFATHER**

“THE GODFATHER IS A STAGGERING TRIUMPH...THE DEFINITIVE NOVEL ABOUT A SINISTER FRATERNITY OF CRIME...”

*--Saturday Review*

“YOU CAN’T STOP READING IT, AND YOU’LL FIND IT HARD TO STOP DREAMING ABOUT IT!”

*--New York Magazine*

# **THE GODFATHER**

**Mario Puzo**

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*For Anthony Cleri*

### About the Author

Mario Puzo was born on Manhattan's West Side in a neighborhood known for decades as Hell's Kitchen. His first books, *The Fortunate Pilgrim* ("a minor classic" *NY Times*) and *Dark Arena*, brought him critical acclaim, but it was publication of *The Godfather* in March 1969, that catapulted him into the front ranks of American authors. Reviewers hailed the book as "a staggering triumph" (*Saturday Review*), "big, turbulent, highly entertaining" (*Newsweek*), "remarkable" (*Look*), "a voyeur's dream, a skillful fantasy of violent personal power" (*New York Times*). Winning readers by the millions, it stayed at or near the top of the *New York Times* best-seller lists for sixty-nine weeks. *Fools Die*, Mario Puzo's brilliant new novel about the feverish world of the big-time gambler, has been hailed as the publishing event of the decade.

## **BOOK I**

*Behind every great fortune there is a crime.*

--BALZAC

## Chapter 1

Amerigo Bonasera sat in New York Criminal Court Number 3 and waited for justice; vengeance on the men who had so cruelly hurt his daughter, who had tried to dishonor her.

The judge, a formidably heavy-featured man, rolled up the sleeves of his black robe as if to physically chastise the two young men standing before the bench. His face was cold with majestic contempt. But there was something false in all this that Amerigo Bonasera sensed but did not yet understand.

“You acted like the worst kind of degenerates,” the judge said harshly. Yes, yes, thought Amerigo Bonasera. Animals. Animals. The two young men, glossy hair crew cut, scrubbed clean-cut faces composed into humble contrition, bowed their heads in submission.

The judge went on. “You acted like wild beasts in a jungle and you are fortunate you did not sexually molest that poor girl or I’d put you behind bars for twenty years.” The judge paused, his eyes beneath impressively thick brows flickered slyly toward the sallow-faced Amerigo Bonasera, then lowered to a stack of probation reports before him. He frowned and shrugged as if convinced against his own natural desire. He spoke again.

“But because of your youth, your clean records, because of your fine families, and because the law in its majesty does not seek vengeance, I hereby sentence you to three years’ confinement to the penitentiary. Sentence to be suspended.”

Only forty years of professional mourning kept the overwhelming frustration and hatred from showing on Amerigo Bonasera’s face. His beautiful young daughter was still in the hospital with her broken jaw wired together; and now these two *animales* went free? It had all been a farce. He watched the happy parents cluster around their darling sons. Oh, they were all happy now, they were smiling now.

The black bile, sourly bitter, rose in Bonasera’s throat, overflowed through tightly clenched teeth. He used his white linen pocket handkerchief and held it against his lips. He was standing so when the two young men strode freely up the aisle, confident and cool-eyed, smiling, not giving him so much as a glance. He let them pass without saying a word, pressing the fresh linen against his mouth.

The parents of the *animales* were coming by now, two men and two women his age but

more American in their dress. They glanced at him, shamefaced, yet in their eyes was an odd, triumphant defiance.

Out of control, Bonasera leaned forward toward the aisle and shouted hoarsely, "You will weep as I have wept--I will make you weep as your children make me weep"--the linen at his eyes now. The defense attorneys bringing up the rear swept their clients forward in a tight little band, enveloping the two young men, who had started back down the aisle as if to protect their parents. A huge bailiff moved quickly to block the row in which Bonasera stood. But it was not necessary.

All his years in America, Amerigo Bonasera had trusted in law and order. And he had prospered thereby. Now, though his brain smoked with hatred, though wild visions of buying a gun and killing the two young men jangled the very bones of his skull, Bonasera turned to his still uncomprehending wife and explained to her, "They have made fools of us." He paused and then made his decision, no longer fearing the cost. "For justice we must go on our knees to Don Corleone."

In a garishly decorated Los Angeles hotel suite, Johnny Fontane was as jealously drunk as any ordinary husband. Sprawled on a red couch, he drank straight from the bottle of scotch in his hand, then washed the taste away by dunking his mouth in a crystal bucket of ice cubes and water. It was four in the morning and he was spinning drunken fantasies of murdering his trampy wife when she got home. If she ever did come home. It was too late to call his first wife and ask about the kids and he felt funny about calling any of his friends now that his career was plunging downhill. There had been a time when they would have been delighted, flattered by his calling them at four in the morning but now he bored them. He could even smile a little to himself as he thought that on the way up Johnny Fontane's troubles had fascinated some of the greatest female stars in America.

Gulping at his bottle of scotch, he heard finally his wife's key in the door, but he kept drinking until she walked into the room and stood before him. She was to him so very beautiful, the angelic face, soulful violet eyes, the delicately fragile but perfectly formed body. On the screen her beauty was magnified, spiritualized. A hundred million men all over the world were in love with the face of Margot Ashton. And paid to see it on the screen.

"Where the hell were you? Johnny Fontane asked.



“Out fucking,” she said.

She had misjudged his drunkenness. He sprang over the cocktail table and grabbed her by the throat. But close up to that magical face, the lovely violet eyes, he lost his anger and became helpless again. She made the mistake of smiling mockingly, saw his fist draw back. She screamed, “Johnny, not in the face, I’m making a picture.”

She was laughing. He punched her in the stomach and she fell to the floor. He fell on top of her. He could smell her fragrant breath as she gasped for air. He punched her on the arms and on the thigh muscles of her silky tanned legs. He beat her as he had beaten snotty smaller kids long ago when he had been a tough teenager in New York’s Hell’s Kitchen. A painful punishment that would leave no lasting disfigurement of loosened teeth or broken nose.

But he was not hitting her hard enough. He couldn’t. And she was giggling at him. Spread-eagled on the floor, her brocaded gown hitched up above her thighs, she taunted him between giggles. “Come on, stick it in. Stick it in, Johnny, that’s what you really want.”

Johnny Fontane got up. He hated the woman on the floor but her beauty was a magic shield. Margot rolled away, and in a dancer’s spring was on her feet facing him. She went into a childish mocking dance and chanted, “Johnny never hurt me, Johnny never hurt me.” Then almost sadly with grave beauty she said, “You poor silly bastard, giving me cramps like a kid. Ah, Johnny, you always will be a dumb romantic guinea, you even make love like a kid. You still think screwing is really like those dopey songs you used to sing.” She shook her head and said, “Poor Johnny. Goodbye, Johnny.” She walked into the bedroom and he heard her turn the key in the lock.

Johnny sat on the floor with his face in his hands. The sick, humiliating despair overwhelmed him. And then the gutter toughness that had helped him survive the jungle of Hollywood made him pick up the phone and call for a car to take him to the airport. There was one person who could save him. He would go back to New York. He would go back to the one man with the power, the wisdom he needed and a love he still trusted. His Godfather Corleone.

The baker, Nazorine, pudgy and crusty as his great Italian loaves, still dusty with flour, scowled at his wife, his nubile daughter, Katherine, and his baker’s helper, Enzo. Enzo had changed into his prisoner-of-war uniform with its green-lettered armband and was terrified that this scene would make him late reporting back to Governor’s Island. One of the many thousands

of Italian Army prisoners paroled daily to work in the American economy, he lived in constant fear of that parole being revoked. And so the little comedy being played now was, for him, a serious business.

Nazorine asked fiercely, "Have you dishonored my family? Have you given my daughter a little package to remember you by now that the war is over and you know America will kick your ass back to your village full of shit in Sicily?"

Enzo, a very short, strongly built boy, put his hand over his heart and said almost in tears, yet cleverly, "*Padrone*, I swear by the Holy Virgin I have never taken advantage of your kindness. I love your daughter with all respect. I ask for her hand with all respect. I know I have no right, but if they send me back to Italy I can never come back to America. I will never be able to marry Katherine."

Nazorine's wife, Filomena, spoke to the point. "Stop all this foolishness," she said to her pudgy husband. "You know what you must do. Keep Enzo here, send him to hide with our cousins in Long Island."

Katherine was weeping. She was already plump, homely and sprouting a faint moustache. She would never get a husband as handsome as Enzo, never find another man who touched her body in secret places with such respectful love. "I'll go and live in Italy," she screamed at her father. "I'll run away if you don't keep Enzo here."

Nazorine glanced at her shrewdly. She was a "hot number" this daughter of his. He had seen her brush her swelling buttocks against Enzo's front when the baker's helper squeezed behind her to fill the counter baskets with hot loaves from the oven. The young rascal's hot loaf would be in *her* oven, Nazorine thought lewdly, if proper steps were not taken. Enzo must be kept in America and be made an American citizen. And there was only one man who could arrange such an affair. The Godfather. Don Corleone.

All of these people and many others received engraved invitations to the wedding of Miss Constanzia Corleone, to be celebrated on the last Saturday in August 1945. The father of the bride, Don Vito Corleone, never forgot his old friends and neighbors though he himself now lived in a huge house on Long Island. The reception would be held in that house and the festivities would go on all day. There was no doubt it would be a momentous occasion. The war with the Japanese had just ended so there would not be any nagging fear for their sons fighting in

the Army to cloud these festivities. A wedding was just what people needed to show their joy.

And so on that Saturday morning the friends of Don Corleone streamed out of New York City to do him honor. They bore cream-colored envelopes stuffed with cash as bridal gifts, no checks. Inside each envelope a card established the identity of the giver and the measure of his respect for the Godfather. A respect truly earned.

Don Vito Corleone was a man to whom everybody came for help, and never were they disappointed. He made no empty promises, nor the craven excuse that his hands were tied by more powerful forces in the world than himself. It was not necessary that he be your friend, it was not even important that you had no means with which to repay him. Only one thing was required. That you, *you yourself*, proclaim your friendship. And then, no matter how poor or powerless the supplicant, Don Corleone would take that man's troubles to his heart. And he would let nothing stand in the way to a solution of that man's woe. His reward? Friendship, the respectful title of "Don," and sometimes the more affectionate salutation of "Godfather." And perhaps, to show respect only, never for profit, some humble gift--a gallon of homemade wine or a basket of peppered *taralles* specially baked to grace his Christmas table. It was understood, it was mere good manners, to proclaim that you were in his debt and that he had the right to call upon you at any time to redeem your debt by some small service.

Now on this great day, his daughter's wedding day, Don Vito Corleone stood in the doorway of his Long Beach home to greet his guests, all of them known, all of them trusted. Many of them owed their good fortune in life to the Don and on this intimate occasion felt free to call him "Godfather" to his face. Even the people performing festal services were his friends. The bartender was an old comrade whose gift was all the wedding liquors and his own expert skills. The waiters were the friends of Don Corleone's sons. The food on the garden picnic tables had been cooked by the Don's wife and her friends and the gaily festooned one-acre garden itself had been decorated by the young girl-chums of the bride.

Don Corleone received everyone--rich and poor, powerful and humble--with an equal show of love. He slighted no one. That was his character. And the guests so exclaimed at how well he looked in his tux that an inexperienced observer might easily have thought the Don himself was the lucky groom.

Standing at the door with him were two of his three sons. The eldest, baptized Santino but called Sonny by everyone except his father, was looked at askance by the older Italian men; with

admiration by the younger. Sonny Corleone was tall for a first-generation American of Italian parentage, almost six feet, and his crop of bushy, curly hair made him look even taller. His face was that of a gross Cupid, the features even but the bow-shaped lips thickly sensual, the dimpled cleft chin in some curious way obscene. He was built as powerfully as a bull and it was common knowledge that he was so generously endowed by nature that his martyred wife feared the marriage bed as unbelievers once feared the rack. It was whispered that when as a youth he had visited houses of ill fame, even the most hardened and fearless *putain*, after an awed inspection of his massive organ, demanded double price.

Here at the wedding feast, some young matrons, wide-hipped, wide-mouthed, measured Sonny Corleone with coolly confident eyes. But on this particular day they were wasting their time. Sonny Corleone, despite the presence of his wife and three small children, had plans for his sister's maid of honor, Lucy Mancini. This young girl, fully aware, sat at a garden table in her pink formal gown, a tiara of flowers in her glossy black hair. She had flirted with Sonny in the past week of rehearsals and squeezed his hand that morning at the altar. A maiden could do no more.

She did not care that he would never be the great man his father had proved to be. Sonny Corleone had strength, he had courage. He was generous and his heart was admitted to be as big as his organ. Yet he did not have his father's humility but instead a quick, hot temper that led him into errors of judgment. Though he was a great help in his father's business, there were many who doubted that he would become the heir to it.

The second son, Frederico, called Fred or Fredo, was a child every Italian prayed to the saints for. Dutiful, loyal, always at the service of his father, living with his parents at age thirty. He was short and burly, not handsome but with the same Cupid head of the family, the curly helmet of hair over the round face and sensual bow-shaped lips. Only, in Fred, these lips were not sensual but granite-like. Inclined to dourness, he was still a crutch to his father, never disputed him, never embarrassed him by scandalous behavior with women. Despite all these virtues he did not have that personal magnetism, that animal force, so necessary for a leader of men, and he too was not expected to inherit the family business.

The third son, Michael Corleone, did not stand with his father and his two brothers but sat at a table in the most secluded corner of the garden. But even there he could not escape the attentions of the family friends.

Michael Corleone was the youngest son of the Don and the only child who had refused the great man's direction. He did not have the heavy, Cupid-shaped face of the other children, and his jet black hair was straight rather than curly. His skin was a clear olive-brown that would have been called beautiful in a girl. He was handsome in a delicate way. Indeed there had been a time when the Don had worried about his youngest son's masculinity. A worry that was put to rest when Michael Corleone became seventeen years old.

Now this youngest son sat at a table in the extreme corner of the garden to proclaim his chosen alienation from father and family. Beside him sat the American girl everyone had heard about but whom no one had seen until this day. He had, of course, shown the proper respect and introduced her to everyone at the wedding, including his family. They were not impressed with her. She was too thin, she was too fair, her face was too sharply intelligent for a woman, her manner too free for a maiden. Her name, too, was outlandish to their ears; she called herself Kay Adams. If she had told them that her family had settled in America two hundred years ago and her name was a common one, they would have shrugged.

Every guest noticed that the Don paid no particular attention to this third son. Michael had been his favorite before the war and obviously the chosen heir to run the family business when the proper moment came. He had all the quiet force and intelligence of his great father, the born instinct to act in such a way that men had no recourse but to respect him. But when World War II broke out, Michael Corleone volunteered for the Marine Corps. He defied his father's express command when he did so.

Don Corleone had no desire, no intention, of letting his youngest son be killed in the service of a power foreign to himself. Doctors had been bribed, secret arrangements had been made. A great deal of money had been spent to take the proper precautions. But Michael was twenty-one years of age and nothing could be done against his own willfulness. He enlisted and fought over the Pacific Ocean. He became a Captain and won medals. In 1944 his picture was printed in *Life* magazine with a photo layout of his deeds. A friend had shown Don Corleone the magazine (his family did not dare), and the Don had grunted disdainfully and said, "He performs those miracles for strangers."

When Michael Corleone was discharged early in 1945 to recover from a disabling wound, he had no idea that his father had arranged his release. He stayed home for a few weeks, then, without consulting anyone, entered Dartmouth College in Hanover, New Hampshire, and so he

left his father's house. To return for the wedding of his sister and to show his own future wife to them, the washed-out rag of an American girl.

Michael Corleone was amusing Kay Adams by telling her little stories about some of the more colorful wedding guests. He was, in turn, amused by her finding these people exotic, and, as always, charmed by her intense interest in anything new and foreign to her experience. Finally her attention was caught by a small group of men gathered around a wooden barrel of homemade wine. The men were Amerigo Bonasera, Nazorine the Baker, Anthony Coppola and Luca Brasi. With her usual alert intelligence she remarked on the fact that these four men did not seem particularly happy. Michael smiled. "No, they're not," he said. "They're waiting to see my father in private. They have favors to ask." And indeed it was easy to see that all four men constantly followed the Don with their eyes.

As Don Corleone stood greeting guests, a black Chevrolet sedan came to a stop on the far side of the paved mall. Two men in the front seat pulled notebooks from their jackets and, with no attempt at concealment, jotted down license numbers of the other cars parked around the mall. Sonny turned to his father and said, "Those guys over there must be cops."

Don Corleone shrugged. "I don't own the street. They can do what they please."

Sonny's heavy Cupid face grew red with anger. "Those lousy bastards, they don't respect anything." He left the steps of the house and walked across the mall to where the black sedan was parked. He thrust his face angrily close to the face of the driver, who did not flinch but flapped open his wallet to show a green identification card. Sonny stepped back without saying a word. He spat so that the spittle hit the back door of the sedan and walked away. He was hoping the driver would get out of the sedan and come after him, on the mall, but nothing happened. When he reached the steps he said to his father, "Those guys are FBI men. They're taking down all the license numbers. Snotty bastards."

Don Corleone knew who they were. His closest and most intimate friends had been advised to attend the wedding in automobiles not their own. And though he disapproved of his son's foolish display of anger, the tantrum served a purpose. It would convince the interlopers that their presence was unexpected and unprepared for. So Don Corleone himself was not angry. He had long ago learned that society imposes insults that must be borne, comforted by the knowledge that in this world there comes a time when the most humble of men, if he keeps his eyes open, can take his revenge on the most powerful. It was this knowledge that prevented the

Don from losing the humility all his friends admired in him.

But now in the garden behind the house, a four-piece band began to play. All the guests had arrived. Don Corleone put the intruders out of his mind and led his two sons to the wedding feast.

There were, now, hundreds of guests in the huge garden, some dancing on the wooden platform bedecked with flowers, others sitting at long tables piled high with spicy food and gallon jugs of black, homemade wine. The bride, Connie Corleone, sat in splendor at a special raised table with her groom, the maid of honor, bridesmaids and ushers. It was a rustic setting in the old Italian style. Not to the bride's taste, but Connie had consented to a "guinea" wedding to please her father because she had so displeased him in her choice of a husband.

The groom, Carlo Rizzi, was a half-breed, born of a Sicilian father and the North Italian mother from whom he had inherited his blond hair and blue eyes. His parents lived in Nevada and Carlo had left that state because of a little trouble with the law. In New York he met Sonny Corleone and so met the sister. Don Corleone, of course, sent trusted friends to Nevada and they reported that Carlo's police trouble was a youthful indiscretion with a gun, not serious, that could easily be wiped off the books to leave the youth with a clean record. They also came back with detailed information on legal gambling in Nevada which greatly interested the Don and which he had been pondering over since. It was part of the Don's greatness that he profited from everything.

Connie Corleone was a not quite pretty girl, thin and nervous and certain to become shrewish later in life. But today, transformed by her white bridal gown and eager virginity, she was so radiant as to be almost beautiful. Beneath the wooden table her hand rested on the muscular thigh of her groom. Her Cupid-bow mouth pouted to give him an airy kiss.

She thought him incredibly handsome. Carlo Rizzi had worked in the open desert air while very young--heavy laborer's work. Now he had tremendous forearms and his shoulders bulged the jacket of his tux. He basked in the adoring eyes of his bride and filled her glass with wine. He was elaborately courteous to her as if they were both actors in a play. But his eyes kept flickering toward the huge silk purse the bride wore on her right shoulder and which was now stuffed full of money envelopes. How much did it hold? Ten thousand? Twenty thousand? Carlo Rizzi smiled. It was only the beginning. He had, after all, married into a royal family. They

would have to take care of him.

In the crowd of guests a dapper young man with the sleek head of a ferret was also studying the silk purse. From sheer habit Paulie Gatto wondered just how he could go about hijacking that fat pocketbook. The idea amused him. But he knew it was idle, innocent dreaming as small children dream of knocking out tanks with popguns. He watched his boss, fat, middle-aged Peter Clemenza whirling young girls around the wooden dance floor in a rustic and lusty *Tarantella*. Clemenza, immensely tall, immensely huge, danced with such skill and abandon, his hard belly lecherously bumping the breasts of younger, tinier women, that all the guests were applauding him. Older women grabbed his arm to become his next partner. The younger men respectfully cleared off the floor and clapped their hands in time to the mandolin's wild strumming. When Clemenza finally collapsed in a chair, Paulie Gatto brought him a glass of icy black wine and wiped the perspiring Jove-like brow with his silk handkerchief. Clemenza was blowing like a whale as he gulped down the wine. But instead of thanking Paulie he said curtly, "Never mind being a dance judge, do your job. Take a walk around the neighborhood and see everything is OK." Paulie slid away into the crowd.

The band took a refreshment break. A young man named Nino Valenti picked up a discarded mandolin, put his left foot up on a chair and began to sing a coarse Sicilian love song. Nino Valenti's face was handsome though bloated by continual drinking and he was already a little drunk. He rolled his eyes as his tongue caressed the obscene lyrics. The women shrieked with glee and the men shouted the last word of each stanza with the singer.

Don Corleone, notoriously straitlaced in such matters, though his stout wife was screaming joyfully with the others, disappeared tactfully into the house. Seeing this, Sonny Corleone made his way to the bride's table and sat down beside young Lucy Mancini, the maid of honor. They were safe. His wife was in the kitchen putting the last touches on the serving of the wedding cake. Sonny whispered a few words in the young girl's ear and she rose. Sonny waited a few minutes and then casually followed her, stopping to talk with a guest here and there as he worked his way through the crowd.

All eyes followed them. The maid of honor, thoroughly Americanized by three years of college, was a ripe girl who already had a "reputation." All through the marriage rehearsals she had flirted with Sonny Corleone in a teasing, joking way she thought was permitted because he was the best man and her wedding partner. Now holding her pink gown up off the ground, Lucy



Mancini went into the house, smiling with false innocence, ran lightly up the stairs to the bathroom. She stayed there for a few moments. When she came out Sonny Corleone was on the landing above, beckoning her upward.

From behind the closed window of Don Corleone's "office," a slightly raised corner room, Thomas Hagen watched the wedding party in the festooned garden. The walls behind him were stacked with law books. Hagen was the Don's lawyer and acting *Consigliere*, or counselor, and as such held the most vital subordinate position in the family business. He and the Don had solved many a knotty problem in this room, and so when he saw the Godfather leave the festivities and enter the house, he knew, wedding or no, there would be a little work this day. The Don would be coming to see him. Then Hagen saw Sonny Corleone whisper in Lucy Mancini's ear and their little comedy as he followed her into the house. Hagen grimaced, debated whether to inform the Don, and decided against it. He went to the desk and picked up a handwritten list of the people who had been granted permission to see Don Corleone privately. When the Don entered the room, Hagen handed him the list. Don Corleone nodded and said, "Leave Bonasera to the end."

Hagen used the French doors and went directly out into the garden to where the supplicants clustered around the barrel of wine. He pointed to the baker, the pudgy Nazorine.

Don Corleone greeted the baker with an embrace. They had played together as children in Italy and had grown up in friendship. Every Easter freshly baked clotted-cheese and wheat-germ pies, their crusts yolk-gold, big around as truck wheels, arrived at Don Corleone's home. On Christmas, on family birthdays, rich creamy pastries proclaimed the Nazorines' respect. And all through the years, lean and fat, Nazorine cheerfully paid his dues to the bakery union organized by the Don in his salad days. Never asking for a favor in return except for the chance to buy black-market OPA sugar coupons during the war. Now the time had come for the baker to claim his rights as a loyal friend, and Don Corleone looked forward with great pleasure to granting his request.

He gave the baker a Di Nobili cigar and a glass of yellow Strega and put his hand on the man's shoulder to urge him on. That was the mark of the Don's humanity. He knew from bitter experience what courage it took to ask a favor from a fellow man.

The baker told the story of his daughter and Enzo. A fine Italian lad from Sicily; captured by the American Army; sent to the United States as a prisoner of war; given parole to help our

war effort! A pure and honorable love had sprung up between honest Enzo and his sheltered Katherine but now that the war was ended the poor lad would be repatriated to Italy and Nazorine's daughter would surely die of a broken heart. Only Godfather Corleone could help this afflicted couple. He was their last hope.

The Don walked Nazorine up and down the room, his hand on the baker's shoulder, his head nodding with understanding to keep up the man's courage. When the baker had finished, Don Corleone smiled at him and said, "My dear friend, put all your worries aside." He went on to explain very carefully what must be done. The Congressman of the district must be petitioned. The Congressman would propose a special bill that would allow Enzo to become a citizen. The bill would surely pass Congress. A privilege all those rascals extended to each other. Don Corleone explained that this would cost money, the going price was now two thousand dollars. He, Don Corleone, would guarantee performance and accept payment. Did his friend agree?

The baker nodded his head vigorously. He did not expect such a great favor for nothing. That was understood. A special Act of Congress does not come cheap. Nazorine was almost tearful in his thanks. Don Corleone walked him to the door, assuring him that competent people would be sent to the bakery to arrange all details, complete all necessary documents. The baker embraced him before disappearing into the garden.

Hagen smiled at the Don. "That's a good investment for Nazorine. A son-in-law and a cheap lifetime helper in his bakery all for two thousand dollars." He paused. "Who do I give this job to?"

Don Corleone frowned in thought. "Not to our *paisan*. Give it to the Jew in the next district. Have the home addresses changed. I think there might be many such cases now the war is over; we should have extra people in Washington that can handle the overflow and not raise the price." Hagen made a note on his pad. "Not Congressman Luteco. Try Fischer."

The next man Hagen brought in was a very simple case. His name was Anthony Coppola and he was the son of a man Don Corleone had worked with in the railroad yards in his youth. Coppola needed five hundred dollars to open a pizzeria; for a deposit on fixtures and the special oven. For reasons not gone into, credit was not available. The Don reached into his pocket and took out a roll of bills. It was not quite enough. He grimaced and said to Tom Hagen, "Loan me a hundred dollars, I'll pay you back Monday when I go to the bank." The suppliant protested that four hundred dollars would be ample, but Don Corleone patted his shoulder, saying,

apologetically, "This fancy wedding left me a little short of cash." He took the money Hagen extended to him and gave it to Anthony Coppola with his own roll of bills.

Hagen watched with quiet admiration. The Don always taught that when a man was generous, he must show the generosity as personal. How flattering to Anthony Coppola that a man like the Don would borrow to loan *him* money. Not that Coppola did not know that the Don was a millionaire but how many millionaires let themselves be put to even a small inconvenience by a poor friend?

The Don raised his head inquiringly. Hagen said, "He's not on the list but Luca Brasi wants to see you. He understands it can't be public but he wants to congratulate you in person."

For the first time the Don seemed displeased. The answer was devious. "Is it necessary?" he asked.

Hagen shrugged. "You understand him better than I do. But he was very grateful that you invited him to the wedding. He never expected that. I think he wants to show his gratitude."

Don Corleone nodded and gestured that Luca Brasi should be brought to him.

In the garden Kay Adams was struck by the violet fury imprinted on the face of Luca Brasi. She asked about him. Michael had brought Kay to the wedding so that she would slowly and perhaps without too much of a shock, absorb the truth about his father. But so far she seemed to regard the Don as a slightly unethical businessman. Michael decided to tell her part of the truth indirectly. He explained that Luca Brasi was one of the most feared men in the Eastern underworld. His great talent, it was said, was that he could do a job of murder all by himself, without confederates, which automatically made discovery and conviction by the law almost impossible. Michael grimaced and said, "I don't know whether all that stuff is true. I do know he is sort of a friend to my father."

For the first time Kay began to understand. She asked a little incredulously, "You're not hinting that a man like that works for your father?"

The hell with it, he thought. He said, straight out, "Nearly fifteen years ago some people wanted to take over my father's oil importing business. They tried to kill him and nearly did. Luca Brasi went after them. The story is that he killed six men in two weeks and that ended the famous olive oil war." He smiled as if it were a joke.

Kay shuddered. "You mean your father was shot by gangsters?"

"Fifteen years ago," Michael said. "Everything's been peaceful since then." He was

afraid he had gone too far.

“You’re trying to scare me,” Kay said. “You just don’t want me to marry you.” She smiled at him and poked his ribs with her elbow. “Very clever.”

Michael smiled back at her. “I want you to think about it,” he said.

“Did he really kill six men?” Kay asked.

“That’s what the newspapers claimed,” Mike said. “Nobody ever proved it. But there’s another story about him that nobody ever tells. It’s supposed to be so terrible that even my father won’t talk about it. Tom Hagen knows the story and he won’t tell me. Once I kidded him, I said, ‘When will I be old enough to hear that story about Luca?’ and Tom said, ‘When you’re a hundred.’” Michael sipped his glass of wine...That must be some story. That must be some Luca.”

Luca Brasi was indeed a man to frighten the devil in hell himself. Short, squat, massive-skulled, his presence sent out alarm bells of danger. His face was stamped into a mask of fury. The eyes were brown but with none of the warmth of that color, more a deadly tan. The mouth was not so much cruel as lifeless; thin, rubbery and the color of veal.

Brasi’s reputation for violence was awesome and his devotion to Don Corleone legendary. He was, in himself, one of the great blocks that supported the Don’s power structure. His kind was a rarity.

Luca Brasi did not fear the police, he did not fear society, he did not fear God, he did not fear hell, he did not fear or love his fellow man. But he had elected, he had *chosen*, to fear and love Don Corleone. Ushered into the presence of the Don, the terrible Brasi held himself stiff with respect. He stuttered over the flowery congratulations he offered and his formal hope that the first grandchild would be masculine. He then handed the Don an envelope stuffed with cash as a gift for the bridal couple.

So that was what he wanted to do. Hagen noticed the change in Don Corleone. The Don received Brasi as a king greets a subject who has done him an enormous service, never familiar but with regal respect. With every gesture, with every word, Don Corleone made it clear to Luca Brasi that he was *valued*. Not for one moment did he show surprise at the wedding gift being presented to him personally. He understood.

The money in the envelope was sure to be more than anyone else had given. Brasi had spent many hours deciding on the sum, comparing it to what the other guests might offer. He

wanted to be the most generous to show that he had the most respect, and that was why he had given his envelope to the Don personally, a gaucherie the Don overlooked in his own flowery sentence of thanks. Hagen saw Luca Brasi's face lose its mask of fury, swell with pride and pleasure. Brasi kissed the Don's hand before he went out the door that Hagen held open. Hagen prudently gave Brasi a friendly smile which the squat man acknowledged with a polite stretching of rubbery, veal-colored lips.

When the door closed Don Corleone gave a small sigh of relief. Brasi was the only man in the world who could make him nervous. The man was like a natural force, not truly subject to control. He had to be handled as gingerly as dynamite. The Don shrugged. Even dynamite could be exploded harmlessly if the need arose. He looked questioningly at Hagen. "Is Bonasera the only one left?"

Hagen nodded. Don Corleone frowned in thought, then said, "Before you bring him in, tell Santino to come here. He should learn some things."

Out in the garden, Hagen searched anxiously for Sonny Corleone. He told the waiting Bonasera to be patient and went over to Michael Corleone and his girl friend. "Did you see Sonny around?" he asked. Michael shook his head. Damn, Hagen thought, if Sonny was screwing the maid of honor all this time there was going to be a mess of trouble. His wife, the young girl's family; it could be a disaster. Anxiously he hurried to the entrance through which he had seen Sonny disappear almost a half hour ago.

Seeing Hagen go into the house, Kay Adams asked Michael Corleone, "Who is he? You introduced him as your brother but his name is different and he certainly doesn't look Italian."

"Tom lived with us since he was twelve years old," Michael said. "His parents died and he was roaming around the streets with this bad eye infection. Sonny brought him home one night and he just stayed. He didn't have anyplace to go. He lived with us until he got married."

Kay Adams was thrilled. "That's really romantic," she said. "Your father must be a warmhearted person. To adopt somebody just like that when he had so many children of his own."

Michael didn't bother to point out that immigrant Italians considered four children a small family. He merely said, "Tom wasn't adopted. He just lived with us."

"Oh," Kay said, then asked curiously, "why didn't you adopt him?"

Michael laughed. "Because my father said it would be disrespectful for Tom to change

his name. Disrespectful to his own parents.”

They saw Hagen shoo Sonny through the French door into the Don’s office and then crook a finger at Amerigo Bonasera. “Why do they bother your father with business on a day like this?” Kay asked.

Michael laughed again. “Because they know that by tradition no Sicilian can refuse a request on his daughter’s wedding day. And no Sicilian ever lets a chance like that go by.”

Lucy Mancini lifted her pink gown off the floor and ran up the steps. Sonny Corleone’s heavy Cupid face, redly obscene with winey lust, frightened her, but she had teased him for the past week to just this end. In her two college love affairs she had felt nothing and neither of them lasted more than a week. Quarreling, her second lover had mumbled something about her being “too big down there.” Lucy had understood and for the rest of the school term had refused to go out on any dates.

During the summer, preparing for the wedding of her best friend, Connie Corleone, Lucy heard the whispered stories about Sonny. One Sunday afternoon in the Corleone kitchen, Sonny’s wife Sandra gossiped freely. Sandra was a coarse, good-natured woman who had been born in Italy but brought to America as a small child. She was strongly built with great breasts and had already borne three children in five years of marriage. Sandra and the other women teased Connie about the terrors of the nuptial bed. “My God,” Sandra had giggled, “when I saw that pole of Sonny’s for the first time and realized he was going to stick it into *me*, I yelled bloody murder. After the first year my insides felt as mushy as macaroni boiled for an hour. When I heard he was doing the job on other girls I went to church and lit a candle.”

They had all laughed but Lucy had felt her flesh twitching between her legs.

Now as she ran up the steps toward Sonny a tremendous flash of desire went through her body. On the landing Sonny grabbed her hand and pulled her down the hall into an empty bedroom. Her legs went weak as the door closed behind them. She felt Sonny’s mouth on hers, his lips tasting of burnt tobacco, bitter. She opened her mouth. At that moment she felt his hand come up beneath her bridesmaid’s gown, heard the rustle of material giving way, felt his large warm hand between her legs, ripping aside the satin panties to caress her vulva. She put her arms around his neck and hung there as he opened his trousers. Then he placed both hands beneath her bare buttocks and lifted her. She gave a little hop in the air so that both her legs were wrapped

around his upper thighs. His tongue was in her mouth and she sucked on it. He gave a savage thrust that banged her head against the door. She felt something bumming pass between her thighs. She let her right hand drop from his neck and reached down to guide him. Her hand closed around an enormous, blood-gorged pole of muscle. It pulsed in her hand like an animal and almost weeping with grateful ecstasy she pointed it into her own wet, turgid flesh. The thrust of its entering, the unbelievable pleasure made her gasp, brought her legs up almost around his neck, and then like a quiver, her body received the savage arrows of his lightning-like thrusts; innumerable, torturing; arching her pelvis higher and higher until for the first time in her life, she reached a shattering climax, felt his hardness break and then the crawly flood of semen over her thighs. Slowly her legs relaxed from around his body, slid down until they reached the floor. They leaned against each other, out of breath.

It might have been going on for some time but now they could hear the soft knocking on the door. Sonny quickly buttoned his trousers, meanwhile blocking the door so that it could not be opened. Lucy frantically smoothed down her pink gown, her eyes flickering, but the thing that had given her so much pleasure was hidden inside sober black cloth. Then they heard Tom Hagen's voice, very low, "Sonny, you in there?"

Sonny sighed with relief. He winked at Lucy. "Yeah, Tom, what is it?"

Hagen's voice, still low, said, "The Don wants you in his office. Now." They could hear his footsteps as he walked away. Sonny waited for a few moments, gave Lucy a hard kiss on the lips, and then slipped out the door after Hagen.

Lucy combed her hair. She checked her dress and pulled around her garter straps. Her body felt bruised, her lips pulpy and tender. She went out the door and though she felt the sticky wetness between her thighs she did not go to the bathroom to wash but ran straight on down the steps and into the garden. She took her seat at the bridal table next to Connie, who exclaimed petulantly, "Lucy, where were you? You look drunk. Stay beside me now."

The blond groom poured Lucy a glass of wine and smiled knowingly. Lucy didn't care. She lifted the grapey, dark red juice to her parched mouth and drank. She felt the sticky wetness between her thighs and pressed her legs together. Her body was trembling. Over the glass rim, as she drank, her eyes searched hungrily to find Sonny Corleone. There was no one else she cared to see. Slyly she whispered in Connie's ear, "Only a few hours more and you'll know what it's all about." Connie giggled. Lucy demurely folded her hands on the table, treacherously

triumphant, as if she had stolen a treasure from the bride.

Amerigo Bonasera followed Hagen into the corner room of the house and found Don Corleone sitting behind a huge desk. Sonny Corleone was standing by the window, looking out into the garden. For the first time that afternoon the Don behaved coolly. He did not embrace the visitor or shake hands. The sallow-faced undertaker owed his invitation to the fact that his wife and the wife of the Don were the closest of friends. Amerigo Bonasera himself was in severe disfavor with Don Corleone.

Bonasera began his request obliquely and cleverly. "You must excuse my daughter, your wife's goddaughter, for not doing your family the respect of coming today. She is in the hospital still." He glanced at Sonny Corleone and Tom Hagen to indicate that he did not wish to speak before them. But the Don was merciless.

"We all know of your daughter's misfortune," Don Corleone said. "If I can help her in any way, you have only to speak. My wife is her godmother after all. I have never forgotten that honor." This was a rebuke. The undertaker never called Don Corleone "Godfather" as custom dictated.

Bonasera, ashen-faced, asked, directly now, "May I speak to you alone?"

Don Corleone shook his head. "I trust these two men with my life. They are my two right arms. I cannot insult them by sending them away."

The undertaker closed his eyes for a moment and then began to speak. His voice was quiet, the voice he used to console the bereaved. "I raised my daughter in the American fashion. I believe in America. America has made my fortune. I gave my daughter her freedom and yet taught her never to dishonor her family. She found a 'boy friend,' not an Italian. She went to the movies with him. She stayed out late. But he never came to meet her parents. I accepted all this without a protest, the fault is mine. Two months ago he took her for a drive. He had a masculine friend with him. They made her drink whiskey and then they tried to take advantage of her. She resisted. She kept her honor. They beat her. Like an animal. When I went to the hospital she had two black eyes. Her nose was broken. Her jaw was shattered. They had to wire it together. She wept through her pain. 'Father, Father, why did they do it? Why did they do this to me?' And I wept." Bonasera could not speak further, he was weeping now though his voice had not betrayed his emotion.



Don Corleone, as if against his will, made a gesture of sympathy and Bonasera went on, his voice human with suffering. "Why did I weep? She was the light of my life, an affectionate daughter. A beautiful girl. She trusted people and now she will never trust them again. She will never be beautiful again." He was trembling, his sallow face flushed an ugly dark red.

"I went to the police like a good American. The two boys were arrested. They were brought to trial. The evidence was overwhelming and they pleaded guilty. The judge sentenced them to three years in prison and suspended the sentence. They went free that very day. I stood in the courtroom like a fool and those bastards smiled at me. And then I said to my wife: 'We must go to Don Corleone for justice.'"

The Don had bowed his head to show respect for the man's grief. But when he spoke, the words were cold with offended dignity. "Why did you go to the police? Why didn't you come to me at the beginning of this affair?"

Bonasera muttered almost inaudibly, "What do you want of me? Tell me what you wish. But do what I beg you to do." There was something almost insolent in his words.

Don Corleone said gravely, "And what is that?"

Bonasera glanced at Hagen and Sonny Corleone and shook his head. The Don, still sitting at Hagen's desk, inclined his body toward the undertaker. Bonasera hesitated, then bent down and put his lips so close to the Don's hairy ear that they touched. Don Corleone listened like a priest in the confessional, gazing away into the distance, impassive, remote. They stood so for a long moment until Bonasera finished whispering and straightened to his full height. The Don looked up gravely at Bonasera. Bonasera, his face flushed, returned the stare unflinchingly.

Finally the Don spoke. "That I cannot do. You are being carried away."

Bonasera said loudly, clearly, "I will pay you anything you ask." On hearing this, Hagen flinched, a nervous flick of his head. Sonny Corleone folded his arms, smiled sardonically as he turned from the window to watch the scene in the room for the first time.

Don Corleone rose from behind the desk. His face was still impassive but his voice rang like cold death. "We have known each other many years, you and I," he said to the undertaker, "but until this day you never came to me for counselor help. I can't remember the last time you invited me to your house for coffee though my wife is godmother to your only child. Let us be frank. You spurned my friendship. You feared to be in my debt."

Bonasera murmured, "I didn't want to get into trouble."

The Don held up his hand. "No. Don't speak. You found America a paradise. You had a good trade, you made a good living, you thought the world a harmless place where you could take your pleasure as you willed. You never armed yourself with true friends. After all, the police guarded you, there were courts of law, you and yours could come to no harm. You did not need Don Corleone. Very well. My feelings were wounded but I am not that sort of person who thrusts his friendship on those who do not value it--On those who think me of little account." The Don paused and gave the undertaker a polite, ironic smile. "Now you come to me and say, 'Don Corleone give me justice.' And you do not ask with respect. You do not offer me your friendship. You come into my home on the bridal day of my daughter and you ask me to do murder and you say--" here the Don's voice became a scornful mimicry--" 'I will pay you anything.' No, no, I am not offended, but what have I ever done to make you treat me so disrespectfully?"

Bonasera cried out in his anguish and his fear, "America has been good to me. I wanted to be a good citizen. I wanted my child to be American."

The Don clapped his hands together with decisive approval. "Well spoken. Very fine. Then you have nothing to complain about. The judge has ruled. America has ruled. Bring your daughter flowers and a box of candy when you go visit her in the hospital. That will comfort her. Be content. After all, this is not a serious affair, the boys were young, high-spirited, and one of them is the son of a powerful politician. No, my dear Amerigo, you have always been honest. I must admit, though you spurned my friendship, that I would trust the given word of Amerigo Bonasera more than I would any other man's. So give me your word that you will put aside this madness. It is not American. Forgive. Forget. Life is full of misfortunes."

The cruel and contemptuous irony with which all this was said, the controlled anger of the Don, reduced the poor undertaker to a quivering jelly but he spoke up bravely again. "I ask you for justice."

Don Corleone said curtly, "The court gave you justice."

Bonasera shook his head stubbornly. "No. They gave the youths justice. They did not give me justice."

The Don acknowledged this fine distinction with an approving nod, then asked, "What is your justice?"

"An eye for an eye," Bonasera said.

"You asked for more," the Don said. "Your daughter is alive."

Bonasera said reluctantly, "Let them suffer as she suffers." The Don waited for him to speak further. Bonasera screwed up the last of his courage and said, "How much shall I pay you?" It was a despairing wail.

Don Corleone turned his back. It was a dismissal. Bonasera did not budge.

Finally, sighing, a good-hearted man who cannot remain angry with an erring friend, Don Corleone turned back to the undertaker, who was now as pale as one of his corpses. Don Corleone was gentle, patient. "Why do you fear to give your first allegiance to me?" he said. "You go to the law courts and wait for months. You spend money on lawyers who know full well you are to be made a fool of. You accept judgment from a judge who sells himself like the worst whore in the streets. Years gone by, when you needed money, you went to the banks and paid ruinous interest, waited hat in hand like a beggar while they sniffed around, poked their noses up your very asshole to make sure you could pay them back." The Don paused, his voice became sterner.

"But if you had come to me, my purse would have been yours. If you had come to me for justice those scum who ruined your daughter would be weeping bitter tears this day. If by some misfortune an honest man like yourself made enemies they would become my enemies"--the Don raised his arm, finger pointing at Bonasera--"and then, believe me, they would fear you."

Bonasera bowed his head and murmured in a strangled voice, "Be my friend. I accept."

Don Corleone put his hand on the man's shoulder...Good," he said, "you shall have your justice. Some day, and that day may never come, I will call upon you to do me a service in return. Until that day, consider this justice a gift from my wife, your daughter's godmother."

When the door closed behind the grateful undertaker, Don Corleone turned to Hagen and said, "Give this affair to Clemenza and tell him to be sure to use reliable people, people who will not be carried away by the smell of blood. After all, we're not murderers, no matter what that corpse valet dreams up in his foolish head." He noted that his firstborn, masculine son was gazing through the window at the garden party. It was hopeless, Don Corleone thought. If he refused to be instructed, Santino could never run the family business, could never become a Don. He would have to find somebody else. And soon. After all, he was not immortal.

From the garden, startling all three men, there came a happy roaring shout. Sonny Corleone pressed close to the window. What he saw made him move quickly toward the door, a delighted smile on his face. "It's Johnny, he came to the wedding, what did I tell you?" Hagen

moved to the window. "It's really your godson," he said to Don Corleone. "Shall I bring him here?"

"No," the Don said. "Let the people enjoy him. Let him come to me when he is ready." He smiled at Hagen. "You see? He is a good godson."

Hagen felt a twinge of jealousy. He said dryly, "It's been two years. He's probably in trouble again and wants you to help."

"And who should he come to if not his godfather?" asked Don Corleone.

The first one to see Johnny Fontane enter the garden was Connie Corleone. She forgot her bridal dignity and screamed, "Johneee." Then she ran into his arms. He hugged her tight and kissed her on the mouth, kept his arm around her as others came up to greet him. They were all his old friends, people he had grown up with on the West Side. Then Connie was dragging him to her new husband. Johnny saw with amusement that the blond young man looked a little sour at no longer being the star of the day. He turned on all his charm, shaking the groom's hand, toasting him with a glass of wine.

A familiar voice called from the bandstand, "How about giving us a song, Johnny?" He looked up and saw Nino Valenti smiling down at him. Johnny Fontane jumped up on the bandstand and threw his arms around Nino. They had been inseparable, singing together, going out with girls together, until Johnny had started to become famous and sing on the radio. When he had gone to Hollywood to make movies Johnny had phoned Nino a couple of times just to talk and had promised to get him a club singing date. But he had never done so. Seeing Nino now, his cheerful, mocking, drunken grin, all the affection returned.

Nino began strumming on the mandolin. Johnny Fontane put his hand on Nino's shoulder. "This is for the bride," he said, and stamping his foot, chanted the words to an obscene Sicilian love song. As he sang, Nino made suggestive motions with his body. The bride blushed proudly, the throng of guests roared its approval. Before the song ended they were all stamping with their feet and roaring out the sly, double-meaning tag line that finished each stanza. At the end they would not stop applauding until Johnny cleared his throat to sing another song.

They were all proud of him. He was of them and he had become a famous singer, a movie star who slept with the most desired women in the world. And yet he had shown proper respect for his Godfather by traveling three thousand miles to attend this wedding. He still loved old

friends like Nino Valenti. Many of the people there had seen Johnny and Nino singing together when they were just boys, when no one dreamed that Johnny Fontane would grow up to hold the hearts of fifty million women in his hands.

Johnny Fontane reached down and lifted the bride up onto the bandstand so that Connie stood between him and Nino. Both men crouched down, facing each other, Nino plucking the mandolin for a few harsh chords. It was an old routine of theirs, a mock battle and wooing, using their voices like swords, each shouting a chorus in turn. With the most delicate courtesy, Johnny let Nino's voice overwhelm his own, let Nino take the bride from his arm, let Nino swing into the last victorious stanza while his own voice died away. The whole wedding party broke into shouts of applause, the three of them embraced each other at the end. The guests begged for another song.

Only Don Corleone, standing in the comer entrance of the house, sensed something amiss. Cheerily, with bluff good humor, careful not to give offense to his guests, he called out, "My godson has come three thousand miles to do us honor and no one thinks to wet his throat?" At once a dozen full wineglasses were thrust at Johnny Fontane. He took a sip from all and rushed to embrace his Godfather. As he did so he whispered something into the older man's ear. Don Corleone led him into the house.

Tom Hagen held out his hand when Johnny came into the room. Johnny shook it and said, "How are you, Tom?" But without his usual charm that consisted of a genuine warmth for people. Hagen was a little hurt by this coolness but shrugged it off. It was one of the penalties for being the Don's hatchet man.

Johnny Fontane said to the Don, "When I got the wedding invitation I said to myself, 'My Godfather isn't mad at me anymore.' I called you five times after my divorce and Tom always told me you were out or busy so I knew you were sore."

Don Corleone was filling glasses from the yellow bottle of Strega. "That's all forgotten. Now. Can I do something for you still? You're not too famous, too rich, that I can't help you?"

Johnny gulped down the yellow fiery liquid and held out his glass to be refilled. He tried to sound jaunty. "I'm not rich, Godfather. I'm going down. You were right. I should never have left my wife and kids for that tramp I married. I don't blame you for getting sore at me."

The Don shrugged. "I worried about you, you're my godson, that's all."

Johnny paced up and down the room. "I was crazy about that bitch. The biggest star in

Hollywood. She looks like an angel. And you know what she does after a picture? If the makeup man does a good job on her face, she lets him bang her. If the cameraman made her look extra good, she brings him into her dressing room and gives him a screw. Anybody. She uses her body like I use the loose change in my pocket for a tip. A whore made for the devil.”

Don Corleone curtly broke in. “How is your family?”

Johnny sighed. “I took care of them. After the divorce I gave Ginny and the kids more than the courts said I should. I go see them once a week. I miss them. Sometimes I think I’m going crazy.” He took another drink. “Now my second wife laughs at me. She can’t understand my being jealous. She calls me an old-fashioned guinea, she makes fun of my singing. Before I left I gave her a nice beating but not in the face because she was making a picture. I gave her cramps, I punched her on the arms and legs like a kid and she kept laughing at me.” He lit a cigarette. “So, Godfather, right now, life doesn’t seem worth living.”

Don Corleone said simply. “These are troubles I can’t help you with.” He paused, then asked, “What’s the matter with your voice?”

All the assured charm, the self-mockery, disappeared from Johnny Fontane’s face. He said almost brokenly, “Godfather, I can’t sing anymore, something happened to my throat, the doctors don’t know what.” Hagen and the Don looked at him with surprise, Johnny had always been so tough. Fontane went on. “My two pictures made a lot of money. I was a big star. Now they throw me out. The head of the studio always hated my guts and now he’s paying me off.”

Don Corleone stood before his godson and asked grimly, “Why doesn’t this man like you?”

“I used to sing those songs for the liberal organizations, you know, all that stuff you never liked me to do. Well, Jack Woltz didn’t like it either. He called me a Communist, but he couldn’t make it stick. Then I snatched a girl he had saved for himself. It was strictly a one-night stand and she came after me. What the hell could I do? Then my whore second wife throws me out. And Ginny and the kids won’t take me back unless I come crawling on my hands and knees, and I can’t sing anymore. Godfather, what the hell can I do?”

Don Corleone’s face had become cold without a hint of sympathy. He said contemptuously, “You can start by acting like a man.” Suddenly anger contorted his face. He shouted. “LIKE A MAN!” He reached over the desk and grabbed Johnny Fontane by the hair of his head in a gesture that was savagely affectionate. “By Christ in heaven, is it possible that you