

Penguin



Readers



The Godfather

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CHAPTER ONE

The wedding

On the last Saturday in August 1945, hundreds of guests came to a huge house on Long Island to celebrate the daughter of Don Vito Corleone getting married.

Don Corleone's friends brought cream-colored envelopes full of money as gifts for the **bride**, with cards signed to show their great respect for the **Godfather**. Don Corleone was a man to whom everybody had come for help, and they had never been disappointed. He kept all his promises. It did not matter how poor or powerless a man was, Don Corleone would take his troubles to his heart and find an answer to his problems. His reward? Friendship, the respectful title of "Don" or the more gentle "Godfather," and sometimes a small gift of homemade wine, or some tasty Italian biscuits. And the understanding, of course, that you owed him a favor so he had the right to call on you at any time to ask for one in return.

Today, on this great day, Don Vito Corleone stood by the front door to greet all his guests, rich and poor, with an equal show of love. Standing at the door next to him were two of his three sons. The eldest, Santino (but called Sonny by everyone except his father), was tall for an Italian American, and his thick, curly dark hair made him look taller. He was often angry and impatient, his body was huge and powerful, and he had a **reputation** for sleeping with many women. At this moment, although married, Sonny Corleone was watching Lucy Mancini, his sister's best

friend, as she sat at a garden table in her pink dress. She knew what he wanted and was smiling back at him.

Don Corleone's second son, Frederico (but always called Freddie), stood next to Sonny. Freddie was always ready to help his father and still, at the age of 30, lived with his parents. He was short and tough with black curly hair, but his face was not handsome. He never argued with his father or embarrassed him by behaving badly with women. But, despite these good qualities, he did not have that animal force or strength of **character** that was so necessary for a leader of men. Like Sonny, he was not expected to **inherit** the family business.

The third son, Michael, did not stand with his father but sat at a table in the far corner of the garden with his American girlfriend, Kay Adams. Michael was the youngest son of the Don and the only one who had refused the great man's direction. His black hair was straight not curly, and he was handsome in a way that was almost beautiful. Michael had been the Don's favorite before the war, but today the Don had not spoken to him much. He had wanted Michael to inherit the business, but when the war came Michael **volunteered**, going against his father's wishes. He had no idea how much his father had paid in **bribes** to keep him out of the war. He had fought bravely and won medals. When he had to leave the air force because of an injury, he stayed home for a few weeks. Then, without speaking to anyone, he entered Dartmouth College in New Hampshire and left his father's house. Now he had returned for the wedding of his sister and to show his family his future wife—a thin American girl whose sharp face was too

intelligent for a woman, and who was clearly not a **virgin**.

Michael was amusing Kay by telling her about some of the wedding guests, and, as usual, she was amusing him in return with her great interest in anything new. Finally, her attention was caught by a small group of men who were standing round a table and watching the Don.

“They don’t look happy,” Kay said.

“They’re waiting to see my father in private. They have favors to ask,” Michael replied.

At that moment, a band began to play. There were now hundreds of guests in the huge garden, which was filled with flowers. The bride, Constanzia (Connie) Corleone, sat at a high table. She was not quite a pretty girl—she was too thin and nervous. Next to her sat her **groom**, Carlo Rizzi, who she had met through her brother Sonny. He smiled and poured her wine, but his eyes kept moving toward the cream envelopes that were filled with money. “How much do they hold?” he wondered. Twenty thousand? Carlo Rizzi smiled. He had married into a rich family. They would have to take care of him.

As the band grew louder, Don Corleone disappeared into the house and walked up to his office, where Tom Hagen, his lawyer and *Consigliori*, was waiting for him. Hagen handed him a list of the names of the men who wanted to speak to him today. Don Corleone nodded. “Leave Bonasera to the end,” he said.

So, first, Tom brought up the baker Nazorine. He and the Don **embraced** each other—they had played with each other as children in Italy. Every Easter and Christmas, and on family

birthdays, lovely freshly baked pies and cakes always arrived at the Don's door. Nazorine had even made today's wedding cake. All through the years, Nazorine had happily paid money to the bakery **union** organized by the Don. Now the time had come to ask for a favor in return. The baker told him about Enzo—a fine Italian boy from Sicily whom his daughter wanted to marry, but who had no right to stay and live in America. When the baker finished, Don Corleone smiled and said, "My dear friend, put your worries to one side." He then explained that he would contact one of his friends in local government and organize everything for Enzo. But this would cost money, did his friend understand? Two thousand dollars. The baker nodded his head gratefully as the Don walked him to the door and explained that someone would come to the bakery to arrange the details.

The next man brought in wanted a very simple favor. His name was Anthony Coppola and he was the son of an old friend of the Don's. He needed \$500 to open a pizza restaurant. The Don reached into his pocket and pulled out some money.

Hagen watched the wedding party from the window. He noticed Lucy Mancini go into the house followed quickly by Sonny, and thought about saying something to the Don. Then he decided against it.

"He's not on the list, but Luca Brasi wants to see you," Hagen said, after Coppola had left. "He wants to congratulate you."

For the first time the Don did not seem happy. "Is it necessary?" he asked.

Hagen **shrugged**. "He was very grateful that you invited him

to the wedding. He never expected that. I think he wants to show his thanks.”

In the garden Kay Adams noticed the violent **fury** on the face of Luca Brasi, as he waited to talk to the Don, and asked Michael about him. He explained that Luca Brasi was one of the most feared men in the **Mafia**. He could murder people in a way that made arrest and conviction almost impossible. Michael had brought Kay to the wedding hoping that she would realize the truth about his family. But so far she seemed to think his father was just a bit of a shady businessman.

“I don’t know if this is true,” he added, surprised that he did not want to tell Kay everything. He loved her and trusted her, so why was this? “But he’s kind of a friend to my father,” he went on. “Fifteen years ago, some people tried to take control of my father’s **olive 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.” Michael laughed softly as if it were a joke.

For the first time, Kay began to understand. “You mean your father was shot by **gangsters**?” she said. Then she smiled. “You’re just trying to scare me because you don’t want me to marry you.”

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

“And who is he?” Kay asked, watching Hagen going into the house behind Brasi. With his light hair and slim body, Hagen was clearly not Italian.

“Tom has lived with us since he was twelve years old,” Michael said. “His parents died and he was living on the streets. Sonny brought him home one night and he just stayed until he got married. My father sent him to law school and he’s now the family lawyer and counselor—which is a first, as he’s not Sicilian.”

“That’s really romantic,” Kay said. “Your father must have a very warm heart.”

They watched Hagen return with Brasi a short time later. The counselor next pointed a finger at Amerigo Bonasera.

“Why do they trouble your father with business on a day like this?” Kay asked.

Michael laughed. “Because they know that no Sicilian can refuse a favor on his daughter’s wedding day.”