



MARIO PUZO

The Godfather

PENGUIN READERS

Introduction

'My father made him an offer he couldn't refuse. Luca held a gun to his head and my father told him that if he didn't agree to let Johnny go, Luca would blow his brains out.'

So Michael, youngest son of Don Vito Corleone, introduces his girlfriend Kay to his father's business practice. His father is a gangster, a very important gangster. He is the Godfather of one of the most powerful and richest families in New York. His business is fear and murder. Michael, an innocent college boy, doesn't want anything to do with his father. He's different from the others in his family. All he wants is a quiet, peaceful, honest life with Kay. But this isn't as easy as he thinks. Things happen, and Michael begins to change. He slowly realizes that, at heart, he's a Corleone too. And, if he must, he can be as deadly as the rest . . .

Mario Puzo was born in New York in 1920. He has written many books but *The Godfather*, which he wrote in 1969, is his most famous. In 1972, it was made into a film by Francis Ford Coppola. Marlon Brando won an Oscar for his performance as Don Vito Corleone. Coppola and Puzo won an Oscar for the best writing of a film. Coppola, born in 1939, was one of Hollywood's most important film-makers in the 1970s. As well as *The Godfather* and *The Godfather 2* (1974), he made *Apocalypse Now* (1979), also starring Marlon Brando.

His films during the 1980s were not so popular but, more recently, he has made two successful films: *The Godfather 3* (1990) and *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (1992).

Mario Puzo has written several films as well as books. His best-known films are *Superman* (1978) and *Superman 2* (1980).

Chapter 1 Wedding on Long Island

On the last Saturday in August, 1945, Miss Constanzia Corleone, daughter of Don Vito Corleone, married Carlo Rizzi. Her father had invited hundreds of people to the wedding at his huge house on Long Island, just outside New York. As the guests arrived, Don Corleone welcomed them all, rich and poor, with an equal show of love. Many of the guests had reason to be grateful to Don Corleone for their good luck in life, and they called him 'Godfather'* to his face.

Standing next to him as he welcomed the guests were two of his three sons, Santino - or Sonny, as he was called — was the eldest. He was a tall, strong, good-looking man with thick brown hair. He looked uncomfortable in his white shirt and black suit. The second son, Fredo, was completely different. He was weak-looking and pale, with sad dark eyes and thin lips.

The youngest son, Michael, was sitting at a table in the corner of the garden with his girlfriend, Kay. There was a gentle, innocent quality to him, with his soft dark eyes and full lips, but his army uniform suggested that this was not a weak man. Just a quiet one. He was embarrassed by all the singing and dancing, but he was quietly pleased that Kay was enjoying herself. This was the first time that she had met his family.

'Who's that funny little fat man over there?' she asked, her eyes shining with excitement. 'He looks about sixty years old but he's dancing like a teenager.'

'That's Pete Clemenza,' Michael said. 'He's an old friend of my father's.'

* Godfather: the head of an important family in the Mafia, which is a secret group of criminals. It is used here as a title of great respect.

'And what about him?' Kay looked at a large, ugly man who was sitting alone outside the house, talking to himself. 'He's very frightening.'

'That's Luca Brasi,' Michael smiled at Kay. 'He's waiting to speak to my father in private.'

'Yes, but who is he?'

'He helps my father sometimes,' Michael replied quietly, looking at his food.

Suddenly, the big man stood up and Kay looked away quickly, afraid that he was coming over to talk to her. But another man came up to the table instead. He had thin fair hair and blue eyes. Michael stood up and the two men hugged each other warmly.

'My brother, Tom Hagen, this is Kay Adams,' Michael finally said.

Tom Hagen shook Kay's hand, then whispered to Michael: 'My father wants to know why you don't go to see him.'

Michael sat down without speaking, and Tom walked away into the house, followed by Luca Brasi.

'If he's your brother, why does he have a different name?' Kay asked Michael when Tom had gone.

'When my brother Sonny was a boy,' Michael explained, 'he found Tom Hagen in the street. Tom had no home, so my father took him in and he's been with us ever since. He's a good lawyer. Not a Sicilian, but I think he's going to be a *Consigliori*!

'What's that?'

'My father's chief adviser. Very important to the family.'

Suddenly, there came a loud, happy sound from the other side of the garden. The music and singing stopped. Connie, in her white wedding-dress, left her husband and ran towards the gate screaming: 'Johnny! Johnny!' She threw herself into the arms of a very handsome dark-haired man in a white suit, and covered his face with kisses. Then she led him by the hand through a crowd of excited, screaming girls, to meet her new husband, Carlo.

Kay turned to Michael excitedly. 'You didn't tell me your family knew Johnny Fontane,' she said.

'Sure. Do you want to meet him?' Michael smiled. 'My father helped him to become famous.'

'He did? How?'

At that moment, Johnny Fontane began to sing. 'Let's listen to the song,' Michael tried to change the subject.

'Please Michael,' Kay said impatiently, reaching across the table and squeezing his hand. 'Tell me.'

'Well, Johnny is my father's godson. When Johnny was beginning to become popular, he had a problem with his boss, a band-leader. Johnny wanted to leave the band, but this man wouldn't let him. So Johnny asked my father to help. My father went to see the band-leader and offered him \$10,000 to let Johnny go. He said no. The next day my father went to see him with Luca Brasi. One hour later, the band-leader let Johnny go. For \$1,000.'

Kay looked confused. 'How did he do that?'

'My father made him an offer he couldn't refuse. Luca held a gun to his head and my father told him that if he didn't agree to let Johnny go, Luca would blow his brains out.'

At first Kay didn't say anything. She thought Michael was joking. But Michael wasn't smiling. 'That's a true story, Kay,' he said quietly. Then he saw Kay beginning to look worried, a little frightened, so he squeezed her hand and added quickly: 'That's my family, Kay. That's not me.'



I don't know what to do, Godfather. 'Johnny Fontane sat on the corner of the desk in Don Corleone's dark office and shook his head helplessly. Don Corleone was sitting in his leather chair, listening carefully to his favourite godson. He had, after all, travelled two thousand miles from California to be at his

daughter's wedding. 'My voice is weak, 'Johnny went on. 'I can't sing as well as I used to. There's a part in a film that I want. It would be perfect for me. If I had this part, I'd be a top star again. But the boss of the film company, Jack Woltz, won't give me the part. Can you help me?'

'Go and rest,' Don Corleone said. His voice was soft, but there was a rough quality to it that made everybody listen. It was a voice impossible to argue with. Something to do with the way he spoke without moving his mouth. 'In a month, this man will give you what you want.'

'Too late,' Johnny looked at his godfather unhappily. 'They start filming in a week.'

Don Corleone stood up and put a fatherly arm around Johnny's shoulder. 'I'm going to make this man an offer he can't refuse,' he said, leading Johnny towards the door. 'Now, go and enjoy yourself He kissed Johnny on the cheek, shut the door and turned to Tom Hagen, who had heard everything.

'What are we going to do with your daughter's new husband?' Tom asked. 'Shall we give him anything important to do?'

'No,' Don Corleone replied. 'Give him something small. A betting shop, maybe. But never discuss the family business with him.'

'Virgil Sollozzo called, 'Tom went on. 'He wants to meet you next week.'

'We'll discuss that after you get back from California.'

Tom looked surprised. 'Why am I going to California?'

I want you to help Johnny. You're going to talk to this Jack Woltz. I want you to go tonight. And now, if there's no other business, I'd like to go to my daughter's wedding.'

With these words, Don Corleone left Tom alone in the office, went outside, took his daughter by the hand and danced with her to the slow, Sicilian music.