

The Godfather



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF MARIO PUZO

Mario Puzo was one of twelve children born to Neapolitan parents who emigrated from Italy to New York. He grew up in Hell's Kitchen, a tough neighborhood on Manhattan's West Side with a large population of Italian and Irish immigrants. Puzo's father abandoned the family when Mario was twelve years old, leaving his strong-willed mother to raise the family on her own. During World War II, Puzo served in the army but saw no combat due to his poor eyesight. After the war, he returned to New York and pursued a writing career. He wrote articles for men's magazines such as *Swank* and *Male* and published two novels: *The Dark Arena* (1955) and *The Fortunate Pilgrim* (1965). Both novels received critical praise but met with poor sales. By the late 1960s, Puzo was a father of five in deep financial debt, so he purposely tried to write a hit novel. The result was 1969's *The Godfather*, a bestselling tale of life in an Italian-American Mafia family that became a cultural phenomenon and inspired an Academy Award-winning movie trilogy from director Francis Ford Coppola. Puzo wrote several more novels and screenplays throughout the 1970s, 80s, and 90s before he died of heart failure in 1999. His last work, another Mafia epic called *Omerta*, was published posthumously in 2000.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The term "Mafia" refers to *La Cosa Nostra* ("Our thing"), an organized Italian-American criminal society that functions as an offshoot of Sicily's criminal underworld. The Mafia emerged out of New York's Italian neighborhoods in the early twentieth century, where so-called "Black Hand" groups extorted people for "protection" money that, in reality, only protected them from the Black Hand. By 1931, powerful crime "bosses" such as Salvatore Maranzano and Charles "Lucky" Luciano organized the Mafia into five separate criminal groups known as "families" that controlled loansharking, gambling, racketeering, prostitution, murder for hire, drug running, and other illegal activities in New York City. The Mafia kept its activities secret by adhering to a code of silence (*omertà*). In 1962, however, Joseph Valachi, a "made man" (full member) in the mob revealed the secrets of *La Cosa Nostra* to a U.S. Senate committee, including its structure, rituals, membership, codes, and illicit activities. Mario Puzo relied on transcribed papers from the Valachi hearings to conduct research for *The Godfather*. Although the novel contains many accuracies about the mob, Puzo invented other elements, such as the title "Godfather" for a mob boss, the old-line bosses' reluctance to

deal narcotics, and the crime family's hereditary leadership. Puzo's novel and its subsequent film adaptations remain among the most recognizable depictions of the Mafia in American popular culture.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

The world of organized crime constitutes a sub-genre of crime fiction that became popular in the 1930s. Modern crime fiction dates back to the nineteenth century and encompasses Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes detective novels, the Golden Age of mystery fiction embodied by Agatha Christie, and the hard-boiled crime noir of American writers such as Phillip Marlowe. The rise of the gangster as a rebellious outlaw who flaunted American societal conventions, however, coincided with Prohibition and the Great Depression, when the exploits of real mobsters like Al Capone inspired fiction writers. W.R. Burnett's *Little Caesar* (1929), which chronicles a hoodlum's ascent into the highest ranks of the mob, is *The Godfather's* most obvious antecedent. Burnett's novel was the first of its kind to tell a gangster story from the criminal's perspective, and it inspired the popular 1931 film of the same title. Other precursors to Puzo's novel include Armitage Trail's *Scarface* (1929), based on Al Capone's rise in Chicago. *The Godfather* (1969), however, became the seminal novel told from the Mafia's perspective. It inspired later works such as Gay Talese's *Honor Thy Father* (1971), a non-fiction account of the Bonnano Crime Family that relied on fictional literary conventions. The film based on *The Godfather* soon eclipsed the popularity of the novel, and Puzo's influence likewise soon became more pronounced in film and television through such movies as *Goodfellas* (1990) and TV series like *The Sopranos* (1999-2007).

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *The Godfather*
- **When Written:** Late 1960s.
- **Where Written:** New York City, United States.
- **When Published:** 1969. Reissued in 2002.
- **Literary Period:** Crime novel.
- **Genre:** Crime novel. Ethnic novel. Historical novel.
- **Setting:** New York City and Long Beach, New York. Hollywood, California. Las Vegas, Nevada.
- **Climax:** Michael Corleone, the youngest son of Don Vito Corleone, assumes the role of the new Don (leader) of his Mafia family.
- **Antagonist:** The rival New York crime families and other rival criminal elements, as well as members of law enforcement.

- **Point of View:** Third person

EXTRA CREDIT

Listen to your mother. Mario Puzo lifted several of the novel's most memorable lines directly from his mother, including "an offer he can't refuse" and "revenge is a dish that tastes best when it's cold."

Life from art. *The Godfather* novel and its film adaptation are examples of art inspiring real life. Actual mobsters like Gambino family boss John Gotti began imitating the eloquent speech and dress of the film's characters to make their lifestyle match Puzo's vision of the Mafia.



PLOT SUMMARY

An undertaker, Amerigo Bonasera, watches a judge suspend the sentences of two men who savagely beat his daughter. Furious, he decides to seek true justice from Don Vito Corleone. In a Los Angeles hotel, celebrity Johnny Fontane drunkenly strikes his second wife, actress Margot Ashton, for cheating on him, but he cannot bring himself to hit her beautiful face. His voice and career failing, Johnny takes his problems to his Godfather, Don Corleone. Meanwhile, Nazorine, a New York baker, wants to prevent his employee, Enzo, from being deported back to Italy. The Baker knows that only Don Corleone can help.

It is August 1945. The Godfather, Don Vito Corleone, the Sicilian-American boss of the Corleone Family, one of the Mafia's Five Families that dominate organized crime in New York City, is hosting the wedding of his daughter, Connie Corleone, at his lavish Long Beach home. Also attending the wedding are Don Vito's sons. The hot-tempered Sonny Corleone sneaks off to have sex with his mistress, Lucy Mancini. Fredo Corleone, the middle son, dutifully mixes with the wedding guests. Don Vito's youngest son, the World War II hero Michael Corleone, sits with his non-Italian girlfriend, Kay Adams. The Don has amassed great **wealth** and power through his control of criminal rackets such as gambling and extortion. He is therefore a "man of respect" to whom people come seeking extralegal justice and other services in exchange for pledging their everlasting loyalty to their Godfather. The Don meets with Bonasera, Fontane, and Nazorine. He agrees to solve their problems but chastises Bonasera for his foolish faith in the legal system.

Later that evening, Don Corleone visits his dying Consigliere, Genco Abbandando, in the hospital. When Genco passes away, the Don appoints as new *Consigliere* his adopted son and lawyer, Tom Hagen. Don Corleone sends Hagen to convince Hollywood film producer, Jack Woltz, to cast Fontane in his new picture. Woltz refuses because Fontane stole his trophy

girlfriend. In retaliation, The Don's henchmen sever the head from Woltz's prized racehorse and place it in his bed. A horrified Woltz gives Fontane the part. The Don also sends his caporegime, Peter Clemenza and his soldiers to beat the two men who assaulted Bonasera's daughter. Don Corleone's political contacts, whom he keeps on his payroll, then prevent the deportation of Nazorine's helper, Enzo.

After Connie's wedding, Don Corleone meets with Virgil "The Turk" Sollozzo, a heroin dealer allied with the Tataglia Family who offers a large profit incentive if the Corleone Family will use its political connections to protect his drug distribution ring. The Don declines to get involved because he believes drugs to be a dirty business that would scare away his political allies. The Don is suspicious of Sollozzo, so he sends his enforcer, Luca Brasi to spy on The Turk, but Sollozzo and Bruno Tataglia (the son of the leader of the Tataglia family) garrote Brasi in a nightclub. At Christmastime, Michael and Kay are on a date in New York City when Michael sees a newspaper headline proclaiming that his father has been shot. Spurned by Don Corleone's refusal to join his drug operation, Sollozzo pays off the Don's bodyguard, Paulie Gatto, to betray his boss. Sollozzo then sends assassins to hit the Don, but they fail to kill him. Afterwards, Sollozzo kidnaps Tom Hagen and demands that he ensure that Sonny, the now acting Don, makes a deal with Sollozzo over drug distribution.

Sollozzo then attempts to kill Don Corleone in his hospital room with the help of Mark McCluskey, a police captain on Sollozzo's payroll. Michael foils this second assassination attempt by bringing more guards for his father. Clemenza and his soldier, Rocco Lampone, kill the traitor, Paulie Gatto, in his **car**. Michael then develops a plan with Sonny, Hagen, and the *caporegimes*, Clemenza and Sal Tessio to murder Sollozzo and McCluskey to prevent more attempts on Don Corleone's life. Michael meets with Sollozzo and McCluskey in a restaurant, where he retrieves a pistol stashed in the bathroom and shoots the other two men. Michael then flees to Sicily to evade murder charges.

Johnny Fontane is attempting to sleep with a young actress, Sharon Moore, but she rebuffs his advances. A dispirited Johnny then reconnects with his ex-wife, Virginia, and their two daughters before Tom Hagen offers Johnny a film production deal backed by Don Corleone. Johnny agrees to the deal to please his Godfather and invites his former musical partner, Nino Valenti, to join him in the venture. Johnny and Nino record music and produce several films, but Nino grows disenchanted with the debauchery of Hollywood life and descends into alcoholism.

A flashback follows Vito Corleone's rise in New York's criminal underworld. Born Vito Andolini in the town of Corleone, Sicily, the adolescent Vito flees to America after the local Sicilian Mafia boss murders his father and brother. In America, he changes his last name to "Corleone" and works in the

Abbandando family's grocery store in Little Italy. Vito eventually collaborates with a young Tessio and Clemenza to hijack merchandise from delivery trucks and resell it at a profit. When Don Fanucci, the neighborhood Black Hand, gets word of Vito's activities, he threatens violence if Vito and his partners don't give him a cut of the profits. Rather than pay Fanucci, Vito murders him, establishing himself as a "man of respect" whose fearsome reputation precedes him. Vito performs favors for people who profess their loyalty to him, and he raises a family with his wife, Mama Corleone. He becomes rich bootlegging alcohol during Prohibition, then forms an olive oil importing company and uses his crew of soldiers to force competitors out of business. Vito operates his legitimate businesses as fronts for his growing crime empire. He helps to organize the other Mafia organizations into Five Families that control specific territories, thereby assuring peace in the underworld and his own position as the most powerful Mafia Don in New York.

The novel returns to where it left off in 1947. Kay Adams is working as a teacher in her native New Hampshire. Michael has been gone for two years, and she must fend off questions from police detectives who are investigating his connection to the murders of Sollozzo and McCluskey. Back in New York, Carlo Rizzi constantly beats his wife, Connie Corleone because he thought the Corleone's would make him rich and all they gave him was a lowly bookmaking job. Carlo's abuse of Connie invokes Sonny's rage, and one day Sonny beats him mercilessly in the street. Knowing that Sonny will not kill his sister's husband, Carlo refuses to fight back. Meanwhile, the Corleone Family is at war with the Five Families over the murders of Sollozzo and McCluskey. As Don Corleone returns home from the hospital, the Family adds extra security to his large estate, known as the mall. Fredo moves to Las Vegas to work the Family's casino business while Sonny, Hagen, Clemenza, and Tessio "go to the mattresses" and continue to battle the rival Families.

The novel flashes forward. The undertaker Bonasera is having dinner at home when Tom Hagen calls on him to perform his service for Don Corleone. Bonasera goes to his funeral parlor, where Don Corleone arrives with the bullet-ridden corpse of Sonny. The Don asks Bonasera to make his son's body presentable for an open-casket funeral. The novel then shifts back to the present, where Sonny's bloody fight against the Five Families has left many casualties but has not ended the war. Tom Hagen disapproves of Sonny's tactics but cannot interfere because Sonny is the acting boss while Don Corleone recovers from his injuries. One evening, Connie answers a call from one of Carlo's mistresses. She confronts him and he angrily beats her again. She then calls Sonny to ask for a ride to the mall. Sonny becomes enraged and drives to Connie's apartment by taking the Jones Beach Causeway. When he stops at the tollbooth, the car in front of him blocks him in, and

the toll taker pulls out a gun and shoots him. Two gunmen emerge from the blocking car and shoot him again. When Sonny's bodyguards arrive at the scene, they call Tom Hagen, who calls Carlo to tell him that he and Connie will move to the mall, where Carlo will have a more prominent position in the Corleone Family. Later that evening, Hagen informs Don Corleone that his eldest son is dead. The Don forbids any acts of vengeance.

Don Corleone organizes a peace meeting with the head of the Five Families, as well as the heads of Families from across the country. At the meeting, Don Corleone advises the other bosses to come to a reasonable agreement in order to stop the war and spare more bloodshed. He insists that drug trafficking will destroy the Mafia because it will chase away their political allies who view it as a dangerous and illicit business. He reminds the other Dons that most of their children work in legitimate society as pezzonanavnte (big shots), and that moving away from criminal enterprises is a less violent and destructive path to take in the future. Don Emilio Barzini and Don Phillip Tattaglia, however, demand that Don Corleone must share his political connections to give protection for the other Families who want to deal in drugs because the business is too profitable to ignore. Don Corleone reluctantly agrees to do so on condition that the other Families promise they will not retaliate against Michael for the Sollozzo and McCluskey murders. The other Dons agree, and Don Corleone adjourns the meeting.

The Don returns to the mall and tells Hagen that he plans to semi-retire, and that the *Consigliere* should prioritize bringing Michael home safely from Sicily. Don Corleone now knows that Barzini was allied with Sollozzo and Tattaglia all along, and that he must ultimately be dealt with if the Corleone Family is to retain its power.

Meanwhile, Lucy Mancini has been living in Las Vegas for a year since Sonny's death. There, she meets Dr. Jules Segal, the handsome physician at the Corleone Family's casino hotel. They begin dating, and Segal learns that Lucy has a condition that interferes with her sex life. He tells her that a Los Angeles surgeon he knows can fix her up with a simple surgery, and Segal's concern makes her fall in love with him. He then reveals that he performs abortions on showgirls, many of whom Fredo Corleone impregnates. A few weeks later, Dr. Frederick Kellner operates successfully on Lucy. After her surgery, Lucy greets Johnny Fontane and Nino Valenti. Segal hears Fontane's raspy voice and convinces the stubborn singer to let him examine his throat. Segal finds warts on Johnny's vocal chords and suggests a surgeon who can remove them. He also warns that Nino's alcoholism will soon kill him. A month after Lucy's operation, she and Segal are engaged to be married.

The novel goes backwards in time. Michael Corleone has been hiding in the town of Corleone, Sicily. He is staying at a villa owned by the local Mafia boss, Don Tommasino and

Tommasino's uncle, Dr. Taza, both of whom are friends of Don Corleone. Michael spends his days learning to read Italian and walking amidst the beautiful Sicilian landscape with his shepherd bodyguards Calo and Fabrizio. One day, while hiking the fields, Michael comes across a beautiful peasant girl named Apollonia and immediately desires her. He goes to her village, where he convinces Apollonia's father, Signor Vitelli, to let him marry his daughter. The wedding, however, alerts Michael's mob enemies to his whereabouts, and a car bomb meant for Michael kills Apollonia instead. Now that his enemies believe him to be dead, Michael returns to America. He reunites with Kay and the two marry. Michael, however, now plans to succeed his father as Don of the Corleone Family, and he warns Kay that she will not be his partner in life and cannot ever ask about his Family business.

Michael decides to close all of the Corleone Family's eastern business operations and move to Las Vegas to invest fully in casinos. In Vegas, he meets Fredo, Lucy, Fontane, Nino, Segal, and casino magnate Moe Greene. He gives Segal a job in a new hotel and makes Greene "an offer he can't refuse" to buy Green's share of the casino. Green, however, does refuse. Meanwhile, Fontane's new films are a big success, but Nino ultimately drinks himself to death. Michael returns to New York and plots a master plan with Don Corleone to settle all Family business by murdering the Corleones' enemies. Michael also tells Clemenza and Tessio that they can form their own New York Families after the move to Las Vegas, but that they must stay loyal to the Corleones until then.

Don Corleone dies one morning in his garden. After the Don's funeral, Michael sets his master plan into motion. His men kill Moe Greene, Don Barzini, and Phillip Tataglia. Michael then has Tessio murdered, who he had figured out was plotting against him with Barzini. Finally, Michael has Clemenza garrote Carlo in a car for betraying Sonny to Barzini's hitmen. With his Mafia rivals dead, Michael now formally succeeds his father as Don and restores the Corleones' status as New York's most powerful Mafia Family. Kay threatens to leave him when she learns that he had Carlo killed, but Hagen convinces her that the murder was in the Family's best interest. She converts to Catholicism and moves to Nevada with Michael and their two children. Before the move, however, Kay spends her remaining days in New York praying in church for her husband's eternal soul.

Michael and Sonny (the Don's middle son, Fredo, is a failure in the Family business and thus operates on the fringes of the Family and of the novel). Corleone was born Vito Andolini in the Sicilian village of Corleone, in Italy. In 1901, when Vito is a child, the local Mafia boss, Don Ciccio, murders both Vito's father, Antonio, and Vito's older brother, Paulo. Don Ciccio's henchmen then attempt to kill Vito, but he escapes on a ship to New York, where he changes his last name to "Corleone." In America, Vito befriends the young Genco Abbando and works as a grocery clerk. Here, Puzo establishes Vito's qualities that define his character throughout his life: he is cunning, forward-thinking, amiable, and even-tempered but also cruel when the situation demands it. Vito starts a family and collaborates with two local criminals, Peter Clemenza and Salvatore Tessio. When Don Fanucci, the local "Black Hand" (extortionist), demands tribute money, Vito successfully murders him. This development begins Vito's path towards becoming a respected (and feared) crime boss. He forms a legitimate olive oil company that he uses as a front for the various criminal activities, including gambling and bootlegging, that he consolidates over time into the Corleone Family. Through a combination of favoritism, palm-greasing, and subtly implied threats, the Don builds a network of "friends" (including judges and politicians), whose protection brings enormous power to his criminal enterprise. Vito's wisdom, his use of violence as a last resort, and his willingness to aid those who promise loyalty to him as their "Godfather" makes him a rare voice of reason in the tumultuous criminal underworld.

Santino "Sonny" Corleone – Sonny is the eldest son of Don Vito Corleone and one of the novel's principle protagonists. In contrast to his father's even-tempered demeanor and tendency to make violence a last resort, Sonny is hotheaded, impetuous, and quick to use violence to resolve a dispute. Sonny is also lascivious and known for his extremely large phallus. Despite being married to Sandra, Sonny openly has an affair with Lucy Mancini and other women. Sonny's bad temper and high libido often clouds his judgment. As a result, Vito thinks Sonny is unsuited to succeed him as Don of the Family, a role that demands cool judgement and forethought. Born in Manhattan, the young Sonny witnesses Vito's murder of Fanucci, a key moment that baptizes him into the "Family business." As a teenager, Sonny works as a violent enforcer for his Family when the Corleones are at war with the other Mafia families. His temperamental issues notwithstanding, Sonny becomes "acting boss" of the Corleone Family after Sollozzo and Phillip Tattaglia nearly murder Vito after the latter refuses a role in Sollozzo's drug racket. Although Sonny's temper leads him to demand revenge, Tom Hagen convinces Sonny to negotiate with Sollozzo and his police protector, McCluskey. Sonny proves a fairly capable leader, as demonstrated by his role in sanctioning Michael's murder of both Sollozzo and McCluskey. Ultimately, however, Sonny's temper leads to his demise after an attempt to kill Carlo for beating up Connie, Sonny's sister,



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Don Vito Corleone – Vito Corleone is the novel's titular *Godfather* and the patriarch and "Don" (Boss) of the Corleone Family, one of the five Mafia crime families in New York. He is also among the novel's principle protagonists alongside his sons

leads to his assassination at the hands of Don Barzini's hitmen. Sonny's death demonstrates the pitfalls of impulsiveness in a criminal subculture that rewards patience and deft negotiation.

Michael Corleone – Michael is Don Vito Corleone's third-youngest child who becomes the new Don of the Corleone Crime Family after his father's retirement and subsequent passing. Unlike the hotheaded Sonny and the passive Fredo, Michael shares his father's cunning, even-temperedness, and quiet ruthlessness, all of which make him the ideal candidate to succeed Vito as Don. At the beginning of the novel, Puzo introduces Michael as the one Corleone son who *does not* wish to join the Family business. Michael attends Dartmouth College and, in 1941, he enlists in the army following America's entry in World War II. Although he earns medals for bravery in combat, Michael's military service angers Vito, who believes that family loyalty supersedes patriotism. Michael also dates the non-Italian teaching student, Kay Adams, further demonstrating his willingness to break from family tradition. Yet Puzo uses Michael to highlight the Mafia's suction-like power to absorb even those who wish to escape its all-consuming influence. Sollozzo's attempted murder of Don Vito thrusts Michael into the position of his father's protector. His loyalty to his father leads Michael to become the "button man" (hitman) who "makes his bones" (gains membership in the Mafia) by murdering both Sollozzo and McCluskey. To escape prosecution for these murders, Michael flees to Sicily, where, under the protection of the local Mafia chieftains, he becomes thoroughly enmeshed in the world of organized crime. There, he marries a beautiful girl named Apollonia—having essentially cut Kay out of his life at this point—but Apollonia dies tragically in a car bomb explosion meant for Michael. After returning to New York and marrying Kay, Michael takes over as Don of the Family, with his father's blessing, and successfully orchestrates the murder of the other Mafia Dons and Moe Greene, who stands in the way of the Corleones' plan to expand into Las Vegas. Even more so than Vito, Michael represents the role destiny plays in shaping the fate of those who cast their lot with the mob.

Frederico "Fredo" Corleone – Fredo is Don Vito Corleone's second-youngest child. Like his older brother, Sonny, Fredo wants to join the Family business. However, Fredo is a passive, often weak-willed individual who lacks Sonny's ruthlessness and Michael's intelligence, making him ill-suited to leading a criminal enterprise. As a baby, Fredo contracted pneumonia before growing into an aggressive child who often got into physical fights with his brothers. The adult Fredo witnesses the attempted murder of his father, during which he becomes paralyzed with fear. His shameful failure to protect Vito relegates Fredo to relatively minor roles in the Family business. What Fredo lacks in toughness and intelligence, however, he compensates for with his gregarious personality. His personal charisma secures him a role overseeing parts of the Corleones'

Las Vegas casino operations alongside Moe Greene. Even in this role, however, Fredo largely works to entertain and placate guests before business meetings, and his penchant for womanizing leads Greene to deny Fredo a full partnership in the casino rackets. Fredo's character demonstrates that, in the world of the Mafia, those who cannot tolerate violence cannot hope to gain real power.

Constanza "Connie" Corleone – Connie is Don Vito Corleone's youngest child and his only daughter. As a woman, she has no role to play in the Corleone Family's deeply patriarchal criminal enterprise. Puzo first introduces Connie at the beginning of the novel, during her wedding to Carlo Rizzi. Vito is a doting father towards Connie, but he ends this special treatment after she marries the abusive Carlo, claiming that she is now her husband's property, not his. Connie's character embodies the passive role that women play in Puzo's novel. Rather than being fully realized humans with their own autonomy and ambitions, women instead function as pawns in the male characters' personal and professional schemes. The alcoholic and gambling-addicted Carlo verbally and physically abuses Connie and cheats on her with other women. Neither Vito nor Mama Corleone will intercede on Connie's behalf, citing the husband's supreme authority in marital matters. Only Sonny, who is deeply protective of Connie, punishes Carlo for his abuse. Sonny's aid, however, leads to his death at the hands of Barzini's hitmen, demonstrating how Connie's importance to the story hinges on the ways her existence affects the men around her.

Mama Corleone – Mama Corleone, whose first name does not appear in the novel, is the wife of Don Vito Corleone and the mother of Sonny, Fredo, Michael, and Connie. Born in Sicily, Mama Corleone immigrates to New York in the early 20th century, where she marries Vito at a young age. Her role in the novel is that of a passive homemaker and devout Catholic who cares for her children and has no role in her husband's criminal operations. Unlike the articulate Vito, Mama Corleone speaks with a heavy, stereotypical Italian accent and is a largely voiceless character, further attesting to her relative unimportance as a character in a world in which men hold compete power in both personal and professional matters. Despite her minor role, however, Puzo indicates that Mama Corleone is well aware of the reality of her husband's "business" and merely chooses to be silent about it.

Thomas "Tom" Hagen – Tom is a lawyer, the Corleone Family Consigliere (councilor), and the unofficially adopted son of Don Vito Corleone and Mama Corleone. Tom is of Irish and German heritage and is the first non-Sicilian to hold the title of *Consigliere* in the history of the Mafia, a fact that causes the other mob families to refer to the Corleone Family derisively as the "Irish Gang." As a child, Tom's alcoholic father abandoned him and his mother died of an eye infection. The orphaned Tom lived on the streets until Sonny found him and brought him to

Vito, who took him in but never formally adopted him. Tom grew up alongside Sonny, Michael, Fredo, and Connie. As an adult, Tom graduates from law school and practices as an attorney. Tom's cunning and legal expertise impresses Don Vito, who offers Tom a role working for the Corleone Family. He accepts Don Vito's offer because he knows that gaining a prominent foothold in the Corleone Family promises personal **wealth** and power. In 1945, when the Corleone Family *Consigliere* Genco Abbandando dies of cancer, Vito formally appoints Hagen to the position. The title grants Hagen immense power and responsibility in the Family's affairs, especially regarding the conflict between Vito's godson, Johnny Fontane and the Hollywood producer Jack Woltz. In many ways, Tom Hagen serves as a surrogate for the reader, who shares his status as an outsider permitted an insider's view of the clandestine world of the Italian-American Mafia.

Johnny Fontane – Johnny is Don Vito Corleone's godson. He is a famous singer and actor who hails from New York's Little Italy neighborhood, where he grew up as a close friend of Sonny Corleone and the broader Corleone Family. Johnny lives and works in Hollywood, California. He first appears in the novel having a drunken argument with his second wife, the young actress Margot Ashton, who is openly cheating on him. Later, Johnny attends Connie Corleone's wedding, where his celebrity status causes a stir. After performing a few songs for the guests, he tells Don Vito that his career is in decline because he is losing his singing voice. He also asks the Godfather to help him secure a role in an upcoming movie that will restore his career. The film's producer, the powerful movie mogul Jack Woltz, refuses to cast Johnny because the latter stole Woltz's trophy girlfriend. After chastising Johnny for divorcing his first wife, Virginia, and leaving their two daughters for Ashton, Don Vito agrees to get Johnny the movie role. Later in the novel, the Las Vegas surgeon, Jules Segal, removes warts from Johnny's vocal cords, and the surgery allows Johnny to sing once again. Johnny's character highlights the extensive influence Don Corleone has within the film industry. Johnny acts as the Corleone Family's liaison with Hollywood and embodies the domineering presence of male sexuality in the novel. Johnny is a consummate womanizer who makes the sexual conquest of young girls essential to his celebrity identity.

Peter "Pete" Clemenza – Clemenza is a powerful caporegime—a Mafia captain who controls his own territory, acts on orders from the Don, and directs a group of mob soldiers who carry out those orders—in the Corleone crime Family. He is among Don Vito Corleone's closest friends and confidants, as the two first collaborated as young criminals in Little Italy. Clemenza has an enormous belly and operates with a cold ruthlessness when he kills those who cross the Don. His crime territory is the Bronx. Alongside Salvatore Tessio, Clemenza is one of the two original *caporegimes* in the Corleone Family. Clemenza first meets Vito Corleone after Vito agrees to

stash several of Clemenza's guns to hide them from police. Clemenza returns the favor by stealing a lavish rug from a wealthy neighbor for Vito's small apartment. These exchanges lead to Clemenza collaborating with Vito and Tessio hijacking and reselling goods such as dresses and guns. Clemenza demonstrates the type of unflinching loyalty upon which the Mafia thrives. After Sonny discovers that Clemenza's own protégé, Paulie Gatto, has betrayed Vito to Sollozzo's hitmen, Clemenza himself, along with Rocco Lampone, carries out Paulie's murder. Clemenza also plays a key role in the plot to assassinate Sollozzo and McCluskey by teaching Michael how to carry out the murder and stashing the pistol in the toilet at Luna Azure Restaurant for Michael to retrieve.

Salvatore "Sal" Tessio – Tessio is the other powerful caporegime in the Corleone Family alongside Peter Clemenza. Tessio first collaborates with Vito Corleone and Clemenza as a young man in Little Italy. When Don Fanucci demands protection money from the three men's rackets, Tessio is the first to agree to Vito's plan that they pay Fanucci less than he demands so that Vito can snare him in a murder trap. Tessio's early trust in Vito solidifies a lifelong personal and business relationship between the two men, and Don Vito eventually makes Tessio a *caporegime* in charge of the Corleone Family's Brooklyn territory. After Sollozzo's attempt on Don Vito's life, Tessio's soldiers are instrumental in carrying out the retaliatory murder of Bruno Tattaglia. In contrast to Clemenza, who embodies Mafia loyalty, Tessio becomes a symbol of betrayal. Although he respects Michael Corleone, Tessio does not trust him to protect the Corleone Family's interests after Don Vito's death. In order to lay the foundation for his own crime Family, Tessio arranges a peace summit between Michael and Don Barzini, knowing that the latter will murder Michael there. When Michael discovers the plot, he has Tessio assassinated as a warning to other potential traitors.

Virgil "The Turk" Sollozzo – Sollozzo is a narcotics smuggler and dealer. He approaches Don Vito Corleone with a proposition to make the Corleone Family partners in his heroin ring in exchange for protection from the corrupt judges and politicians that Don Corleone keeps on his payroll. As Sollozzo is a powerfully built, intimidating figure of dark complexion, Tom Hagen likens the man's fearsomeness to that of Corleone Family enforcer, Luca Brasi. His nickname, "The Turk," derives from the fact he is skilled with a knife (a trait attributed to Turkish thieves) and because he amassed his heroin empire in Turkey and allegedly married a Turkish woman. Puzo also likens Sollozzo's prominent nose to that of a Turkish *scimitar* (sabre). Sollozzo proposes to use his contacts in Turkey to harvest poppies and ship them to Sicily, where his Italian mob connections will process the poppies into heroin. With the backing of the Tattaglia Crime Family, Sollozzo wants to smuggle the heroin into America and distribute it with the aid of the Corleones. When Don Vito rejects Sollozzo's offer

because he believes the drug business is too dangerous and “dirty,” Sollozzo attempts to murder Vito so that he can do business with Sonny, who expresses interest in the drug operation. When Michael eventually kills Sollozzo and McCluskey as retaliation for their hit on Don Vito, the murders set off the Five Families War. In contrast to old-line “moustache Pete” bosses like Vito, who fears that drugs will scare off his political allies, Sollozzo’s character represents the new era of Mafia business, which has no moral qualms about embracing drug trafficking.

Captain Mark McCluskey – McCluskey is a corrupt Irish-American police captain who is on the payrolls of both Virgil Sollozzo and the Tattaglias. McCluskey first appears in the novel after Michael calls the police to report the loss of guard detail over Don Vito Corleone, who lies unprotected in the hospital after Sollozzo’s hitmen shoot him. McCluskey arrives on the scene and confronts Michael, who accuses the captain of removing the guards. McCluskey responds by punching Michael in the face, breaking his jaw. A long-time member of the New York City Police Department, whose father was a police sergeant, McCluskey resents his low pay and sees nothing wrong with engaging in “clean graft” so that his kids can attend good colleges. He is an old friend of Bruno Tattaglia through their sons’ university classes and agrees to protect the Tattaglia Family’s drug operations with Sollozzo in exchange for a hefty, ongoing bribe. McCluskey’s association with Sollozzo, however, proves to be his downfall when Michael murders both him and Sollozzo at the Luna Azure Restaurant.

Luca Brasi – Brasi is Don Corleone’s most loyal and trusted enforcer, a Mafia henchman who carries out murders and beatings on behalf of the Don. Luca is a towering figure whose fearsome size and intimidating grimace strikes fear into everyone except Don Corleone. Brasi has a reputation as a brutal killer with an unlimited potential for inflicting savage violence on those who betray or cross the Corleone Family. Brasi began his life of crime as a teenager when he killed his abusive, alcoholic father and pushed a neighbor off a roof for sleeping with his mother. Brasi’s work as a Corleone Family enforcer helps further build his legendary reputation. In one instance, when two soldiers from Al Capone’s Chicago Outfit attempted to kill Don Vito, Brasi tracked the men down and dismembered one with an axe while the man was still alive. The man’s partner choked on the gag Brasi placed in his mouth. In another horrifying incident, Brasi forced an Italian midwife, Filomena, to kill his newborn baby (whose mother is a prostitute), by tossing the child into a furnace. Puzo describes Brasi as a man without feeling, ethics, or conscience who does not fear death, the Devil, or hell, but who *chooses* to fear Don Corleone, to whom he swears eternal loyalty. Brasi represents the pure evil that comes from crime without conscience. Even bosses like Don Corleone adhere to some rules and ethics, but Brasi embodies an almost nihilistic rejection of any human

compassion. Ultimately, Bruno Tattaglia and Virgil Sollozzo murder Brasi when he tries to spy on their operations for Don Corleone.

Kay Adams – Kay is Michael Corleone’s long-term girlfriend and eventual wife, as well as the mother of his children. Born in New Hampshire to a Baptist minister (Mr. Adams) and a homemaker (Mrs. Adams), Kay meets Michael at Dartmouth University in 1945, where she is studying education, and soon becomes his girlfriend. As a non-Italian woman, Kay represents the life away from his Sicilian-American heritage that Michael initially wishes to lead. Kay is intelligent, well educated, and independent. She first appears in the novel as Michael’s guest at Connie’s wedding, where she learns about the Corleone Family business. Kay and Michael are sexually active long before their marriage, and they carry out this affair in New York hotels to avoid conflicting with their families’ respective taboos against premarital sex. Michael and Kay separate temporarily after Michael flees to Sicily after he murders Sollozzo and McCluskey. During this period, Kay graduates from Dartmouth and takes a job as an elementary school teacher. She also develops a friendly relationship with Mama Corleone, who urges her to let Michael go. Kay reunites with Michael, however, when he returns to America. She initially resents him for vanishing from her life, but she becomes further drawn into his Mafia world after their marriage and the birth of their children. Due to her gender and her status as a non-Italian, Kay cannot have any role in the Corleone’s criminal operations, which Michael explicitly keeps secret from her. She therefore represents the view of outsiders who can occasionally peer into the Mafia’s secretive subculture, but only so far before they are pushed away.

Jack Woltz – Woltz is a wealthy and powerful Hollywood movie producer who bitterly resents Johnny Fontane after the latter has an affair with Woltz’s young girlfriend. In addition to his money and influence within the movie industry, Woltz also has connections with the President of the United States and the FBI chief, J. Edgar Hoover. A greedy, pretentious, and power-hungry man, Woltz is also a womanizer and a pedophile who preys on underage girls hoping to break into the film industry. At the request of Johnny Fontane, Woltz meets with Tom Hagen, who offers to use Don Corleone’s influence within the labor industry to quell the producer’s union troubles if Woltz agrees to cast Fontane in his new picture. When Woltz angrily refuses, Corleone’s henchmen decapitate the head from Woltz’s prized racehorse, an act that forces Woltz to give Fontane the role. Woltz embodies what Mafia members call the pezzonovante, the big shots who wield power and influence within legitimate society, but who do not understand that real power entails a willingness to operate completely outside of the law.

Paulie Gatto – Gatto is Peter Clemenza’s handpicked protégé and Don Vito Corleone’s bodyguard. Paulie works for

Clemenza as a “button man,” a soldier who executes an order (usually murder) after the caporegime “presses the button” (gives the order). Paulie at first proves loyal to Clemenza, so much so that Clemenza passes over other men with more experience than Gatto in order to move the latter up the Corleone Family ranks. Paulie dutifully “makes his bones” by committing a first murder for the Family, and in exchange, Clemenza gives Paulie a percentage of the Family’s bookmaking income and a fake union payroll slot. Despite the trust Clemenza places in him, however, Paulie betrays the Corleones by taking secret payments from Sollozzo and calling in sick during bodyguard duties, leaving only the feeble Fredo to protect Don Corleone. Paulie’s betrayal leads directly to the near assassination of the Don. When Sonny discovers that Gatto has turned traitor, he orders his death. Clemenza and his new button man, Rocco Lampone, drive Paulie to a deserted road and shoot him in the head.

Rocco Lampone – Lampone is an associate in Peter Clemenza’s regime. He is a former soldier who sustained a knee injury under combat in North Africa that left him with a limp. After Lampone was discharged from the army in 1943, Clemenza took him in due to a war-induced shortage of reliable Mafia soldiers. Lampone first works as a contact in the Corleone’s garment rackets and handles government employees charged with providing bootlegged food stamps for sale on the black market. Lampone’s good judgement and knack for knowing when to use force steadily earns him Clemenza’s respect. Clemenza eventually chooses Lampone as his new “button man” after Paulie Gatto’s betrayal of Don Corleone. Rocco later becomes Michael’s trusted enforcer and takes Tessio’s place as caporegime after Tessio’s betrayal of the Family and his subsequent murder.

Nino Valenti – Nino Valenti is Johnny Fontane’s boyhood friend and eventual musical collaborator. Like Fontane, Valenti is also one of Don Vito Corleone’s godsons. A skilled mandolin player and songwriter, Valenti sings backup for Fontane and works as a truck driver for the Corleone Family, though Don Corleone declines to give him a bigger role in the Family’s criminal rackets. After Johnny makes it big in Hollywood, he promises to get Nino a job in California but reneges on this promise. Nino first appears in the novel as he plays mandolin at Connie Corleone’s wedding. Later, he reconnects with Johnny, who records several new records with Nino, introduces him to lascivious Hollywood starlets, and even gets him some film roles that make him a minor movie star. Despite his success, however, Nino is an alcoholic who ignores Jules Segal’s warnings and eventually drinks himself to death at a young age.

Dr. Jules Segal – Segal is a brilliant surgeon who worked at an East Coast university hospital before the administration blacklisted him for performing abortions, which were illegal at the time. He relocates to Las Vegas, where he takes a job as the in-house doctor at the hotel owned by Moe Greene and the

Corleone Family. Despite his skillful hands and knowledge of anatomy, he is relegated to mostly performing abortions on Vegas showgirls and cocktail waitresses, many of whom Fredo Corleone recklessly impregnates. Despite his dedication to his work, Segal is a charismatic and attractive man who dresses informally. In 1950, he meets Lucy Mancini after she moves to Las Vegas following Sonny Corleone’s murder. The two begin dating and Segal discovers that Lucy has a pelvic malformation that causes her to have wide vaginal opening, making it difficult for her to orgasm during sex. He takes her to a skilled Los Angeles surgeon, Frederick Kellner, who fixes her problem. After the surgery, Jules marries Lucy. He later refers Michael Corleone to a facial surgeon who repairs the bone damage in Michael’s face that he sustained from McCluskey’s punch. In return, Michael makes Segal the head of a special hospital in Las Vegas. Segal also removes warts from Johnny Fontane’s vocal cords, saving his singing career.

Lucy Mancini – Lucy is Connie Corleone’s best friend who serves as maid of honor at her wedding. She is also Sonny Corleone’s longtime mistress. At the wedding, Lucy escapes into the Corleone house to have sex with Sonny. Although this creates strains in Sonny’s marriage, they carry on this affair until Sonny’s death, and the Corleone Family often uses Lucy’s Midtown Manhattan apartment as a safe house. After Sonny’s death, Tom Hagen sends Lucy to Las Vegas, where she receives a small share in a Corleone Family hotel. There, she begins dating Jules Segal but laments that Sonny was the only man who could make her climax during sex. Segal discovers that this is due to her pelvic malformation, and connects her with a skilled surgeon who fixes her problem. After the surgery, Lucy marries Segal.

Carlo Rizzi – Rizzi is Connie Corleone’s husband. His father was Sicilian and his mother was from North Italy. As a result, he has striking blond hair and lacks the darker complexion of the Sicilians around him. Rizzi grew up in Nevada but moved to New York to escape petty troubles with the law. In New York, he befriended Sonny Corleone and eventually proposed to Connie. Carlo is well aware of the Corleone Family’s **wealth**, and he marries Connie in part because he hopes to get a piece of their wealth and power for himself. He eventually receives a role running one of the Family’s small bookmaking operations, a relatively unimportant position that he resents. A compulsive gambler and philanderer, Carlo also has a quick temper. He physically and emotionally abuses Connie because he makes him feel powerful to dominate a Corleone. Carlo’s abusiveness towards Connie infuriates Sonny, who regrets introducing Carlo to his sister and beats him mercilessly in the street. Carlo gets revenge on Sonny by intentionally beating Connie again. As an enraged Sonny drives to Carlo’s home to kill him, Don Barzini’s men murder him in a hail of bullets. Towards the end of the novel, Michael discovers that Carlo had collaborated with Barzini. As punishment, Clemenza garrotes Carlo in a **car**.

Amerigo Bonasera – Bonasera is a Sicilian-American undertaker who owns a successful funeral parlor. He is a long-time friend of the Corleone Family, and Don Vito Corleone and Mama Corleone are godparents to his daughter. Bonasera appears early in the novel as he observes the trial of two young men, Jerry Wagner and Kevin Moonan, who savagely beat his daughter. Because the men come from influential families, the judge suspends their sentence, effectively excusing them for their heinous crime. The outraged Bonasera attends Connie's wedding and begs Don Vito to murder his daughter's attackers so that she may have justice. The Don initially rebukes Bonasera for going to the police first and chastises him for his unwillingness to accept the Don's "friendship" over the years. Understanding the disrespect that he has shown Don Vito, Bonasera apologizes and swears his eternal loyalty to him. In return, Don Vito sends Clemenza and Paulie Gatto to beat Wagner and Moonan within inches of their lives. Bonasera's character serves as a surrogate for the reader: through the undertaker, the reader learns that to receive the Don's services, one must swear friendship and loyalty and agree to perform a service for Don Vito in return. Later in the novel, Bonasera does just that when the Don tasks him with properly restoring Sonny Corleone's bullet-ridden corpse for funeral display.

Margot Ashton – Johnny Fontaine's second wife. Margot is a well-known and glamorous Hollywood actress whom Fontaine married after he divorced Virginia. Ashton and Fontaine's marriage is tumultuous: she openly cheats on him (partly in response to his rampant womanizing) and, early in the novel, a drunken Fontaine beats her without hitting her face so as not to spoil her screen image. She responds to his feeble attacks with laughter and derision.

Nazorine – A baker who immigrated to New York from Sicily. He grew up with Vito Corleone in Italy, and the two men remained friends in America. Nazorine once called on Don Vito's assistance after the owner of a furniture store he purchased declared bankruptcy and refused to return his deposit. After Don Corleone swiftly covers the deposit, Nazorine swears his loyalty to the Don. Throughout the years, Nazorine shows his respect to the Don by delivering various baked goods and pastries to him at Christmas, Easter, and family birthdays. At the beginning of the novel, Nazorine implores Don Corleone to prevent Enzo, an Italian prisoner of war and the boyfriend of his daughter, Katherine, from being deported back to Italy. Enzo is also a helper in Nazorine's bakery. In a display of the influence he holds over prominent politicians, Don Vito prevents Enzo's deportation.

Albert "Al" Neri – Neri is a former Sicilian American New York City police officer who becomes Michael Corleone's loyal and trusted bodyguard and enforcer. As a police officer, Neri amassed a fearsome reputation as short-tempered and prone to meting out violent punishment on offenders. His favored

weapon was a large flashlight, which he used to crack the skulls of perpetrators. After Neri accidentally kills the abusive African American pimp, Wax Baines, a judge convicts him of voluntary manslaughter. Tom Hagen and Peter Clemenza liken Neri's personality to that of Luca Brasi and secure his release from prison. After meeting with Michael, Neri swears his loyalty to the Corleone Family and becomes Michael's personal enforcer. Neri carries out the assassinations of both Moe Greene and Emilio Barzini.

Fabrizio – Michael's bodyguard (along with Calo) in Sicily. He is a former sailor in the Italian Navy and has a distinctive tattoo of a husband stabbing his wife and her lover. Fabrizio betrays Michael to the Corleone Family's enemies, which leads to Apollonia's death in a **car** bomb explosion intended for Michael. Fabrizio later moves to Buffalo, New York, where he operates a pizza parlor under a different name. When Michael learns of his location, he has Fabrizio killed.

Genco Abbandando – The Corleone Family's original Consigliere and Tom Hagen's predecessor. A lifelong friend of Don Vito Corleone, Genco grew up in Hell's Kitchen, where his family owned a grocery store. When Vito arrives in New York, the Abbandando family adopts him, and he begins working in their store. Genco and Vito soon become partners in crime, and Vito names his olive oil company (a front for his illegal activity) *Genco Pura*, after his friend. Genco serves as Don Vito's first *Consigliere* until he is stricken with cancer and dies. When Don Corleone visits Genco on his deathbed, the old *Consigliere* implores Vito to stop God from taking him, a testament to the Don's power. Of course, the Don *doesn't* have control over this, reminding readers that regardless of his towering power and influence, the Don is still human.

Les Halley – The bandleader who signed Johnny Fontane to a five-year personal services contract. The contract allows him to loan Fontane out and pocket most of the money he makes. With the help of Luca Brasi and a gun, Don Corleone convinces Halley to release Fontane from the contract in exchange for a \$10,000 payment as well as Halley's life.

Jerry Wagner and Kevin Moonan – Wagner, a wealthy college fraternity member, and Moonan, the son of a politician, are two thugs who brutally beat Bonasera's daughter. After a judge suspends their sentence for the assault, Bonasera calls on Don Corleone to dispense justice. In retaliation for their attack on Bonasera's daughter, Clemenza and Paulie Gatto beat Wagner and Moonan so badly that they undergo plastic surgery on their faces.

Don Fanucci – The freelance "Black Hand" extortionist in Hell's Kitchen and Vito Corleone's first hit. Fanucci extorts "protection" money from individuals and storekeepers and soon conflicts with the young Vito Corleone. However, Vito keenly senses that Fanucci relies on reputation alone to scare people and doesn't back his threats with real violence. After

Fanucci demands a share of the profit from Vito's smuggling rackets, Vito murders him.

The Bocchicchio Family – A branch of the Sicilian Mafia whom Don Corleone calls to broker the peace meeting between the Five Families. After fleeing a mob war in Sicily, the Bocchicchio Family establishes a successful garbage hauling firm in New York's Hudson Valley. The Bocchicchio Family is notorious for the importance they place on family loyalty. To diversify their operations, they establish a profitable business serving as negotiators and hostages who help resolve disputes between other Mafia families. They supply a hostage as a surrogate for Michael Corleone during the Corleone Family's negotiations with Sollozzo and the Tattaglias.

Emilio Barzini – The Don of the Barzini Family, the second most powerful Family behind the Corleones. Barzini controls gambling in Queens, Brooklyn, and Staten Island. He also has interests in Las Vegas, Cuba, and Miami Beach. Barzini allies with Phillip Tattaglia and Virgil Sollozzo to murder Don Vito Corleone in order to weaken Corleone's turf and absorb his political connections.

Felix Bocchicchio – A member of the Bocchicchio Family who trains as a lawyer. After murdering the man who accuses him of legal fraud and being sentenced to death, Don Vito Corleone convinces Felix to also confess to the murder of Sollozzo and McCluskey in exchange for a permanent payout for his family.

Al Capone – The powerful Don of Chicago's Mafia organization, known as "The Outfit." He attempts to murder Don Vito Corleone in order to overtake the Corleone Family's crime rackets. However, Don Corleone sends Luca Brasi to kill his would-be assailants, thereby sending a warning to Capone not to interfere with the Corleone Family's affairs.

Moe Greene – The Mafia-connected head of multiple casinos in Las Vegas. The Corleone Family bankrolls Greene's hotel-casino. Greene also gives Fredo Corleone a job in the casino at the request of Don Corleone. When Michael Corleone assumes the title of acting boss of the Family, he offers to buy out Greene's hotel. When Greene protests, Michael has him killed.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Katherine – Nazorine's young daughter. She is in love with Enzo, the Italian prisoner of war.

Filomena – Nazorine's wife and Katherine's mother.

Enzo – An Italian prisoner of war paroled to work in New York City. He is Nazorine's helper and Katherine's boyfriend and eventual fiancé.

Anthony Coppola – The son of a man Vito Corleone worked with as a youth in the railroad yards. He asks the Don for \$500 to open up a pizzeria.

Sandra Corleone – Sonny Corleone's wife and the mother of

his children.

Mrs. Abbando – Genco Abbando's elderly wife.

Dr. Kennedy – The wealthy doctor who tends to Genco Abbando on his deathbed.

J. Edgar Hoover – The powerful director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). Hoover is a friend of movie mogul Jack Woltz.

Billy Goff – A powerful member the Hollywood labor unions who is connected to Don Vito Corleone. At the Don's request, Goff instigates labor strikes to punish Jack Woltz. Later in the novel, Goff blocks Johnny Fontane's plans to release his own films. As a result, Tom Hagen has Goff murdered.

Theresa Hagen – Tom Hagen's wife.

Billy – Johnny Fontane's butler.

Sharon Moore – An aspiring actress from Greenwich Village, New York, who comes to Hollywood to audition for a part in a movie. She rejects Johnny Fontane's sexual advances, which baffles him.

Virginia "Ginny" Fontane – The estranged first wife of Johnny Fontane and the mother of his two daughters. Johnny divorces her to marry a young starlet named Margot Ashton, resulting in an bitter split in which Virginia receives a major settlement. After Johnny separates from Margot, he and Virginia reunite as platonic friends.

Roy McElroy – The public relations counsel for the Woltz International Film Corporation. He hosts a Hollywood Lonely Hearts Party at his lavish house.

Deanna Dunn – An Academy Award-winning film starlet who performs oral sex on Nino Valenti at McElroy's party.

Maranzalla – A Hell's Kitchen gangster who leads a criminal ring that specializes in extortion, armed robbery, and gambling.

Signora Colombo – A poor widow who comes to young Vito Corleone for help after her landlord, Mr. Roberto, evicts her from her apartment for keeping a dog.

Mr. Roberto – Signora Colombo's landlord who evicts her for keeping a dog. After Vito Corleone implores him to reconsider the eviction, he learns of Vito's reputation and allows her to stay.

Salvatore Maranzano – Manhattan's gambling chief following the repeal of Prohibition. He connects with Vito Corleone in a crime partnership.

Detective Siriani – The investigative partner of Detective John Philips.

Mr. Adams – A Baptist minister and Kay Adams's father.

Mrs. Adams – Kay Adams's mother.

Sally Rags and Coach – Two bookmakers who work under Carlo Rizzi.

Carlo Tremonti – The Sicilian boss of mob territory in the American South. He is based in Florida, where he controls gambling in Southern towns, as well as in Cuba.

Joseph Zaluci – The Don of Detroit’s Mafia Family. He opposes the Mafia’s involvement in drug trafficking.

Frank Falcone and Anthony Molinari – Mafia Dons from the West Coast. Falcone controls the movie unions and gambling at the movie studios, as well as prostitution in the West. Molinari controls the San Francisco waterfronts, sports gambling, and ensures protection for Fredo Corleone when he moves to Las Vegas to work with Moe Greene.

Domenick Panza – The Don of Boston’s Mafia Family. The other Dons distrust him because his organization is chaotic and rife with violent disorder.

Vincent Forlenza – The Don from Cleveland who controls almost exclusively gambling. Other Mafia members refer to his Family as “the Jewish Family” because many of his advisors are Jewish men.

Anthony Stracci – A Don who controls the New Jersey area and the shipping on the West Side docks of Manhattan. His is the least powerful of New York’s Five Families.

Ottilio Cuneo – The Don of the Family that controls Upstate New York. He smuggles Italian immigrants from Canada and controls all upstate gambling and the state licensing of racing tracks.

Phillip Tattaglia – The Don of the Tattaglia Family and the father of Bruno Tattaglia. He controls prostitution in New York and allies with Barzini in a war against the Corleone Family.

Bruno Tattaglia – The son of Phillip Tattaglia. Bruno controls an exclusive nightclub, where he and Sollozzo murder Luca Brasi. Sonny Corleone retaliates for Brasi’s murder by killing Bruno.

Dr. Frederick Kellner – A Los Angeles-based surgeon who performs the vaginal reconstruction surgery on Lucy Mancini.

Don Tommasino – The powerful Mafia Don in Sicily and ally of Don Vito Corleone. Don Tommasino looks after Michael when he hides in Sicily to flee murder charges.

Dr. Taza – Don Tommasino’s uncle.

Calo – One of Michael’s shepherd bodyguards in Sicily, the other being Fabrizzio.

Apollonia – A beautiful young Sicilian girl whom Michael marries during his exile in Sicily. She ultimately dies in a car bomb explosion intended for Michael.

Signora Vitelli – Apollonia’s mother.

Signor Vitelli – Apollonia’s father.

Filomena – An elderly Sicilian midwife whom Michael encounters during his exile in Sicily. She maintains a deep hatred for Luca Brasi, who once forced her to murder his newborn child.

Rita Neri – Al Neri’s estranged wife.

Thomas – Al Neri’s nephew.

Wax Baines – An African American pimp, dope-pusher, and strong-arm artist. Neri kills him in a fit of rage.

Detective John Phillips A cop on the Corleone Family payroll

TERMS

Mafia – The Mafia is a type of organized crime syndicate whose principle operations include organizing and overseeing illegal activities such as racketeering, extortion, prostitution, drug trafficking, bootlegging, political corruption, union infiltration, murder for hire, and gambling, among others. The Mafia also settles disputes among criminal factions and protects them from one another’s cheating. In addition, Mafias dispense extralegal justice by playing the role of a government for the criminal underworld and offering protection for people who cannot go to legitimate authorities because they are involved in illegal markets. In popular culture, “the Mafia,” or *Cosa Nostra* (“our thing”) usually refers specifically to the Italian-American crime families (as depicted in *The Godfather*) that have long dominated organized crime in New York, Chicago, and other cities. The word “Mafia” has diverse origins, but likely derives from the nineteenth-century Sicilian term *mafiusu*, which loosely translates to “swagger” or “bravado” and refers to an arrogant bully who is also fearless and enterprising. Italian mobsters’ brash criminal behavior, combined with their frequent, often exaggerated displays of masculine bravado has associated them with the term “Mafia” in the popular imagination.

Five Families – The Five Families are New York City’s five major organized crime syndicates in the Italian-American Mafia. Their structure dates to 1931, when a Sicilian mob figure named Salvatore Maranzano formerly organized warring factions of Italian-American criminals into Five Family groups with demarcated territories and a hierarchical structure. Each of the Five Families report to a ruling Commission, the Mafia’s governing body that mediates disputes among the families. In *The Godfather*, the Five Families are the Corleone, Tattaglia, Barzini, Cuneo, and Stracci families. The real-life Five Families are the Bonanno, Colombo, Gambino, Genovese, and Lucchese crime families.

Don – The title used by **Vito Corleone**, “Don” means “boss” or head of a crime family. An honorific title that denotes respect and power, the word originates in the Spanish titles “Don” and the feminine “Donna.” Under Spanish rule, Sicilians adopted these titles and applied them to members of the nobility, such as barons, priests, large landholders and other respected men and women. Mario Puzo’s novel *The Godfather* is largely responsible for associating the term “Don” with the Mafia, and some real-life Mafia bosses adopted the term after the release

of Puzo's novel and its subsequent film adaptations.

Godfather – Another title used by **Don Vito Corleone**. It is a term of endearment, respect, and authority. In the Catholic tradition, a godfather is a spiritual title bestowed upon a man by the parents of a new child. The chosen godfather takes a special interest in that child's development and agrees to look after the child if his or her parents should die. Mario Puzo invented the title of "Godfather" for a Mafia Don to signify Vito Corleone's power and status as a patriarchal figure to both his blood family and his crime family.

Caporegime – A Mafia rank similar to "captain" that denotes a ranking "Made Man:" an official member of the Mafia who directs a crew of soldiers and usually exercises control of criminal rackets over a specific geographical territory. In the Mafia family hierarchy, a *caporegime* reports to, and executes orders from, the Boss, the underboss, and the consigliere. Peter Clemenza and Salvatore Tessio are the Corleone Family caporegimes in *The Godfather*.

Consigliere – A Mafia term meaning councilor or advisor who advises the Don. Represented by **Tom Hagen** and **Genco Abbando** in Puzo's novel, the *consigliere* also mediates disputes within the family and represents the family in meetings with other crime families. The *consigliere* also acts as liaison between the crime family and other key figures, such as business and labor leaders, judges, and politicians. In terms of hierarchy, the *consigliere's* power is third beneath the Don and his underboss. He is the only figure within the family permitted to dispute the Don's decisions.

Soldier – The lowest "Made" member of a Mafia crime family, soldiers still command respect in the organization. Soldiers make up a caporegime's crew. To become full members of the Mafia, soldiers are required to take the oath of silence (*omertà*) and to "make their bones" by killing another person in service of the family. **Paulie Gatto** and **Rocco Lampone** are examples of soldiers from *The Godfather*.

Made his Bones – A phrase that means committing murder for a mob family. The phrase indicates that a man wishing to become "made" in the mob must first make "bones" out of another man by killing him, thereby demonstrating his loyalty and dedication to the family.

Pezzonovante – A Sicilian term that means "big shot" and ".95 Caliber," referring to a particularly large and powerful rifle cartridge (hence, a "big shot"). In Puzo's novel, **Vito Corleone** and other Mafia members refer to professionals such as lawyers, doctors, professors, politicians, church leaders and others who hold power and social capital in legitimate society as the *pezzonovante*. The term is largely pejorative, as Mafia members often believe the *pezzonovante's* power to be less than their own.

Button Man – A soldier who executes an order (usually murder) after the caporegime "presses the button," or gives the order.

Omertà – A Sicilian term referring to a code of silence and honor that potential Mafia members are required to swear to become "Made" in a crime family. Adhering to *omertà* means that members must never inform authorities or rival criminals about Mafia secrets and activities under any circumstances. Punishment for breaking the code of *omertà* is death.

Black Hand – In the early twentieth century, the Black Hand was a type of freelance criminal active in New York's Little Italy. Black hands extorted so-called "protection money" from storekeepers and individuals that, in reality, merely protected people from retaliation by the Black Hand. **Don Fanucci** is the most prominent example of the Black Hand in Puzo's novel.

Racket – An organized criminal act that constitutes a type of substantial and repeated business activity. A popular type of **Mafia racket** is "protection," in which mobsters demand that a business or individual pay them a fee in exchange for protection from dangerous individuals. Mafia members typically cause damage to the business of those who refuse to pay them for "protection." Conducting a racket is known as racketeering.

Infamnia – An Italian word meaning an "infamy." **Don Corleone** refers to pedophilia and drug dealing as examples of *infamnia*.

Going to the Mattresses – A phrase denoting a Mafia family's preparation for war with one or more rival families. To prepare for wartime, a mob family sets up headquarters in various secret apartments. Mob soldiers then move into these apartments, which, when not fighting, they use as hideouts until the war is over. By staying in apartments and "going to the mattresses," the soldiers can prevent rival families from tracking their movements, and protect their own personal families from violence.

Hit – A Mafia term for a murder. Generally, caporegimes and soldiers carry out hits on orders from the Don. Targets of mob hits include people who have betrayed or crossed the family.

Enforcer – An enforcer is a term for a Mafia associate who is responsible for handling those who do not abide by a mob family's rules, policies, and deals. A Mafia enforcer generally relies on violence or the threat of violence to enforce family policies. A Don will often call on his enforcer to murder (hit) those men who pose a threat to a family's financial wellbeing. **Luca Brasi** is the most famous enforcer in *The Godfather*.

Associate – An associate is an unofficial member of a crime family who is involved in Mafia rackets. Associates act as intermediaries between the family and other organizations/people, such as labor unions, drug dealers, and politicians. If an associate does not come from full Italian heritage, he cannot become a full "made" member of a Mafia family.

Tail – A car driven by law enforcement or rival criminals that follows another Mafia member's car in order to track its movements.

Payroll – The Corleone Family keeps a list of people they

bribe—especially police, lawyers, politicians, and other individuals with power and influence—in exchange for information and special treatment. They refer to this bribe list as their “payroll.”

Dago, Wop, Goombah, Greaseball, Guinea – These are derogatory epithets used to describe people of Italian descent.

Jack Woltz, Carlo Rizzi, and Moe Greene uses these terms to describe Corleone Family members.

Finocchio – An offensive Italian term for a homosexual. **Don Corleone** uses the term to mock a crying **Johnny Fontane**.

Moustache Pete – A derogatory term that younger Mafia members use to refer to older Dons, whom they view as unwilling to embrace new business ventures such as narcotics due to their outdated notions of decency. The term references the popular style of facial hair that many older Mafia bosses prefer.

Lupera – A type of shotgun commonly used in Sicily.



THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



CRIME AND JUSTICE

The Godfather tells the story of the Corleone Family, in which the primary protagonists are the leaders of a New York-based Mafia

organization—first Don Vito Corleone and then his son, Michael Corleone. Perhaps it should be no surprise that in a novel in which the “bad guys” are the focus of the story that the concepts of crime and justice are, at their core, complicated.

The primary source of the complicated nature of crime and justice in the novel is the fact that, as the novel portrays it, there is no pure, simple justice available anywhere. The novel makes this point in its opening scene, when Amerigo Bonasera sits in court and is forced to watch as the two well-off boys who brutally beat his daughter are given only suspended sentences because of their father's political connections. In fact, in every instance in which the novel portrays what are supposed to be sources of societal justice or even just esteemed industries, they are marked by a distinct *lack* of justice, merit, or anything redeeming. Lawyers and government officials are corrupt, either in the pocket of crime bosses or seeking to curry favor with even more powerful “legitimate” politicians. The police, underpaid and resentful of that fact, systematically overlook all instances of what they call “clean graft,” in which officers take bribes to look the other way regarding crimes such as gambling

and prostitution. Powerful labor leaders take bribes to start strikes, while powerful media titans like Jack Woltz use their positions to follow through on petty grudges or to prey on the less powerful (which in Jack Woltz's case, means young girls seeking film careers). The novel portrays a world in which there isn't any justice anywhere, and there is corruption everywhere, just visible behind the veneer of legitimate society. It is in this environment—an environment that causes people like Amerigo Bonasera who “once trusted law and order” to justifiably lose their faith in society—in which crime Families such as the Corleone's rise and thrive. As Bonasera himself says after the trial lets off the two boys who beat his daughter: “for justice we must go on our knees to Don Corleone.”

The critical point here is that the Corleone Family *does* dispense a sort of justice. Don Corleone responds to Bonasera's crisis by sending out two soldiers to beat the boys who attacked Bonasera's daughter. At another time, Don Corleone frees Johnny Fontane from a legitimately predatory contract by threatening to kill the man who tricked Johnny into signing it. And just when Don Corleone was beginning to form his crime Family, he helped the widow Signora Colombo who had been unfairly (though not illegally) evicted from her apartment by talking to her landlord—a talk that, despite being pleasant, scared the landlord into changing his decision. Put simply: the Don Corleone and the Corleone Family offer help and justice to those who can't get either from mainstream society.

However, the justice that Corleone offers is not the same as the ideals of the justice available under the law. Where law-based justice is meant to be impartial and universal, applying to everyone, the justice Corleone dispenses is personal and contingent: it is offered only to those who pledge loyalty. When Bonasera does come to Don Corleone to get justice for his daughter, Corleone says about Bonasera's original choice to seek justice through the courts: “You spurned my friendship. You feared to be in my debt.” Once Bonasera swears loyalty, though, Corleone assures him that “you shall have your justice.” Whereas justice under the law is meant for the betterment of society and as an end unto itself, Corleone's justice is always an exchange, always offered as a favor with an understanding that the favor will be repaid. And, in addition, because the Mafia metes out justice by committing crimes, those who seek out Mafia justice by extension become participants in crime. Those who benefit from Don Corleone's justice therefore become enmeshed in the Corleone family in two ways: first, because they personally owe Don Corleone for his help; second, because in getting Don Corleone's help they have become connected to illegal activities that could get them into trouble with the law, and so they are reliant on Don Corleone's protection from those potential consequences. *The Godfather* ultimately suggests that although the Corleone Family commits crimes in the service of “justice,” this justice is a tool rather than

an end: it is meant to bind people to the Family so that the Family can more easily engage in criminal profit-making, which is the true goal of the Mafia.

And yet there is an additional tension that the novel explores but doesn't ever entirely resolve. At one point in the novel, Don Corleone says to his fellow mob bosses about the powerbrokers of "legitimate" society: "Who is to say we should obey the laws they make for their own interest and to our hurt?" Corleone and the other mob bosses seem to legitimately believe that *all* of society is a kind of Mafia, that society is a rigged system set up only to protect and enrich those who are powerful, and that the laws and legitimacy of that society are just fronts designed to make the rigged game less visible and harder to upset. What's a bit less clear is whether the *novel* agrees with the crime bosses. The fact that there are essentially no examples of pure or selfless justice occurring in the book, and that every character, ranging from judges to Hollywood moguls, seem to be corrupt and interested only in their own wealth and luxury, does seem to support the crime bosses' point of view. At the same time, it's possible to argue that the book shows how the Mafia works to corrupt public institutions—it bribes judges, the police, forces media moguls to pay "protection" against trumped-up labor strikes—such that more idealistic versions of justice become increasingly scarce, which in turn only strengthens the Mafia as their own brand of transactional justice becomes the only readily available justice around.



POWER

In its portrayal of the rise of the Corleone crime Family to power, and its central family's struggle to maintain that power in the face of various

competing factions, both inside and outside the family, *The Godfather* explores the nature of power. The novel's exploration of power proceeds at two different levels. First, it examines interpersonal and organizational power, the qualities required in leaders to build and run organizations. Second, it explores the differences between what might be called legitimate and illegitimate power, between the power of the state and of legitimate enterprises and the power of the Mafia.

The novel is full of characters seeking to gain and wield power. But perhaps the clearest way to understand the novel's take on what is actually required of a person to truly become a leader is to look at the three sons of Don Corleone, and the various ways that they fail and succeed at wielding the power that their father has built. Fredo is the most obvious failure. He is cowardly, as shown when he fails to protect his father during the rival mobster Sollozzo's attempted hit on Don Corleone. Further, he is pleasure-seeking and uncontrolled, as his constant womanizing implies. And he's not that smart—he fails to profitably run the Corleone's hotel in Las Vegas. Sonny, in contrast, seems to have the makings of a leader: he is

charismatic, courageous, and physically dominant. When Don Corleone is injured, it is Sonny who becomes acting Don. Yet Sonny's hot-headedness and sentimentality makes him both reckless and predictable, traits that the rival Barzini Family take advantage of when they lay a trap and then ambush and kill him. It is instead Michael, a war hero who originally wants nothing to do with his family's crime connections, who ends up as the leader of the Corleone Family. Michael's war heroism makes clear his physical bravery, but what also becomes clear over the course of the novel is his intelligence, his family loyalty, and his fundamental cold-bloodedness. It is Michael who both comes up with the plan to trick and then kill Sollozzo and the crooked cop McCluskey, and it is Michael who carries out the plan. Michael gives up everything he once wished for to protect and rebuild his family's power. Michael is also able to develop long-term plans, calm enough to wait for them to come to fruition, and ruthless enough to carry them out when the time is ripe. In virtually any situation in which a character in the book fails to show these traits—whether courage, loyalty, intelligence, or cold-blooded ruthlessness—that character usually ends up either losing power, or dead.

While portraying the personal attributes necessary for leadership, the novel also shows the way that such traits can be used to build power. Vito Corleone's rise to power in the criminal underworld embodies these methods. As a Sicilian immigrant in New York's Little Italy, Vito gains power by murdering Fanucci, the Black Hand (a Mafia precursor that extorted money from immigrants). Vito understands that Fanucci relies on "personal brute force" but lacks the connections that are essential to maintaining power. By killing Fanucci, Vito becomes a "man of respect" in the community because people know he will kill to get what he wants. Here, Puzo demonstrates how violent crime is an essential element in building illegitimate power. And yet Vito uses his new reputation not simply to extort and prey upon those in his community. Instead, he uses his power to build connections, to develop a network of power throughout the community. Thus, when the poor widow, Signora Colombo, complains that her landlord has evicted her, Vito intervenes on her behalf by paying off the landlord, who both lets the widow back in after learning of Vito's reputation *and* repays Vito in order to stay on his good side. Vito does favors, builds a network, and then cashes in those favors. Of course, he also uses strong-arm tactics to get what he wants, but he does so intelligently, behind fronts. He builds a lucrative, legitimate olive oil business, but does so using illegal means, building a monopoly by threatening both retailers and competitors with violence. Vito also performs favors for others and cultivates favors in return. His model of illegitimate power rests on the exchange of favors and good deeds with the threat of violence just below the surface.

The novel also explores power in a broader sense by showing both the contrasts and similarities between illegitimate and

legitimate power. This contrast is shown most sharply when members of the Corleone family come into conflict with leaders of legitimate institutions or industries. The Corleones pejoratively call such people the *pezzonovanti*, a Sicilian term that means “big shot.” The *pezzonovanti* include professionals such as lawyers, doctors, professors, politicians, leaders in the church, and others who hold social and political capital that, in turn, gives them power over those of lesser means. Mainstream society considers the *pezzonovanti*’s power to be legitimate because they derive it from legitimate sources: the state, the law, expertise in a trade, the church.

The *pezzonovanti* consider their power to be greater than the illegitimate power of any mobster. This belief is evident in the Corleone’s interactions with the powerful film producer Jack Woltz. When Corleone consigliere Tom Hagen tries to strongarm Woltz into making a film starring Johnny Fontane, Woltz not only refuses but mocks Hagen for even trying to force him to do anything. Woltz makes clear the extent of his legitimate power, bragging about his connections to both the President and the FBI. Woltz, however, mistakes “the power he wielded in his world to be more potent than the power of Don Corleone.” Woltz is willing to bend the law, but unlike Corleone, he is not willing to break it. Woltz’s power rests on the assumption that legitimate society deems some actions beyond the pale of decency. When faced with Corleone’s willingness to do things that are truly bloodthirsty—such as to kill Woltz’s prized stallion and place the animal’s severed head into bed next to a sleeping Woltz—Woltz folds. “There couldn’t be any kind of world if people acted that way. It was insane,” Woltz reasons. That Woltz considers Corleone’s action to be “insane” confirms Hagen’s belief that Woltz is not a gangster, and he will therefore refuse to sink to the Don’s level to get what he wants. When Hagen states that Don Corleone is “more powerful in areas far more critical” than Woltz (and, by extension, other *pezzonovanti*), he means that the Godfather’s power stems from his willingness to flout legitimate society’s moral conventions to get what he wants. This willingness gives the Mafia’s illegitimate power an edge over Woltz’s legitimate power.

However, while embracing illegitimate power makes Mafia members powerful, it also makes them vulnerable to attacks from other members, which, paradoxically, makes the security of legitimate power appealing. At a meeting of New York’s Five Families (the Italian American Mafia groups that control organized crime), Don Corleone explains that the Mafia “refuse[s] to be puppets dancing on a string pulled by the men on high.” The string-pullers are the *pezzonovanti* “who take it upon themselves to decide what we shall do with our lives.” The *pezzonovanti* have made illegal the methods by which Corleone earns a living, and he resents them for it. Nonetheless, Corleone arranges this meeting because the rival Tattaglia Family murdered his son, Sonny, and attempted to murder Corleone himself. While the Don claims that “the time is past

for guns and killings and massacres,” such violence is integral to the Mafia’s illegitimate power. **Wealth** and power are the rewards of the Mafia life, but such rewards come with the constant threat of violence. Thus, even as Corleone mocks the *pezzonovanti*, he wants what they have: wealth, power, and security. Don Corleone even references this desire explicitly: “Perhaps your grandchildren will become the new *pezzonovanti*,” he tells the bosses.

Don Corleone’s disgust at the *pezzonovanti* is ironic, considering his hope that his own descendants might one day become *pezzonovanti*. But it also hides what the novel seems to consider a deeper truth. If Don Corleone believes that his illegitimate power can be converted to legitimate power—a belief that Michael eventually shares—well, perhaps he’s right! And, further, perhaps the current *pezzonovanti* are themselves the descendants of long-ago illegitimate power that has been converted, over time, to legitimate power. The epigraph at the beginning of *The Godfather* seems to at least partially endorse this idea: “Behind every great fortune there is a crime.”

However, while Puzo is skilled at getting readers to understand and even sympathize with the gangsters’ point of view, he ultimately does not embrace the Mafia’s view of the world. In fact, Puzo offers a stark contrast between Sicily and America. In Sicily, the Mafia “is cancerous to the society it inhabited,” and it so corrupts legitimate institutions that even doctors are incompetent because they get their “degrees” from the local Mafioso. In America, by comparison, corruption is certainly rampant, but the Mafia’s rules do not wholly dictate how society functions the way they do in Sicily, because Mafia law has not overtaken American law. Legitimate power is hardly pure and incorruptible in America, but it is the *only* real bulwark against the Mafia’s cancerous nature. If enough people lose faith in legitimate power and instead turn to the Mafia for justice, then any notions of equality, fairness, and opportunity for all will, shall we say, sleep with the fishes. Puzo includes the long section in Sicily in part to show readers exactly what happens when the Mafia overtakes legitimate society: people will either die, become hopelessly corrupt themselves, or flee that society if they can.



MASCULINITY AND PATRIARCHY

The Godfather is a novel in which men dominate. The novel is primarily about men—most of the characters are male. And those men engage

constantly in a fight for dominance over the other men around them. In addition, it is accepted as a matter of course among these men that they should dominate the women in their lives. Many of the men in the novel view women not as equal human beings, but as objects to be lusted after, controlled, and abused as a means of asserting male dominance both in the family and in broader society. Like the Mafia lifestyle itself, the violent brand of masculinity that many of the novel’s characters

subscribe to prioritizes machismo, social dominance, and physical violence not just as tools for gaining and maintaining power but as ways to assert one's identity.

Don Corleone serves as a symbol of patriarchy itself. He is the patriarch of his personal family and of his crime Family, where he is "Godfather" to the people who seek out his aid. Don Corleone's formal title as "Godfather" attests to his status as a patriarchal symbol. In many Christian traditions, especially Catholicism (to which the Corleones subscribe), the godfather is a person that bears witness to a child's christening, follows the child's upbringing, and agrees to take legal guardianship of the child should something happen to the child's parents. Puzo's invention of the term "Godfather" for a Mafia Don invokes the spiritual role of godfather to express how Don Corleone wields patriarchal authority over his family and over the people who make up his extended crime Family. Just as a godfather bears witness to a child's baptism and subsequent development, the Godfather bears witness to and guides his two families over time. Corleone's authority is such that others compare him to God. Jack Woltz believes the Don considered himself "his own God." Michael Corleone claims his father "takes everything personal. Like God." Fontane claims that being angry with the Don is "like getting sore with God." Abbandando, the old Consigliere, even asks the Don to save him from death. These divine comparisons link Corleone to the most powerful of all patriarchal figures.

The physical domination of women is also a key element to many of the male characters' conceptions of masculinity. Puzo depicts the Godfather's eldest son, Sonny Corleone, as the embodiment of viral, aggressive masculinity. Sonny is so "generously endowed" that Puzo compares his phallus to that of a bull. Women are both intimidated by and attracted to his "massive organ." Sonny uses his phallic endowment to lay conquest to various women throughout the novel despite being a married man. Similarly, Johnny Fontane views women not as human beings but as prizes to be won. He metaphorically wears "a thousand pubic scalps dangling from his belt" and makes a career out of bedding as many "dames" as he can to demonstrate his virility. His image as a successful singer and movie star rests on the intensity with which he dominates women sexually. Carlo Rizzi enjoys beating his wife, Connie Corleone. After a beating, "it pleased him to see the hurt look on her face, the tears springing into her eyes." Beating Connie makes Carlo feel powerful, and he takes pride in being able to dominate over a member of the powerful Corleone Family. Despite coming from a powerful family, Connie lacks personal power because she is a woman, making her a springboard for Carlo's desire to exert his power. Perhaps most notable, though, is the transformation of Michael Corleone. When he is initially with Kay, and his primary goal is to *not* join the Corleone crime family, his attraction to her rests on his sense that she is an equal. But after killing Sollozzo and McCluskey

and then having to hide in Sicily, Michael Corleone encounters a peasant girl named Apollonia and is overcome with "an overwhelming desire for possession" and vows to "own her as wildly as a miser wants to own his gold coins." Michael treats Apollonia not as a wife and partner, but as a piece of property that, by being owned, gives him power. Put another way: as he becomes enmeshed in mob life, Michael's relation to women changes. After Apollonia is killed and Michael returns to New York and Kay, his relationship with Kay is different too. He tells her explicitly that "You'll be my wife but you won't be my partner in life, as I think they say. Not an equal partner." As a mob boss, Michael's only relationship to women can be one of dominance.

By explicitly emphasizing Kay's inequality, Michael voices the novel's underlying point that men derive much of their identity from dominating women. And the Corleone men's domination of women acts as a template for their approach to dominating others as well. "They were men who guarded their free will with wiles and murder," Puzo writes of the mobsters. To guard their own free will, Mafia men deprive others of their free will, a process they begin with the women in their lives.



FAMILY

Family is essential in *The Godfather*, but it is also complicated. Puzo's novel focuses on Don Corleone and his blood relatives, as well as the relatives and associates that make up the Corleone Family. It is impossible, however, for Don Vito (and later Michael Corleone) to maintain dual loyalties to both families because the two are interwoven. The crime Family is the blood family's source of income, and as such, Don Vito much always prioritize the Family business even when doing so harms his blood family. In this respect, Puzo indicates that the two families' fates are entwined. Sonny, Fredo, and Michael are also members of the Corleone crime Family. Other members of the Family include the Consigliere, Tom Hagen; the two caporegimes, Clemenza and Tessio; and the respective crews of mob soldiers that they lead. While the latter group of men are not Corleone blood relatives, they play integral roles as surrogate family members. The tragedies in Puzo's novel, therefore, stem from Don Corleone's inability to spare his domestic family from the negative ramifications associated with running a Mafia Family.

The Corleones believe that family is the most important of all social units. This suggests that they want to choose loyalty to blood family over loyalty to the crime Family. After Sollozzo attempts to kill the Don, Sonny emphasizes the paramount nature of family when he reminds Hagen of his adopted status in the Corleone clan. "Blood was blood and nothing else was its equal," Puzo writes. Tom protests to Sonny that Don Corleone was a father figure to him, but because he is not a blood relation, the *Consigliere* is an outsider within the family. Michael's military service also highlights the importance Don

Corleone places on blood family. He “had no desire [...] of letting his youngest son be killed in the service of a power foreign to himself.” The Don’s anger at Michael stems from his belief that a man should risk his life for family alone. Even when Michael’s battlefield heroics make the papers, the Don huffs, “he performs those miracles for strangers.” Strangers are not family, and loyalty to family is supreme. Despite his early patriotic feelings, Michael comes to accept the Don’s belief in the supremacy of family. “I believe in you and the family we may have,” he tells Kay, “I don’t trust society to protect us.” Michael’s eventual realization that family loyalty is a buffer against an uncaring outside world guides his approach to running his crime Family after the Don’s retirement.

Despite the Corleones’ emphasis on the importance of blood family, the lines that theoretically divide the Corleone domestic family from the crime Family are, in reality, hopelessly blurred. Because so many members of the Corleones are members of the Mafia Family, the violence that plagues the crime Family inevitably affects the blood family even when Don Vito tries to spare the latter from this violence. The instinct to protect his blood family informs Don Corleone’s refusal to join Sollozzo in drug trafficking. “All the members of my Family have lived well the last ten years, without danger, without harm,” he tells Sollozzo, “I can’t endanger them or their livelihoods out of greed.” Here, Corleone attempts to shield his blood family from any potential fallout associated with his Family business, even to the point of rejecting the potentially enormous profits the drug business offers. Unfortunately, for the Don, his two families are so interwoven that when Hagen tries to convince Sonny that Sollozzo’s attempted murder of Vito “was business, not personal,” the claim rings hollow. Don Corleone’s status as patriarch of both families makes it impossible to separate what is “business” and what is “personal.” Even when he rejects Sollozzo’s offer, this very rejection spurs Sollozzo’s attempt on the Don’s life so he can then negotiate a drug-trafficking partnership with Sonny. Sonny’s death at the hands of the Barzini Family is the logical result of conflating business with family: family members suffer the blowback that comes from criminal activity. The interconnected nature of blood and business implicates Don Vito’s family in the Family business whether he likes it or not.

Michael’s rise only further demonstrate the impossibility of choosing loyalty to blood family over loyalty to the crime Family. Michael recognizes that he cannot protect his family from his “work.” After Sollozzo’s attempted assassination of Don Vito, Michael tells Hagen that, “It’s all personal, every bit of business,” [...] they call it business. OK. But it’s personal as hell.” Michael’s acknowledgment that an attack on his father is tantamount to an attack on the Family business attests to how the two families are interconnected. When Michael explains to Kay why he is joining the Family business, he seamlessly conflates his blood family with the crime Family. “Things went

bad and I had to fight for my Family,” he states, “I had to fight because I love and admire my father.” Protecting his father by extension draws Michael deeper into crime. After Fredo sides with Moe Greene when he refuses to sell his casino to the Corleone Family, Michael warns his brother, “don’t ever take sides with anybody against the Family again.” Fredo’s potential betrayal of the crime Family threatens to sever his relationship with his brother. After he becomes the new Don, Michael wants for his own children the future that his father wanted for him: a life outside the Family business. “He would care for his children, his family, his world. But his children would grow in a different world,” Puzo writes. Michael knows that he cannot separate business from family, but he wishes that he could. This is the curse of being in a Mafia Family: it brings great power, but it makes impossible maintaining dual loyalties to business and family. While the blood family and the crime Family are technically distinct entities, the prominent role that family members play in both means that blood family will suffer the repercussions of being involved in the criminal lifestyle.



LOYALTY AND BETRAYAL

The Corleone Family prizes loyalty and considers betrayal to be a transgression punishable by death. However, because the Mafia’s goal is to seek power and make money by most any illegal means possible, it is a breeding ground for traitors seeking to get more than they currently have. Foiling likely attempts at betrayal, in fact, is built into the very structure of the organization. Below the Don of the Family (Don Corleone) there is the *Consigliere* (Tom Hagen), followed by the *caporegimes* (Clemenza and Tessio), who control networks of soldiers. When an order travels down the ranks, the soldiers execute it without knowing who gave the order. Thus, to implicate the Don for ordering a crime, each “link in the chain” must “turn traitor.” The necessity of such a structure, and the constant emphasis on loyalty, is itself a signal that the temptation to betray is common in the criminal life.

Puzo emphasizes throughout the novel the importance Don Corleone places on loyalty and the manner in which he cultivates it. As a young man solidifying his power in Little Italy’s criminal underworld, Vito Corleone forges loyalties by performing favors for others in exchange for their lifelong loyalty to him. “He piled up good deeds as a banker piles up securities,” Puzo writes. In this way, Corleone constructs networks of loyalties that serve as scaffolding for his burgeoning criminal empire. His penchant for building loyalties notwithstanding, Corleone still creates “layers of insulation between himself and any operational act.” He gives orders exclusively to his *Consigliere*, and he splits his *caporegimes* into different territories to prevent them from conspiring against him. Thus, for all of the loyalties Corleone cultivates, the prospect of betrayal is never far from his mind. By granting favors in exchange for loyalty, the Don cloaks his criminal

empire in a sheet of benevolence built on allegiances that are the source of his empire's strength.

Don Corleone's fatherly status also allows him to extract loyalty from others who view him as both a benefactor and a potential foe. These people fear the Don's power and ruthlessness, but they recognize they have much to gain by serving him. Corleone's most loyal ally is the enforcer, Luca Brasi. A fearsome figure who murders at the Don's behest, Brasi does not fear his fellow man, nor does he fear death or hell, but "he had *chosen*, to fear and love Don Corleone." That Brasi both fears and loves his Don is indicative of the way Corleone rewards loyalty with favors to those who are well aware that he will punish betrayal with murder. As the second most powerful figure in the Corleone Family, the *Consigliere* Tom Hagen can, in theory, betray the Don and take power for himself. Yet Puzo writes that, "every Consigliere knew that if he kept the faith, he would become rich, wield power and win respect"—Hagen will gain more by standing with the Godfather than by rebelling against him. As a means of benefitting from Corleone's power, Hagen promises him "complete loyalty, with complete acceptance of the Don's parental divinity." Because there is "no future" in betraying the Don, Hagen swears his loyalty and, by extension, bets his fortunes on the Corleone Family's power. The loyalty of others supports Don Corleone's power, while those who swear loyalty to him gain both financial and physical security. So long as the Don can continue to offer that security, and none of his underlings get too greedy, this arrangement holds strong.

Yet underlings *do* get greedy, and it's not always clear that the Don can provide the wealth or security he promises. In such instances, betrayal occurs. For instance, fairly early in the novel, Don Corleone's bodyguard, Paulie Gatto, wants to earn more than he already does, and so he abandons the Don so that Sollozzo's hitmen can assassinate him. And late in the novel, just before Michael enacts his plan to regain power for the Corleones, the long-time Corleone *caporegime* Tessio attempts to betray him so that he falls into a trap set by the rival Barzini family. Tessio also acts out of self-interest, but it is a self-interest driven by his uncertainty about whether Michael can truly step into his father's role as a successful head of a crime Family. Tessio thinks the Corleones are likely to fall, and so he makes the "business decision" to set him up for a post-Corleone world. Regardless of the motive behind a betrayal, though, the Corleones' response is always vicious. Only loyalty protects the family from attacks by rivals or the police, and so if loyalty can't be won through love, then the Corleones will get it through fear. After Paulie betrays the Corleones, the Corleone *caporegime* Clemenza murders Paulie and lets the police find his body in order to deter "embryo traitors." Tessio, despite his lifetime of loyalty before his final betrayal, is similarly and swiftly executed.

The Corleone Family values loyalty above all other virtues. The

Don has built his criminal empire in large part on the assurance that favors will be rewarded and debts repaid. Yet the criminal nature of the Mafia life assures that betrayal will always be a threat to the power and security of the Corleone Family, and so the family can't simply *talk* about loyalty. It is bound to ensure loyalty by always responding to treachery with death.



SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



WEALTH

The Godfather is a novel about American wealth viewed through the context of the Mafia. The Corleone Family's vast wealth is a symbol of how the American obsession with money inevitably erodes any moral obstacles to getting rich. America is therefore fertile ground for unscrupulous organizations like the Mafia to thrive. The Corleone Family earns millions from illegal rackets such as gambling, bookmaking, extortion, prostitution, bootlegging, money laundering, and murder. Even Don Corleone's "legitimate" holdings in banks, real estate, and olive oil operate as fronts for his criminal activities. Although Don Corleone is a criminal, the morality by which he acquires wealth is a matter of degrees when compared to other wealthy Americans. "Like any good businessman he aimed at holding a monopoly by forcing his rivals to abandon the field or by merging with his own company," Puzo writes. "Like many businessmen of genius he learned that free competition was wasteful, monopoly efficient." Breaking the law may be central to Don Corleone's business, but he is hardly the only businessman who breaks the law. In an American society that prioritizes making money above all else, even the law eventually ceases to deter those seduced by the almighty dollar. Like any business, the Mafia's primary goal is to make money, albeit through illegal means. While the Godfather professes adherence to higher motives such as "justice," "loyalty," and "friendship," these motives are themselves means to acquiring the wealth that bolsters his power. He is therefore not an aberration from American society, but a reflection of it. That the Mafia views the law as a trivial obstacle towards accumulating wealth is the logical result of a society in which money trumps all, even family.



CARS

In *The Godfather*, cars are symbols of impending murder, as they play a role in some of the novel's major mob "hits." The most significant hit in the novel happens when Don Vito Corleone emerges from his office building, where Fredo is waiting with his Buick parked at the curb. As he

stops to patronize a fruit stand, Sollozzo's hitmen open fire on the Don, who collapses next to the car. Although the Don survives the hit, Sollozzo's attack eventually leads to the murders of Paulie Gatto and Sonny. When Sonny learns that Paulie betrayed the Don to Sollozzo, he orders Gatto's death. Clemenza concocts the plot to kill Paulie while he "rubbed and polished the metal of his Cadillac," a scene that makes the car an inspiration for Clemenza's murderous thoughts. Later, Clemenza and Lampone drive Paulie in another car to a deserted stretch of road. While still inside the car, Lampone shoots Paulie in the head, causing "the interior of the car" to reverberate "with the report of a gun." After Carlo once again beats Connie, Sonny roars "out of the mall in his Buick" and takes the Jones Beach causeway. When he stops the car at the tollbooth, Don Barzini's soldiers shoot him, causing his body to fall "out of the car," which has now become his casket. Michael rides with Sollozzo and McCluskey in "a long black car" (an image that invokes a hearse) to Luna Azure restaurant, where he murders the two men with a pistol. Later, during Michael's exile in Sicily, his new bride, Apollonia, dies when she attempts to drive a car rigged with a bomb meant to kill Michael. Cars are frequently harbingers of death in Puzo's novel, and the often serve as surrogate coffins for several key characters.

values like family and loyalty, he always reiterates that the Corleone Family is, above all else, a profit-making enterprise. Although Don Corleone operates outside the boundaries of the law, he is otherwise no different from other wealthy American capitalists, because his internal antennas have the ability to sense profit potential in everything. Without a constant source of money, the Corleone Family would have no wealth and, thus, no power. The Don's genius lies in his ability to extract money out of every situation.

☞ 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.

Related Characters: Luca Brasi, Don Vito Corleone

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 21

Explanation and Analysis

At Connie's wedding, Michael tells Kay about Luca Brasi, a violent man who murders without question and possesses no empathy or compassion for others. Even Don Corleone himself fears Luca Brasi, yet Luca is unassailably loyal to the Don. In fact, Brasi loves and fears his Don even though he loves and fears nothing else. With this quote, Puzo is commenting on the nature of power within the Mafia. In the criminal underworld, those who wield organizational power control those who wield individual power.

Don Corleone wields organizational power because he is the boss of his crime Family. His power, therefore, goes beyond his mere physical ability. The Don's power rests in the organizational control he has over the various elements—gambling, banking, real estate, bookmaking—that make up his criminal empire. Because Don Corleone wields power over so many institutions and individuals, he is far more powerful than Luca Brasi, even though Brasi is actually the more physically powerful man. Luca Brasi embodies the type of individual power that, lacking a guiding organizational structure, becomes merely self-destructive. Luca demonstrates his awesome individual power by fearing absolutely nothing, except for Don Corleone. Luca *chooses* to fear the Don because he knows the Don can give his own power meaning and direction. Without the Don's guidance, Brasi is a common murderer. However, *with* the Don's guidance, Brasi is an enforcer: a



QUOTES


Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Signet edition of *The Godfather* published in 1978.

Chapter 1 Quotes

☞ It was part of the Don's greatness that he profited from everything.

Related Characters: Carlo Rizzi, Don Vito Corleone

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 16



Explanation and Analysis


As Don Corleone is greeting guests at Connie's wedding, Puzo gives a brief biographical background on the groom, Carlo Rizzi, leading to this summation of "the Don's greatness." The key to Don Corleone's power is that he indeed "profit[s] from everything," because money fuels the world of organized crime. Earning money is the Mafia's primary goal, to which other values like loyalty and family are utterly subservient. Thus, for all of Puzo's emphasis on

man who murders for an organization that gives meaning to his otherwise nihilistic violence.

“I believe in America. America has made my fortune.”

Related Characters: Amerigo Bonasera (speaker), Jerry Wagner and Kevin Moonan, Don Vito Corleone

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 25



Explanation and Analysis

Bonasera is meeting with Don Corleone in his private chamber as Connie's wedding celebration goes on in the outdoor garden. The undertaker is there to ask the Don to murder the men who brutally attacked his daughter. Here, Puzo comments on how Don Corleone views the nature of loyalty. The Don believes that loyalty to him should supersede loyalty to country, because unlike one's country, the Don will *never* fail to reward loyalty. Bonasera's monologue is therefore a *mea culpa*, an acknowledgement that he has made a mistake by prioritizing his loyalty to America over his loyalty to Don Corleone.

Bonasera emphasizes that he believes in America and that he fulfilled his end of the American social contract that promises success to anyone who works hard to achieve that success. America gave the hardworking Bonasera the opportunity to go from a poor Sicilian immigrant to a successful owner of a funeral parlor. To show his gratitude, Bonasera became a loyal American who raised his daughter like an American girl and put his faith in the American justice system. For all of his loyalty, however, America failed to give Bonasera's daughter the justice she deserved when a judge suspended her attackers' sentence on account of their privilege. In order to regain the Don's trust and make use of his brand of justice, Bonasera must swear loyalty to Don Corleone above all else.

“I'll make him an offer he can't refuse.”

Related Characters: Don Vito Corleone (speaker), Jack Woltz, Johnny Fontane

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 34

Explanation and Analysis

Just before this quote, a perplexed Johnny Fontane wonders how Don Corleone will convince the movie producer Jack Woltz to cast Fontane in his upcoming film. With this quote, Don Corleone explains how he wields his power and how he is able to fulfill promises that others deem impossible to keep. The Don has built his reputation on his very real willingness to resort to violence and harm to get what he wants. His crime Family is the fruit of this reputation. When Don Corleone says he will make “an offer he can't refuse,” he implies that the offer is not an offer at all; rather, the “offer” is a veiled threat that promises violence and harm to those who refuse the “offer.”

Don Corleone's reliance on violence and harm as the foundations of his criminal enterprise differentiates him from legitimate businessmen. In theory, Woltz is an incredibly powerful man. Like Don Corleone, Woltz has contacts in powerful positions and has great personal wealth. Unlike Don Corleone, however, Woltz is a *pezzonovante* who is constrained by the laws of legitimate society. He therefore cannot perform the kinds of extreme violence and harm that Don Corleone relies on. This is why, despite his power, the initially hostile Woltz ultimately gives Fontane the film role. When Don Corleone murders Woltz's prized stallion, Woltz understands the violence and harm that underpins Don Corleone's “offer.”

“A lawyer with his briefcase can steal more than a hundred men with guns.”

Related Characters: Don Vito Corleone (speaker), Thomas “Tom” Hagen

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 46

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Puzo provides background information on how Don Corleone took in the orphaned Tom Hagen, who then pursued a career in law. With this quote, Don Corleone expresses his conflicted opinion about the *pezzonovante*, the “big shot” lawyers, politicians, and other socially respected leaders who control legitimate society. Throughout the novel, Don Corleone and other mobsters mock and resent the *pezzonovante*, whom they feel unjustly dictate what other men (especially men in the Mafia) can and cannot do

with their lives. Don Corleone also believes that his willingness to flout legitimate society's laws makes him more powerful than the *pezzonovante*, as demonstrated in his dealings with Jack Woltz.

Nevertheless, Don Corleone cannot deny the seductive nature of the *pezzonovante's* power, because the latter group amasses wealth and wields its power without fear of arrest and imprisonment. Lawyers, for example, do not have to flout the law because they can manipulate it instead. Moreover, unlike the Mafia, the *pezzonovante* operates under society's approving gaze. Claiming, "a lawyer with his briefcase can steal more than a hundred men with guns" is the Don's way of simultaneously mocking and respecting the *pezzonovante's* power. He wants the excessive wealth and power that comes with the criminal lifestyle, but he also wishes that, like the *pezzonovante*, he could wield his wealth and power without fearing reprisal from the law or from other Mafia members who wish to take his wealth and power by force.

Chapter 8 Quotes

☝ "Even the shooting of your father was business, not personal. You should know that by now."

Related Characters: Thomas "Tom" Hagen (speaker), Don Vito Corleone, Santino "Sonny" Corleone

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 108

Explanation and Analysis

In the wake of Sollozzo's attempted murder of Don Vito Corleone, Sonny Corleone, Tom Hagen, and the *caporegimes* struggle to find the appropriate response to the hit. Sonny in particular cannot help but take the hit on his father personally, but Hagen reminds him that it was strictly business. This passage is one of several moments in the novel where Puzo demonstrates why it is ultimately impossible for the Corleones to separate their blood family from their crime Family—business is personal in the world of the novel. By assuming the role of patriarch over a Family business that involves his actual family, Don Corleone has, by extension, inextricably bound up his blood family with his criminal activity. As a result, his blood family will suffer the consequences that entail the criminal lifestyle. For Sonny, the hit on Don Corleone cannot be anything *but* personal because Don Corleone is his father, whom he loves and respects.

Chapter 9 Quotes

☝ He was surprised to find himself so secretive with Kay. He loved her, he trusted her, but he would never tell her anything about his father or the Family. She was an outsider.

Related Characters: Don Vito Corleone, Kay Adams, Michael Corleone

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 112

Explanation and Analysis



In this passage, Michael grapples with the way that his father's perilous brush with death brought out in him a fierce family loyalty that now supersedes his love for Kay. Here, Puzo demonstrates the all-consuming nature of a Mafia Family, how it actually undermines the very concept of family loyalty that it claims to honor. This quote marks the moment where Michael Corleone changes from a man who wants to reject his family destiny to one who wants to embrace it.


In choosing to become more involved with the Family's retaliation against Sollozzo and McCluskey, Michael sets himself down a path that will put his wife and children—his *family*—in critical danger. By joining the Family business, Michael undermines the love and trust he claims to have for Kay because he will soon commit a murder on behalf of his Family that will cause Kay great anguish and heartbreak. In addition, Michael claims to trust Kay, but he does not trust her enough to grant her insider status within his Family. Even though Michael will soon make decisions that will have direct implications for Kay's life, he gives her no say in such matters, and he chooses his Family over her because the totalizing nature of the criminal business presents him with no other choice.

Chapter 12 Quotes

☝ "But you can't get sore at him. It's like getting sore at God."

Related Characters: Johnny Fontane (speaker), Thomas "Tom" Hagen, Don Vito Corleone

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 159



Explanation and Analysis

Here, Tom Hagen tells Johnny Fontane that Jack Woltz is using his influence to stop Johnny from winning an Academy Award. Thinking Don Corleone cannot stop Woltz, an angry Johnny lashes out at Tom before realizing that he is actually angry with his Godfather. He likens this anger to “getting sore at God.” This passage is one of several that compares Don Corleone to God, and it speaks to the immense power the Godfather wields even in the film industry on the other side of the country. By comparing the Don to God, Puzo explores his own conflicted feelings about the power individual people hold over their own affairs.

Catholicism plays an important, if veiled, role in the book. The Corleones are nominally Catholics, but they express their faith more out of cultural tradition and habit than out of theological devotion. As criminals, the Corleones are sinners and do not seem to fear Heavenly reprisal for their actions. Puzo, who was raised Catholic, uses Don Corleone to explore the paradoxical idea that a man makes his own way on earth, but that God ultimately guides a man’s destiny. Johnny, like other characters in the novel, seeks Don Corleone’s aid because the Don, like God, can seemingly make *anything* happen. In this way, the Don truly is a substitute for God. Just as God grants talent but controls destiny, Johnny’s own talents got him into the entertainment business, but the powerful Don directs Johnny’s career trajectory.

●● He could use power and monetary favors grudgingly, always alert for treason, always believing that women would betray and desert him, adversaries to be bested. Or he could refuse to hate women and continue to believe in them.

Related Characters: Margot Ashton, Sharon Moore, Virginia “Ginny” Fontane

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 167

Explanation and Analysis


After Don Corleone promises Johnny Fontane the money to start producing his own films, Johnny looks back on his career thus far and how it impacted his relationship with women, especially his ex-wife, Virginia. In this passage, Puzo highlights the theme of masculinity and patriarchy through Johnny’s hypocritical and misogynistic insistence on blaming women for his own weaknesses and transgressions. Johnny has based his entire sense of masculine identity

around the number of women he conquers sexually. When he finds success in the entertainment business, legions of adoring female fans tempt him to betray his marital vows—and he does so proudly and repeatedly. Yet, when his infidelities lead Virginia to divorce him and Margot to cheat on him, he blames women for their “treason,” for having the gall to betray him. Johnny is the product of a deeply patriarchal upbringing; he lives in a culture in which men view women not as equal human beings, but as objects over which men lust and seek control. Because Johnny bases his identity around controlling women, he blames women when they assert control over their *own* lives. Johnny’s selfish decision to “refuse to hate women” reflects his inability to accept that his own faults caused the women in his life to “betray” him. This delusion on Johnny’s part is among the many negative consequences of a patriarchal culture that conflates male identity with female subjugation.

Chapter 14 Quotes

●● When he became a Don and asked opponents to sit down and reason with him, they understood it was the last chance to resolve an affair without bloodshed and murder.

Related Characters: Peter “Pete” Clemenza, Salvatore “Sal” Tessio, Don Fanucci

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 191

Explanation and Analysis



Here, The young Vito Corleone meets with Clemenza and Tessio and outlines his plan to pay Don Fanucci only \$200 of the \$700 total that the Black Hand demands from the three men. This is the first instance in the novel where Puzo emphasizes the calculated nature by which Vito amasses and maintains his power in the criminal underworld. Don Corleone’s power stems from his organizational control over various rackets, as well as his interpersonal ability to build networks and relationships backed by both favors *and* the underlying threat of violence. Don Corleone is a deft negotiator who prefers to use violence as a last resort, but he will not hesitate to resort to violence if necessary. When Vito kills Fanucci, he takes the first step towards building a reputation as a man who will kill to get what he wants. This provides the future Don Corleone with an advantage that is hidden in plain sight when he negotiates with opponents. By asking opponents “to sit down and reason,” the Don is tacitly communicating a message: those who do not give him what he wants will face violent reprisal. Thus, the will to do

violence is the true foundation of Don Corleone's power.

Chapter 16 Quotes

☛ She might be a daughter of the Great Don but she was his wife, she was his property now and he could treat her as he pleased.

Related Characters: Don Vito Corleone, Constanzia "Connie" Corleone, Carlo Rizzi

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 225



Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Carlo Rizzi thinks about his wife, Connie Corleone. Carlo is angry with his lot in life. He married Connie hoping to secure a powerful role in her father's crime Family, but the Don instead gave him a minor bookmaking operation. Unable to retaliate against the Don himself, Carlo vents his frustration by abusing Connie, given that she's a Corleone. This quote speaks to the subjugated role women play as mere objects with which the novel's male characters do what they please. Throughout the novel, Puzo highlights that Mafia culture is deeply patriarchal. It encourages men to demonstrate their masculinity by using macho violence and other forms of coercion to dominate weaker people, especially women. This patriarchal masculinity is so powerful that even the powerful Don Corleone cannot (or will not) transgress it by intervening on his daughter's behalf to stop Carlo from abusing her. Thus, by marrying Carlo, Connie becomes "his property," not his partner, and Carlo can "treat her as he pleased." Reducing Connie to an object that Carlo owns robs her of her humanity. This dehumanization allows Carlo to beat her relentlessly and deny her basic rights and feelings as a sentient human being. In this way, the Mafia's patriarchal subjugation of women acts as a template for their criminal behavior, which literally robs other people of *their* rights to life and property.

Chapter 19 Quotes

☛ She was quite content not to share the pain of her men, after all did they share the pain of women?

Related Characters: Santino "Sonny" Corleone, Thomas "Tom" Hagen, Mama Corleone

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 254

Explanation and Analysis

Tom Hagan has just learned of Sonny's murder while standing in the kitchen with Mama Corleone. This passage marks a rare moment when the reader gets a glimpse (however limited) of Mama Corleone's inner thoughts. The quote indicates that, far from being ignorant about her husband's "business," Mama Corleone is well aware of what happens in the male-dominated Mafia. Stunned and saddened by Sonny's violent death, Tom tries to keep his composure so as not to upset Mama Corleone. She does not seem to perceive that something is wrong, but this is a conscious decision on her part, not the result of ignorance. Puzo suggests that the wives of Mafia men cope with their unequal status by intentionally withdrawing from the violent and painful world their men have created. If there is any benefit to being a woman in a deeply patriarchal culture, it is the right "to not share the pain of her men" unless it is necessary to do so. This stance is a form of passive resistance on Mama Corleone's part against the violent masculinity that surrounds her. After all, she recognizes that she has no moral obligation to share men's pain when they do not reciprocate and "share the pain" of women. This form of passive resistance, however, can only be so effective, because the violence of the Mafia Family always seeps into Don Corleone's personal family. Thus, Mama Corleone will soon learn that her son is dead, and she will have no choice but to grieve for him.

Chapter 20 Quotes

☛ Nothing was more calming, more conducive to pure reason, than the atmosphere of money.

Related Characters: Emilio Barzini, Phillip Tattaglia, Thomas "Tom" Hagen, Don Vito Corleone

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 267



Explanation and Analysis

Don Corleone has just brokered a peace meeting between the heads of the Five Families and other Mafia families across the country. After the murder of Sonny, the Don hopes to avoid further bloodshed by negotiating an end to Five Families War. Fittingly, the mobsters assemble in a

bank conference room. This passage marks one of several instances in which Puzo emphasizes that money, above all else, fuels the Mob. At its core, the Mafia Families are profit-generating enterprises: their only goal is make money by any means necessary, legal or illegal. The supremacy of money hangs over the very foundations of the peace meeting itself. The Five Families War truly starts when Don Corleone refuses Virgil Sollozzo's offer to bring the Corleone Family into the drug trade. Sollozzo views this refusal as hampering his ability to make money. The ensuing cycle of violence claims the lives of Sonny Corleone and Bruno Tattaglia, but as the quote demonstrates, the Mafia Dons know that to stop the war they must negotiate money, not discuss concern for family. Only the "atmosphere of money" is "conductive to pure reason" among men who will sacrifice those they love in the name of profit.

☛ "We are all men who have refused to be fools, who have refused to be puppets dancing on a string pulled by the men on high. We have been fortunate here in this country [...] Some of you have sons who are professors, scientists, musicians, and you are fortunate. Perhaps your grandchildren will become the new *pezzonovanti*."

Related Characters: Don Vito Corleone (speaker), Emilio Barzini, Phillip Tattaglia, Thomas "Tom" Hagen

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 278

Explanation and Analysis

At the peace meeting between the Five Families, Don Corleone explains why he hopes the Mafia will move towards legitimacy in the future. In this process, however, he speaks to the Mafia's complicated view of legitimate society: the mob both rejects and embraces the legitimate power of the *pezzonovante*. At first, Don Corleone compares the *pezzonovante* (the "big shot" doctors, lawyers, politicians, etc.) to the puppet masters who try to turn Mafia members into puppets "dancing on a string" from "on high." The last phrase indicates that Don Corleone sees the *pezzonovante's* position as one of self-designated moral superiority.

Yet, the Don also admits that the Mafia has benefitted from the very same legitimate power—embodied in the laws of the American nation and the people who abide by and enforce them—that it claims to resent. "We have been fortunate here in this country," he states, adding that America's laws and professions have provided opportunities

for the mob bosses' own children to secure positions of power and privilege without resorting to murder, theft, extortion, or other typical Mafia enterprises. Here, Puzo suggests that however corruptible legitimate power may be (and it is very corruptible), its foundation at least rests on the promise of justice for every citizen, therefore making it superior to the mob's illegitimate power. In fact, legitimate power is so superior to the mob's mixture of vengeance, crime, favors, and debt that even the mob itself yearns to join the ranks of the *pezzonovante*.

Chapter 23 Quotes

☛☛ Merit meant nothing. Talent meant nothing. Work meant nothing. The Mafia Godfather gave you your profession as a gift.

Related Characters: Don Tommasino, Dr. Taza, Michael Corleone

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 312

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Michael thinks about the corruption that runs rampant in Sicily—where he's recently fled to—as he suffers from a smashed jaw. Dr. Taza offers to repair Michael's jaw, but Michael does not trust Taza's abilities. This passage marks a key moment in the novel where Puzo comments on the truly destructive nature of the Mafia, which he describes as "cancerous to the society it inhabited." The Mafia has such a stranglehold in Sicily that a Mafia boss's word takes precedence over any laws, customs, and requirements enacted for the general betterment of society.


Like a cancer ravaging a body with cell growth to the point where the body dies, the mob invades legitimate institutions and erodes them to the point where they cease to function properly. The Mafia Don is the final word on matters both trivial and serious. Having crime bosses act as authorities on matters they know nothing about, such as medical issues, has disastrous consequences. In Sicily, "talent," "merit," and "work" cannot compete with a Don's approval. Thus, people like Dr. Taza, who admits to not understanding his medical literature, nonetheless receive their professions as "a gift" from the Don. American institutions, by contrast, are not immune from corruption, but neither are they wholly owned by the Mafia. American doctors must pass through medical school to practice their profession skillfully and avoid endangering other people's lives. Michael's decision to have

his jaw repaired by an American doctor, rather than Dr. Taza, likely saved him further disfigurement, if not his life.

Chapter 25 Quotes

☝☝ “You’ll be my wife but you won’t be my partner in life, as I think they say. Not an equal partner. That can’t be.”

Related Characters: Michael Corleone (speaker), Kay Adams

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 346

Explanation and Analysis



Here, Michael and Kay reunite for an evening of intimacy six months after Michael returns from Sicily. This quote demonstrates the changes he underwent after he “Made his Bones” by murdering Sollozzo and McCluskey. He transforms from an outsider in his Family who once saw Kay as his intellectual equal, to a patriarchal mobster. That Michael distinguishes a “wife” from an “equal partner” indicates his embrace of the Mafia’s reactionary, Old World values as pertaining to the sexes. While far from a bastion of sexual equality, 1940s America nonetheless offers opportunities for young women like Kay that are rare in the Mafia and rarer still in the Sicilian culture from which it sprang.

Michael and Kay first meet as students at Dartmouth College. Kay’s education separates her from the Corleone women, who, with the exception of the college-educated Lucy Mancini, are traditional wives and mothers relegated to the domestic sphere. Michael initially embraces Kay as a fellow outsider: he has secret dalliances with her to avoid his family’s prudish scorn, and repeatedly tells her that he has no desire to become a man like his father. By committing murder and then thoroughly possessing the peasant girl Apollonia in Sicily, Michael goes from an Americanized family outsider to the leader of an organization that has no roles whatsoever for women. In short, as he grows more and more enmeshed in the Mafia and prepares to take over his father’s role as the Don, Michael not only becomes a man *like* his father, he actually *becomes* his father: a domineering patriarch who excludes his spouse from large portions of his life.

Chapter 27 Quotes

☝☝ “But don’t ever take sides with anybody against the Family again.”

Related Characters: Michael Corleone (speaker), Frederico “Fredo” Corleone

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 372

Explanation and Analysis

In this quote, Michael reprimands Fredo for siding with Moe Greene, who has served as Fredo’s surrogate (and abusive) brother in Las Vegas. Fredo initially supports Greene’s refusal to sell to the Corleone Family—and then tries to convince Michael that Moe isn’t disrespectful and abusive—and earns a severe rebuke from Michael. In this passage, Puzo highlights the supreme role loyalty plays in the Corleone Family’s business decisions. Loyalty to the crime Family always trumps loyalty to the Corleone blood family, because the Family business cannot abide traitors of any sort. The Mafia model guarantees benefits *only* to those who swear total and unconditional loyalty to the Don, and this edict is so powerful that even Michael’s own brother is not permitted to transgress it. The Mafia places such a premium on loyalty because rival Families perceive any hint of weakness as grounds for subversion and attack from the outside. Thus, the Corleone Family must immediately snuff out even the slightest hint of treachery. Fredo, for example, does nothing to betray Michael and the Family. He merely voices a mild concern over Michael’s belief that he can muscle Moe Greene into a deal and shrugs off Michael’s concern that Moe is “slap[ping] [Fredo] around.” The Mafia’s ruthless approach to transgressions real and perceived, however, causes Michael to treat Fredo’s comments as evidence of his taking sides “against the Family.” Thus, Even for a member of the Corleone blood clan, betrayal is an unforgivable offense.

Chapter 28 Quotes

☝☝ “Revenge is a dish that tastes best when it is cold.”

Related Characters: Don Vito Corleone (speaker), Bruno Tattaglia, Phillip Tattaglia, Emilio Barzini, Salvatore “Sal” Tessio, Peter “Pete” Clemenza, Thomas “Tom” Hagen, Santino “Sonny” Corleone, Michael Corleone

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 387

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Michael and Don Corleone meet with Tom Hagen, Sal

Tessio, and Peter Clemenza to inform them of their plan to reassert the Corleone Family's dominance over the Five Families and finally end the Mafia war. This passage accompanies the transition of leadership from Don Corleone to Michael, and it epitomizes the qualities that made Vito Corleone such as effective Mafia leader. The Don likens vengeance to a dish "that tastes best when it is cold" to emphasize how patience is an essential trait a Don must possess. Much like a man who waits to enjoy food after it cools as to not get burned, Don Corleone waits until Michael was safely back in New York before executing the hit on Barzini and Tattaglia. Although the Don knew of Barzini's treachery against the Corleone Family after the peace meeting, he also knew that killing Barzini before Michael was safe would leave Michael exposed to retaliation from Barzini's men. Don Corleone's preference for "cold" revenge leads to a successful hit on his enemies without sustaining further damage to his Family. The Don's "cold" revenge contrasts sharply with Sonny's "hot" revenge against Bruno Tattaglia, which he executed quickly without considering the potential blowback it would cause, namely, his own death.

Chapter 29 Quotes

☝ He would see to it that they joined the general family of humanity, but he, as a powerful and prudent parent, would most certainly keep a wary eye on that general family.

Related Characters: Kay Adams, Don Vito Corleone, Michael Corleone

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 394

Explanation and Analysis

At Don Corleone's funeral, Michael thinks approvingly about his father's legacy and wants to honor it. Although this passage represents Michael's assertion of power and begins the Corleone Family's triumph over the Five Families, it is also a tragic moment. Michael begins the novel as a man who himself wants to join "the general family of humanity." He knows that his father is a murderous criminal and wants little to do with that world. Instead, he joins humanity's family by fighting for his country, by sacrificing himself for strangers. In short, Michael begins as a symbol of hope: his path initially suggests that his Family is not his destiny.



However, Michael ultimately becomes a tragic figure who succumbs to the Mafia's devious pull. Not only does he

become a man like his father—a criminal and a murderer—he literally takes his father's place. Even so, Michael still believes that he can save his children from such a fate by encouraging them to join "the general family of humanity" by becoming doctors, scientists, artists, and other respected figures. Perhaps they can become those things, but having "a powerful and prudent" Mafia boss for a father who keeps "a wary eye" on the outside world will forever ensnare his children in the Mafia's orbit. This is the tragedy of Michael Corleone: he is man who foolishly thinks he can protect his blood family from his crime Family even though his own father failed to do just that.

Chapter 30 Quotes

☝ He understood that he would be happier in the world the Corleones had created than in the world outside.

Related Characters: Michael Corleone, Albert "Al" Neri

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 407

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, the novel charts how Al Neri ended up in the Corleone Family's fold: after he accidentally murders a pimp, the police force discharges him, and he is convicted of manslaughter and sentenced him to prison, but the Corleones intervene. This quote is emblematic of how Puzo skillfully presents his story in a way that makes readers sympathize with the Mafia's point of view. That legitimate society would punish an officer of the law for ridding the world of a vile pimp and drug dealer *appears* to support the Mafia's view that legitimate power is corrupt and untrustworthy. From Neri's point of view, the Mafia offers a more just alternative to "the world outside" because the Corleone Family recognizes and embraces his talents as a violent agent of "justice."

Through this passage, however, Puzo subtly articulates why the Mafia is a "cancerous" element in the societies it inhabits. The Mafia enables Neri's worst characteristics—his abusive temper and his predilection for harsh violence—for its own gain alone. It may appear unjust for the legitimate law to punish Neri for killing a criminal, but that law must be upheld because it offers the promise of equal justice for *all* people under its common framework. Without the notion of equal justice before the law, legitimate society will come to resemble the Mafia itself: an anarchic, perverse subculture where "justice" hangs on the arbitrary whims of crime bosses and exists merely as a pretext for their criminal

activity.



SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER 1

Amerigo Bonasera, a Sicilian-American undertaker, sits in a New York City courtroom awaiting the sentence of two men who viciously attacked his daughter. The judge chastises the offenders, but suspends their sentence due to their fathers' political connections and their clean records. A furious Bonasera watches the men leave the courtroom. He thinks about his daughter lying in her hospital bed "with her broken jaw wired together." Bonasera has long trusted the law, but now he feels the law has failed him. He tells his grieving wife, "for justice we must go on our knees to Don Corleone."

It is 4:00 a.m., and Johnny Fontane, a famous singer and actor, is drinking scotch in his lavish Los Angeles hotel suite. Soon, his second wife, the alluring actress, Margot Ashton, opens the door. Johnny asks where she has been. Margot tells him that she was "out fucking." The drunken Johnny knocks her to the floor and beats her, but he cannot bring himself to damage her beautiful actress's face. Sensing this weakness, Margot taunts him before locking herself in the bedroom. The humiliated Johnny decides that only "his Godfather Corleone" can save him from his despair.

A rotund New York baker named Nazorine watches his daughter, Katherine, and her boyfriend, Enzo, an Italian prisoner of war paroled to work in America as a baker's helper. Much to Nazorine's disapproval, the couple are flirting while on the job. Nazorine wants Enzo sent back to Sicily, but his wife, Filomena, urges the baker to secure Enzo's status in America so that he can marry Katherine. Nazorine knows there is "only one man who could arrange such an affair. The Godfather. Don Corleone."

The novel opens by highlighting the major theme of crime and justice that runs throughout the story. Through the court's failure to adequately punish the men who assaulted Bonasera's daughter, Puzo presents Don Corleone, and, by extension, the Mafia, as an alternative system of justice that has the courage to do what the legitimate law cannot, or will not, do.



As a character, Johnny Fontane is emblematic of the male-centric world that Puzo has created. Within the Mafia's wide orbit, women exist not as equal human beings, but as objects upon which men hang their own problems and shortcomings. Fontane, for example, hypocritically resents Margot for cheating on him even though he is a consummate womanizer, as will soon become clear. That he cannot bring himself to damage her face suggests that he feels some guilt for abusing her, though he seems far more concerned about hurting her beauty than hurting her—yet another indication that women are treated like objects by the novel's male characters.



Much like Bonasera and Fontane, Nazorine the baker decides that only Don Corleone can give him justice. Whether the Don's "justice" exists within the realm of the legitimate law does not matter to these men. They go to Don Corleone because he will not constrain their passions with the law.



Bonasera, Fontane, and Nazorine are among hundreds who attend the August 1945 wedding of Don Vito Corleone's daughter, Constanza "Connie" Corleone, to her groom, Carlo Rizzi. The ceremony and reception take place on the expansive grounds of the Corleone family home, known as "the mall." Guests lavish the new couple with envelopes that swell with cash to show their loyalty to Don Corleone. Vito is "a man to whom everybody came for help" because he disappoints no one. He requires only that people swear their loyalty and friendship to him, as well the promise of future services, in exchange for his aid.

Don Corleone, the Sicilian-American patriarch of the Corleone Family, observes the wedding festivities from the doorway of his Long Beach, New York, home. It is customary for a Sicilian to grant requests from loyal friends on his daughter's wedding day, and he "received everyone—rich and poor, powerful and humble—with an equal show of love." Many of the people who decorated for, and serve at, the wedding are among the friends who are in his debt.

Also standing at the door with him are the Don's two elder sons. The eldest, Santino "Sonny" Corleone, is a tall, powerful man with a Cupid-like face, a quick temper, and notoriously large phallus. The middle son, Frederico "Fredo" Corleone is short, burly, and curly haired. He is deeply loyal to his father but lacks the charisma "so necessary for a leader of men." The Don's youngest son, Michael Corleone, sits further away at a table with his non-Italian girlfriend, Kay Adams, whom he met while attending Dartmouth College. Michael is short but handsome, and he has his father's calm demeanor.

The wedding guests notice that Don Corleone pays little attention to Michael. Before the outbreak of World War II, Michael was the Don's favorite son. Michael, however, joined the Marine Corps and fought in the Pacific, where he became a Captain and earned medals for bravery. Don Corleone, however, believes that loyalty to family supersedes loyalty to country, and huffs that Michael "performs those miracles for strangers." Don Corleone eventually arranges Michael's discharge from the military by convincing a doctor to forge paper's claiming that Michael has a disabling wound.

The opening wedding celebration serves as a demonstration of Don Corleone's power and wealth. His estate is vast and brimming with loyal subjects like a monarch's castle. Like a king in past eras, the Don operates as a stand-in for God on earth. People come to Don Corleone professing their eternal servitude in exchange for his graces. Like God, the Don can make promises that other men cannot fulfill. This ability is the root of his power.



Here, Puzo demonstrates the Don's simultaneously benevolent and malevolent nature. Don Corleone dispenses favors for the rich and poor alike, but he does so not out of generosity, but for personal gain. To receive the Don's favors necessitates being forever in his debt. This is not a relationship centered on friendship; rather, the Don masks his greed and coercion with the veneer of friendship and generosity.



Puzo quickly establishes that Don Corleone is looking for a successor to run his crime Family. Each of his sons appear to have individual qualities that qualify them for the role, but each son seems to lack the combination of qualities befitting a successful Don. Sonny is strong and violent but not wise, Fredo is deeply loyal but lacks charm, and Michael is calm and independent but lacks loyalty.



Despite being Don Corleone's favorite son, Michael rebels against his father and his larger crime Family by joining the military. In this manner, Puzo sets Michael up to become a tragic prodigal son who has the initial courage to reject his family's obsession with loyalty, but who ultimately falls prey to that obsession later in the novel.



Michael sits with Kay, whose attention turns to a group of men gathered around a barrel of homemade wine. The men are Amerigo Bonasera, Luca Brasi, and Anthony Coppola. Michael explains to Kay that the men are waiting to see his father in private because “they have favors to ask.” As Don Corleone stands greeting guests, a black **car** parks outside of the mall. Sonny quickly realizes the car’s occupants are cops. He angrily approaches the car and learns that the men are FBI. He spits at their feet and returns to the wedding.

Don Corleone understands that being a Mafia Don attracts the presence of law enforcement. He disapproves of Sonny’s angry display because he values restraint and patience, comfortable in the knowledge that “the most humble of men, if he keeps his eyes open, can take his revenge on the most powerful.” Soon a band begins to play in the garden, where hundreds of guests celebrate the new couple. The bride and groom sit with their wedding party at a raised table. At her parents’ insistence, Connie agreed to a traditionally ostentatious Sicilian ceremony.

Connie is “not quite pretty” but nonetheless gleaming in her wedding dress. Her groom, Carlo, is half Sicilian and half northern. He is a burly former laborer from Nevada who greedily eyes the piles of gift envelopes. Because he has married into “a royal family,” he dreams of a life of impending luxury. In the crowd, Paulie Gatto, a soldier in the Corleone Family, also eyes the wedding envelopes while his boss, the fat Corleone caporegime (captain) Peter “Pete” Clemenza, dances and drinks copious amounts of wine.

As the wedding band takes a break, a musician named Nino Valenti plays the mandolin while Sonny flirts with Lucy Mancini, the maid of honor with whom he is having an affair despite being a married man. From inside Don Corleone’s office, the acting Family Consigliere (advisor), Tom Hagen, gives the Don the list of men who will meet with him.

First, the Don meets Nazorine, who has contributed money to the bakery union that Don Corleone controls. The Don agrees to use his corrupt political connections to secure Enzo’s stay in America. Next, Don Corleone gives \$500 to Anthony Coppola so that he can open up a pizza parlor. Coppola is the son of one of the Don’s long-time friends. The Don then meets with his loyal enforcer, Luca Brasi, a fearsome, violent, nihilistic man who fears neither death, other men, nor hell, but who “had chosen, to fear and love Don Corleone.”

This segment demonstrates that Don Corleone draws two types of people: those seeking favors, and those seeking to punish him for distributing such favors. Puzo emphasizes this pattern throughout the book, as the Don spends his time building contacts and dispensing favors while dodging the vengeance and ire of law enforcement and rival mobsters.



Among the secrets to Don Corleone’s success as a Mafia boss is his ability to avoid openly playing the role of a criminal. Rather than accost the FBI as Sonny does, the Don accepts their presence as an inevitable consequence of his role as a Mafia Don. Don Corleone’s patience allows him to successfully plot against his enemies behind closed doors, rather than out in the open.



The theme of loyalty and betrayal underpins Puzo’s novel. This segment early in the novel, however, shows why betrayal is built into the Mafia’s very structure. Puzo depicts two of the novel’s most significant traitors, Paulie and Carlo, lusting after the Corleone Family’s wealth. In a Mafia subculture where the temptation to constantly line one’s pockets is ever-present, treachery is a constant, and inevitable, threat.



Connie Corleone’s wedding provides an opportunity for the Corleone men to engage in their business while the women tend to marriage and family. This separation of the genders into distinct, and unequal, spheres is characteristic of the Mafia’s approach to gender relations.



This passage highlights the two primary means by which Don Corleone cultivates and wields his power. He avoids violence when merely pulling strings will do, bribing politicians and businessmen and cashing in on favors that men like Nazorine promise him. When violence is necessary, however, he turns to men like Luca Brasi to do the dirty work for him. The violent enforcer embodies crime without conscience. He is less a human and more of a tool that Don Corleone uses to further his own wealth and power.



Luca Brasi's fierce reputation always precedes him. Michael Tells Kay, much to her shock,) that Brasi once single-handedly killed six men who threatened Don Corleone's olive oil business. His reputation aside, however, Brasi humbly congratulates the Don with a wedding gift. Meanwhile, Michael tells Kay more about his family, including how his father unofficially adopted and raised the orphaned Tom Hagen. Inside the house, Sonny and Lucy have sex in an upper bedroom while Sonny's wife, Sandra, gossips with the other guests.

In his office, Don Corleone meets with Amerigo Bonasera, who begs the Don to murder the two men who assaulted his daughter. At first, Don Vito rebukes Bonasera for spurning his friendship and relying on the police for justice. After Bonasera swears his loyalty, Don Corleone tells him "you shall have your justice," but reminds the undertaker that "Some day, [...] I will call upon you to do me a service in return."

Johnny Fontane arrives at the wedding and sings a song. The Don then meets with Johnny, who is his godson. Johnny complains that his voice is shot and that his second wife doesn't respect him. He also asks the Don to convince the film producer Jack Woltz, who personally despises Johnny, to cast him in a film that will revive his flagging career. Don Corleone agrees to help Johnny, but he chastises him for divorcing his first wife, Ginny, and for failing to act "LIKE A MAN." When Johnny asks how the Don will convince Woltz to cast him in the movie, Don Corleone assures him that "I'll make him an offer he can't refuse."

Tom Hagen reminds Don Corleone that he must soon meet with narcotics dealer Virgil Sollozzo to discuss a possible partnership. The Don then instructs Hagen to go to California to meet with Jack Woltz. In the meantime, Don Corleone brings his three sons and Johnny Fontane to the hospital to visit the old Consigliere, Genco Abbandando, who is dying of cancer. Before he leaves for the hospital, Michael tells Kay about the time his father and Luca Brasi threatened to kill a bandleader named Les Halley unless he released Fontane from a bad performing contract.

At the hospital, Genco implores the "Godfather" Don Corleone to save him from death. The Don admits that such an act is beyond his power, but he stays with the old Consigliere until he passes away. Later that evening, Gatto and Clemenza drive Kay back to her New York City hotel. The next day, Don Corleone officially makes Tom Hagen the new *Consigliere*, a controversial move since the German-Irish Hagen is filling a position traditionally reserved only for Sicilians. Hagen then boards a flight bound for California.

At the wedding, Kay experiences the Corleone Family's brutality and kindness in equal measure. From Michael, she learns that Don Corleone orders men to be killed, but is also capable of great kindness, like informally adopting Tom Hagen. By presenting the Corleone Family as both savage and loving, Puzo allows readers to both relate to, and be repulsed by, the Family's behavior.



Don Corleone outwardly chastises Bonasera for not showing him "friendship," but what he is really doing is forcing the undertaker to swear his eternal loyalty, ensuring that the man is in the Don's debt. For those in the Mafia, "friendships" are always contingent on services rendered.



The Godfather is a story about men who build their conception of masculinity around dominating women. Here, Don Corleone berates Fontane for not living up to his role as a family patriarch. When Johnny wallows in his misery, the Don tells him to act "like a man," suggesting that an outward display of emotion, such as feeling sorry for oneself, is feminine behavior and therefore inherently negative coming from a man. "Real" men, according to the Don, display their power and dominance by making offers that other men "can't refuse."



Don Corleone acts as a cross between a businessman and a politician, as he delegates tasks to various underlings and pays his respects to a loyal follower. To those observing from the outside, The Don acts like any other powerful man. Kay's inquiry into his behind-the-scenes criminality, however, allows the audience to glimpse what they will soon see in full: however much he seems like any other powerful man, the Don is a criminal.



Throughout the novel, Puzo frequently compares Don Corleone to God. The Don is a family patriarch with more power than most men have, so this comparison often seems appropriate. In this passage, the Don flexes his power by appointing the non-Sicilian Hagen as new Consigliere. However, the Don is also still human: unlike God, he cannot save Genco from death. This limit on his power will prove costly later in the novel.



As a child, the orphaned Hagen befriended Sonny and won the grace of Vito Corleone, who took him in and raised him as his own son. Hagen attended law school and worked as a lawyer before accepting the Don's offer to work full-time for the Corleone Family. Hagen arrives in Los Angeles and meets with Jack Woltz, a pezzonovante ("big shot") with powerful connections. Hagen offers to quell labor union agitation and to "handle" a heroin dealer who is selling to one of Woltz's movie stars if Woltz will cast Fontane in his new picture. Woltz angrily rebuffs Hagen but agrees to meet again later at his lavish Hollywood mansion.

At the mansion, and upon learning that Hagen represents Don Corleone, Woltz shows him his prized racehorse and treats him to dinner. Woltz tells Hagen that he cannot cast Fontane in the picture because Johnny stole Woltz's latest actress-girlfriend. When Hagen asks Woltz to reconsider his response to Don Corleone, the producer angrily warns him, "if that Mafia goombah tries any rough stuff, he'll find out I'm not a band leader." A disappointed Hagen then flies back to New York, but not before witnessing a mother lead her young daughter out of Woltz's mansion. At this, Hagen realizes that Woltz is a pedophile.

Back in New York, Paulie Gatto and Pete Clemenza wait in their black **car** until Jerry Wagner and Kevin Moonan, the two men who beat Bonasera's daughter, emerge from a bar. The two mobsters jump the men and beat them nearly to death. Don Corleone has fulfilled Bonasera's desire for justice.

CHAPTER 2

Tom Hagen meets with Don Corleone to discuss the Woltz affair, as well as to plan the upcoming meeting with Virgil Sollozzo. The Don calls Woltz's pedophilia an infamia ("infamous behavior") and orders Hagen to punish Woltz for his refusal to cast Fontane in the movie. Soon after this, Woltz awakens one morning to find the severed head of his prized racehorse in his bed, after which he promptly casts Fontane in the movie. That evening, Hagen briefs Don Corleone on Sollozzo. He is a heroin dealer known as "The Turk" due to his skill with a knife and his drug contacts in Turkey.

Although Don Corleone takes in the orphaned Hagen, he never fully adopts him. Instead, the Don grooms Hagen for service to the Family by sanctioning his legal training and then offering him a position in his criminal organization. Hagen, in return, serves Don Corleone not as his father figure but as his employer.



Puzo skillfully gets readers to sympathize with his Mafia protagonists by portraying them as possessing at least some moral qualms that others do not share. Thus, while Don Corleone and Jack Woltz are both powerful and corrupt men, Woltz is a pedophile and therefore a worse man than the Don is. That Woltz is so vile and deserving of punishment makes the Don's eventual "persuasion" by use of the racehorse understandable, if not entirely palatable.



The attack on Wagner and Moonan underscores the major difference between mob justice and legitimate justice. Mafia justice operates under an "eye for an eye" framework, and as such, it is not beholden to legal niceties such as leniency. This decidedly Old Testament brand of justice is fitting for a man like Don Corleone, who often exists as a surrogate for God on earth.



Woltz's status as a pedophile provides Don Corleone the moral cover to proceed with his plan to murder an animal to further the career of a selfish womanizer like Fontane. Puzo uses incidences like this to suggest that the slippery slope of criminal behavior makes boundaries difficult to maintain. Yes, Woltz is an awful man who deserves to be punished, but his punisher is a man who is marginally less awful.



Sollozzo wants to use Don Corleone's political contacts in order to shield his drug distribution from Sicily into America. Despite both Hagen's and Sonny's insistence that "there is more money potential in narcotics than in any other business," the Don decides he will decline Sollozzo's offer, but agrees to still meet with him.

Don Corleone, Sonny, and Hagen meet with the fearsome Sollozzo, who informs them the rival Tattaglia Family is backing his drug trafficking plan. The Turk offers the Don a 50 percent stake in the operation if Don Corleone will share his "payroll" contacts in politics and law enforcement to use as cover for drug distribution. Don Corleone thanks Sollozzo but refuses his offer because narcotics is a "dirty business" that would and scare away his political connections. When Sonny expresses interest in the deal, Don Corleone angrily reminds him to "never let anyone outside the Family know what you are thinking."

It is now around Christmas. Fontane thanks Hagen for securing him the role in Woltz's new movie and vows to get his Godfather a lavish Christmas gift. Michael also calls to tell Hagen that he and Kay will meet the Don at his Long Beach home on Christmas Day. Hagen walks down a New York City street until Sollozzo stops him in his tracks, and orders him into a nearby **car**. Meanwhile, Michael and Kay meet in a city hotel room, where they make love before going Christmas shopping. They happily discuss marriage until Michael sees a newspaper headline proclaiming that his father has been shot.

Michael calls Sonny at the mall and learns that Don Corleone's assassins shot him five times but he is still alive. He also learns that Sollozzo has snatched Tom Hagen.

The narrative shifts back in time to the afternoon before the Don is shot. That afternoon, the Don's normal bodyguard, Paulie Gatto, calls in sick, and Don Corleone wonders why Paulie is sick for the third time that month. Fredo offers to drive his father home from his city office. He leaves the office and waits for the Don near his **car** outside of the building. After he walks out of the building, Don Corleone stops to peruse some fruit in a nearby stand.

Don Corleone's predetermined rejection of the narcotics business in the face of its enormous profit potential appears to suggest that even crime bosses have some moral standards. The Don's meeting with Sollozzo, however, will confirm that the Don's moral standards are themselves informed by selfishness.



Don Corleone's refusal of Sollozzo's lucrative offer demonstrates the old adage that there is no honor among thieves. The Don refuses to join the "dirty" drug trade not because of the negative consequences it could have on broader society, but because doing so might cost him personally, threatening the political contacts that help bolster his illicit wealth and power. Here, Puzo suggests that the Mafia's primary concern is preserving its power rather than chasing blindly after money.



By having Don Corleone's attempted murder happen near Christmastime, Puzo invokes religious notions of death and rebirth, of the son redeeming the father. Just as the God of the Christian Bible promised to redeem the fallen world through the birth of his son Jesus, Puzo places Michael as the redeemer of his crime Family by making his discovery via the newspaper of his father's near death the impetus for his eventual role as the Don's protector and successor.



Don Corleone is mortal after all, but he is still a hard man to kill. Sollozzo's failure to kill the Don will ultimately seal his own fate.



This marks one of the key moments in the novel where cars act as harbingers of death. Paulie's betrayal of the Don forces the weak Fredo to serve as his father's surrogate bodyguard. In this instance, however, the car Fredo drives does not foreshadow Don Corleone's death, but the death of his betrayer, Paulie.



Suddenly, two black-clad men open fire on Don Corleone. Although he is armed, Fredo is afraid to shoot back at the assassins. His father collapses into “a blackish lake of blood” as news photographers swarm the scene. Shortly after the shooting, Detective John Phillips, a cop on the Corleone Family payroll, informs Sonny about the shooting. Enraged, Sonny suspects Sollozzo, but knows the Turk must have powerful allies to have dared such a hit. When Clemenza mentions to Sonny that Paulie was too sick to guard the Don that day, Sonny suspects that Paulie has betrayed the Family.

In this section, Sonny displays strengths that make him seem capable of serving as a Don in his father’s absence. He demonstrates intelligence and resourcefulness when he suspects that Sollozzo could not have acted alone and that the Corleones must handle him carefully. He is also the first to suspect that Paulie betrayed Don Corleone, a suspicion that later proves to be true.



Sonny calls Salvatore “Sal” Tessio, the Brooklyn-based Corleone Family caporegime and orders him to send guards to the hospital and to the mall. He also tells Tessio to bring Michael back to the mall for his own safety. Sonny also wonders what happened to Luca Brasi, who Don Corleone had dispatched to spy on Sollozzo and his allies the Tattaglia Family.

Sollozzo proves a powerful and worthy foe of the Corleone Family. He rightfully recognizes that to take down the Corleones, he must attack their strengths, not their weaknesses. Luca Brasi is a key source of the Corleone Family’s strength, so Sollozzo targets him with vicious effect.



CHAPTER 3

Tom Hagen arrives in a car with Sollozzo to a secret location, where Sollozzo informs Hagen that Don Corleone is dead, and that he must convince Sonny to make a deal on the narcotics trade. Sensing that Sonny’s first inclination will be to retaliate, Sollozzo warns Hagen that “the Tattaglia Family stands behind me with all their people,” and that “the other New York Families will go along with anything that will stop a full-scale war between us.” A phone call then lets Sollozzo know that Don Corleone is still alive. “Bad luck for me. Bad luck for you,” he tells Hagen.

Sonny’s previous failure to heed Don Corleone’s advice to never share Family disagreements with outsiders comes back to haunt him. Having foolishly expressed an interest in Sollozzo’s offer during their first meeting, Sonny exposed a weakness in the Corleones’ unified front. Knowing that Sonny would be more willing than his father to negotiate a drug deal leads Sollozzo to try and dispatch of the Don who stands in the way of the deal.



CHAPTER 4

Michael Corleone arrives at the mall. Clemenza greets him and tells him that the Don is going to be okay. Fredo is sleeping in another room, while Sonny and Tessio are waiting in Don Corleone’s corner office. Michael notices a “hit list” that includes the names Phillip Tattaglia and Sollozzo. Hagen’s wife, Theresa, sits anxiously, awaiting any word about her husband.

Despite his earlier inclination to approach the powerful Sollozzo with tact and restraint, Sonny’s temper drives him to assemble a hit list. This suggests that he is really only capable of violent retaliation and doesn’t have his father’s quiet strength and tact.



After some thinking, the men conclude that Paulie Gatto is the one who betrayed Don Corleone because he stands to gain the most from colluding with Sollozzo and the Tattaglias. Sonny confirms their suspicions after tracking Paulie’s phone calls back to a pay phone outside of Don Corleone’s office building. Sonny recognizes that his interest in the drug deal inspired Sollozzo to try to negotiate directly with him by hitting the Don. His temper rising, Sonny vows to kill Sollozzo and the Tattaglias. Soon after, Tom Hagen arrives.

The speed with which the Corleone Family decides that Paulie must die testifies to the severity with which they punish treachery. That Paulie would commit such an act despite the penalty of death speaks to the constant and overwhelming temptation towards betrayal that comes with the mob lifestyle. Meanwhile, even the realization that Sollozzo wants to make a deal does not stop Sonny from seeking immediate and violent revenge for his father’s near-assassination.



CHAPTER 5

Hagen tells the other men that Sollozzo let him go after he convinced the Turk that he could get Sonny and Don Corleone to make a deal on narcotics. When Tom learns that Sonny wants revenge, he warns him that he should make a deal, especially if the Don dies. Without the Don's political contacts, Hagen states, "the Corleone Family loses half its strength" and risks losing support from the families who will want to avoid a destructive war. Sonny ponders Tom's advice but emphatically orders Clemenza to kill Paulie Gatto. The men also wonder what has happened to Luca Brasi.

Hagen provides the necessary voice of reason who warns Sonny that negotiation is preferable to revenge because it would be less damaging to the Family business. His temper notwithstanding, Sonny shows restraint by pondering Tom's advice, but gives into his bloodlust by ordering Paulie's immediate murder. This suggests that Sonny requires some level of violence to function as a Mafia leader.



CHAPTER 6

The next morning, Clemenza begins planning the murder of his protégé, Paulie. He had brought Paulie up studiously through the Mafia ranks until Paulie "made his bones" and established a good living within the Corleone Family structure. After much pondering over who will replace Paulie as "button man" in the Family, Clemenza decides on Rocco Lampone, a military veteran who has worked for the Family for years and who consistently showed sound judgement. In order to replace Paulie, Rocco must be the one who kills him.

Paulie seals his fate the minute he decides to betray the Corleone Family. Within the Mafia, no amount of prior loyalty can offset the damage done by a single act of treachery. Puzo also emphasizes the central role violence plays in the Mafia's moral order. In order to cancel out a "bad" hit—the attack on the Don—Rocco must commit a "good" hit by killing Paulie. For the mob, murder is positive or negative, depending on the circumstances.



Clemenza decides that Paulie's execution must be public: his body has to be found "so that embryo traitors would be frightened and the enemy warned that the Corleone Family had by no means gone stupid or soft." Pretending that they suspect nothing about Paulie, Clemenza and Rocco then drive around with Paulie on the pretext of scoping out suitable places where they can "go to the mattresses" (prepare for mob war by giving soldiers mattress-filled apartments to use as hideouts). They then have Paulie drive to a secluded road. Clemenza gets out of the car to relieve himself, and Rocco shoots Paulie in the head.

In the novel, the appearance of a car foreshadows impending death. Paulie's demise in the car transforms him from a symbol of betrayal to a symbol of Mafia justice and the Corleone Family's power. As the Family prepares to go to war with the Five Families, Paulie's body becomes a sort of battle flag, a warning to others not to betray the Family and a signal to enemies that death awaits all those who challenge the Corleones.



CHAPTER 7

The narrative shifts backward in time. The night before Don Corleone is shot, Luca Brasi meets with Bruno Tattaglia (the son of the head of the Tattaglia family) in the latter's nightclub as part of his spy mission for the Don. He discusses "joining" the Tattaglias as the Family's new enforcer. Sollozzo emerges from the shadows and guarantees Luca millions of dollars if he joins his drug operation. Luca says he will give his answer in a few days, but before he can leave, an assassin wraps a silk cord around his neck, strangling him to death. "It's important that he not be found right now," Sollozzo states.

For all of Luca Brasi's brute strength, and despite his terrifying reputation, his lack of intelligence leads to his swift demise. Sent by Don Corleone on a spy mission, Brasi is unable to recognize that he walked into a trap set by Tattaglia and Sollozzo. By attacking this major source of the Corleone Family's strength, Sollozzo gains the upper hand in his negotiations with Sonny.



CHAPTER 8

The members of the Corleone Family are working on a plan to deal with Sollozzo, and Fredo is still in a state of shock over his father's near-assassination. Michael and Kay try to restore normalcy by planning a date, while the radio news announces the discovery of Paulie's body in the **car**. Hagen and Sonny discuss the potential deal to make with the Turk, who has ceased contact with the Corleones. They worry that Sollozzo has already made a deal with the other New York families, so that all of those families will unite in a war against the Corleone Family.

As Michael, Hagen, Sonny, Tessio, and Clemenza sit down to eat spaghetti, they hear a noise in the kitchen. Clemenza investigates and returns displaying Luca Brasi's bulletproof vest with a dead fish wrapped inside of it. "The fish means that Luca Brasi is sleeping on the bottom of the ocean," says Hagen, "it's an old Sicilian message."

The Corleone Family's weakened position following Don Corleone's near-assassination demonstrates the perils of being the most powerful of all the Mafia Families. Such power only invites the other Families to try to seize that power for themselves. In addition, Michael's attempt to restore normalcy by going out with Kay is bound to fail because the firm link between his family and the Family business will soon force him to choose between the latter and the former.



This scene demonstrates the close relationship between the Corleone family and the Corleone Family business. As the men attempt to eat together in the family home, "work" interrupts their meal in the form of the dead Luca Brasi's vest. The violence of the outside world interrupts the sanctity of their domestic setting.



CHAPTER 9

That night, Michael meets Kay in the city, but he is preoccupied thinking about Sonny and his strategy against Sollozzo. He feels he should have more sympathy for his father, but he understands Hagen's advice that the issue "was just business, not personal." He and Kay arrive at the hotel, but Michael acts secretive towards her and refuses to tell an "outsider" about his father and the Family business. After spending some time with Kay, Michael leaves to visit Don Corleone in the hospital.

Michael arrives at the hospital around 10:30 p.m. and is surprised to find the street and the lobby inside deserted. He wonders where Tessio and Clemenza's guards are, as there is no one outside of Don Corleone's room. A nurse tells Michael that the police came and chased away all of the Don's guards. Michael then angrily calls Sonny to tell him that their father is "completely unprotected." As Sonny scrambles to send men to the hospital, Michael makes the nurse help him move Don Corleone into a different room.

Once Michael moves his father to a room at the end of the hall, the Don smiles at the presence of his youngest son. "Why should I be afraid now?" Don Corleone asks, "strange men have come to kill me ever since I was twelve years old."

The attempt on Don Corleone's life marks the moment where the Mafia's grip finally takes hold of Michael and refuses to let him go from that point onward. Michael tries to heed Hagen's advice that the hit was just "business," but because "business" nearly cost him his father, Michael's budding loyalty to his family already begins to dominate his life and causes him to view Kay as an outsider.



Despite his previously minimal participation in his Family's business affairs, Michael demonstrates an innate talent for surveying a situation and reacting to it appropriately. Finding a man as powerful—and as vulnerable—as his father without protection unleashes Michael's quick wit and natural leadership qualities.



This scene marks a turning point in the novel that begins the transfer of power from Don Corleone to his son Michael. Although Michael is not yet committed to the Mafia life, he is deeply committed to his father, and the two commitments eventually prove to be hopelessly intertwined.



CHAPTER 10

Having moved Don Corleone to a different hospital room, Michael steps outside to wait for Sonny's reinforcements. Suddenly, Enzo, the baker's helper emerges from the shadows outside of the hospital. He wants to pay his respects to the Don who prevented his deportation. A **car** drives slowly by, giving the impression that its driver recognizes Michael. Enzo is terrified but remains by Michael's side. Then a police car pulls up and two officers approach Michael. Michael asks what happened to his father's guard detail, to which one of the officers, Captain Mark McCluskey, angrily responds that he "pulled them off."

Michael suspects that Sollozzo was in the first **car** that drove by, and that McCluskey is on the Turk's payroll. He concludes that McCluskey called off Don Corleone's guard detail so that Sollozzo could finally murder the Don. McCluskey tells his officers to send Michael to jail, but they protest that he is a war hero and they have no reason to jail him. "How much is the Turk paying you to set my father up, Captain?" Michael asks. McCluskey responds by savagely punching Michael in the face, breaking his jaw and dislodging several teeth.

As Michael reels from McCluskey's attack, Sonny's men arrive with a lawyer to guard Don Corleone. The police retreat. Michael awakens the next morning to find that his jaw has been wired shut and that Hagen has placed a small army of private detectives around Don Corleone. Michael also learns that the Corleones successfully hit Bruno Tattaglia earlier that morning. With Bruno dead, Sollozzo once again calls Sonny to set up a meeting.

Later that morning, Sonny, Hagen, Michael, Tessio, and Clemenza discuss whether to meet Sollozzo. The Turk refuses to negotiate with the hotheaded Sonny and prefers to speak with the more even-tempered Michael instead. Sollozzo says he will provide a hostage in Michael's place to ensure Michael's safety. Hagen urges Sonny to agree to the meeting, but Sonny wants to demand that the other families give up Sollozzo "or fight the Corleone family."

The slow passing of the car outside the hospital suggests the looming presence of death. When confronted by McCluskey, the terrified Enzo contrasts sharply with the cool and confident Michael. Despite facing a man with more power and authority than him, Michael stands up to the police captain, proving that he is a worthy protector for his father.



In addition to his courage in the face of the intimidating McCluskey, Michael shows his keen intelligence by surmising that the police captain is actually working for Sollozzo. By confronting the powerful cop, Michael sacrifices his body. He absorbs McCluskey's savage attack and thus further plays the role of the prodigal son who comes to redeem the father.



Michael's foresight and courage prevents yet another attempt on Don Corleone's life, but Sonny's murder of Tattaglia demonstrates that in the Mafia, violence only begets further violence through a cycle of retaliatory murder. Sollozzo appears willing to break this cycle by offering to meet again with the Corleones, but violence always looms in the background, informing every decision the Mafia parties make.



This section marks the point where Sonny's inability to think beyond his own rage begins to cripple his role as acting boss of the Corleone Family. Hagen recognizes that Sonny's demand for more bloodshed will only result in a costly war.



Hagen then confirms that McCluskey is indeed on Sollozzo's payroll and stands to gain "a piece" of the Turk's drug operation. Hagen argues that Sollozzo is "invulnerable" under the protection of a police captain, and that attacking the two men would cause an uproar both in the Mafia and among the police and other officials who are on the Corleones' payroll. "The Corleone Family would become outcasts," he states, "even the old man's political protection would run for cover." Sonny decides to wait, but Michael suggests that Sollozzo will not stop until Don Corleone is dead. "You have to get Sollozzo right away," Michael reasons.

Michael believes that "there are times when the most extreme measures are justified," and lays out a plan. He will meet with Sollozzo and McCluskey at a public place that will guarantee his safety. He will go unarmed, but if Tessio or Clemenza can stash a gun at the site beforehand, Michael will retrieve it and "take both of them." Sonny teases his "high-class college kid" brother for becoming "mixed up in the Family business." Despite Sonny's teasing, Michael's stern demeanor indicates the seriousness with which he has concocted his plan.

Michael adds that the Corleone Family's newspaper connections will appreciate printing a story about a corrupt police captain who got what he deserved. An impressed Sonny finally admits to his brother, "you're a Corleone after all, you son of a bitch," and welcomes Michael's desire to "kill those fucks that are trying to destroy our father and our Family." Clemenza begins teaching Michael how to handle an untraceable gun wrapped in fingerprint-resistant tape. As the plan is set in motion, Michael feels a "delicious refreshing chilliness all over his body."

CHAPTER 11

Captain Mark McCluskey is in his office putting betting slips into envelopes. His raiding parties had confiscated the slips from bookmakers, and he plans to sell the slips back to the "bookies" for a profit. McCluskey comes from a family of police officers. Yet he engages in "clean graft" to earn extra money for his kids' college funds because of the dangerous nature of his work and its relatively light compensation. An old friend of Bruno Tattaglia, McCluskey found it easy to collaborate with him and Sollozzo, especially since he believes no Mafia hood would dare kill a police officer.

For all of his hotheadedness, Sonny does prove willing to take Hagen's advice and wait before retaliating further against Sollozzo and the Tattaglias. Only Michael, however, recognizes that no amount of negotiations can stop Sollozzo from trying to kill Don Corleone. Like Sonny, Michael proposes violence to deal with the problem. Unlike Sonny, however, Michael realizes that this violence must target Sollozzo directly.



Here, Michael undergoes the next step in his baptism into the Corleone Family. Having already decided that he will protect his father at any cost, Michael reasons that the cost must be murder. Sonny teases Michael for getting "mixed up in the Family business," but Michael made the decision to do so the moment he learned of Don Corleone's shooting.



When Sonny emphasizes that trying to destroy Don Corleone is tantamount to destroying the Family, he undermines Hagen's earlier claim that the hit on the Don was merely "business" and not "personal." The reality of the Mafia lifestyle is that Family and family are inseparable. What affects the one will inevitably affect the other.



McCluskey is a symbol of legitimate power and an enforcer of the law, but like the criminal Don Corleone, McCluskey places boundaries on his "graft." McCluskey sees nothing wrong with making money off illegal activity. However, much like Don Corleone, who rejects the "dirty" drug business, McCluskey limits his corruption to so-called "clean graft." In reality, however, both men find themselves beholden to forces they cannot fully control.



Tom Hagen arranges the necessary documents for Michael to flee the country, including a false passport, a seaman's card, and passage on a freighter bound for Italy. Meanwhile, Clemenza instructs Michael on how to shoot the gun he will use to kill McCluskey and Sollozzo. Clemenza warns Michael that the hits will pit the Corleones in a war with all of the Five Families but insists that "these things have to happen once every ten years or so. It gets rid of the bad blood." Michael's now-wired jaw is still swollen and painful.

Sonny finally learns that the meeting between Michael, Sollozzo, and McCluskey will happen at Luna Azure restaurant in the Bronx. Tessio knows the restaurant well and is confident that Clemenza can stash the gun in its bathroom. Sonny warns Clemenza to hide the gun well. "I don't want my brother coming out of that toilet with just his dick in his hand," he says. Hagen cautions Michael not to take the broken jaw from McCluskey personally, but Michael says that Don Corleone taught him "it's all personal, every bit of business [...] it's personal as hell."

Michael waits outside of a restaurant on Broadway for Sollozzo's **car** to arrive. When it does, Michael finds himself riding with the Turk, McCluskey, and the driver. McCluskey assures Michael that he harbors no hard feelings over their previous meeting. A Corleone Family tail car follows behind them, and Sollozzo's driver crosses the state line into New Jersey before swiftly doubling back into New York to shake the tail. Soon, the car parks outside of Luna Azure restaurant, and the men go inside.

McCluskey, Sollozzo, and Michael begin their meeting in the restaurant. The Turk and Michael converse in Italian. Michael demands that Sollozzo end his attempts on Don Corleone's life. Sollozzo says he cannot promise anything, and that by refusing to share his political contacts, Don Corleone is preventing him from running his drug business. Now convinced that the Turk will not stop until the Don is dead, Michael excuses himself to go to the bathroom. Inside the stall, Michael retrieves the gun and returns to the dining room.

After conversing for a few more minutes, Michael rises from his chair and shoots both McCluskey and Sollozzo in the head. Michael then flees the restaurant into Tessio's waiting car. Tessio asks him if he did "the job," an expression normally reserved for matters of sex. Michael replies affirmatively and Tessio drives off. The next day, police departments across the city declare that contacts with the Mafia will cease until they find McCluskey's killer. An assailant tosses a bomb into the Corleone mall, and two Corleone soldiers are murdered in another restaurant. The Five Families War of 1946 has begun.

Michael's preparation to murder Sollozzo and McCluskey makes him a willing soldier serving in what will become a Mafia war. This is a fitting development for a man who served his country as a soldier in wartime under the premise that loyalty to family does not override loyalty to country. Now, however, Michael takes the steps that will lead him to the opposite conclusion: where he once fought for country, he will soon fight for Family and Family alone.



Among the reasons that Michael eventually assumes leadership of the Corleone Family is his willingness to recognize that being in the Mafia entails total dedication. While Hagen continues to separate what is "business" from what is "personal," Michael understands that such a separation is impossible, and that to succeed in the underworld necessitates taking all aspects of the criminal business personally.



Sollozzo's car plays the role of hearse delivering bodies to the funeral home. It symbolizes the impending murder at the restaurant where Michael plans to "make his bones" and thereby finalize his commitment to Mafia lifestyle. The ease with which Sollozzo's driver shakes the Corleones' tail car signifies that Michael must perform the deed alone if he is to save his father.



Meeting with Sollozzo confirms Michael's earlier suspicions about the Turk's true intent: he has proposed the meetup to lull the Corleones into thinking that Don Corleone will be safe afterwards. Now assured that killing Sollozzo and McCluskey will save his father's life, Michael prepares to make his first hit.



Tessio's use of a sexual metaphor to characterize Michael's hit on Sollozzo and McCluskey invokes a sense of release and even euphoria over the act. Much like a man ceases to be a virgin following the act of sex and ejaculation, Michael is no longer a "virgin" in the Mafia because he has released his bullets to commit his first kill. Moreover, as Clemenza predicted, the murders bring war to the Mafia underworld, indicating the Michael's violation has severe consequences.



CHAPTER 12

Johnny Fontane is in his beachside Los Angeles mansion entertaining a young, would-be actress named Sharon Moore. True to his reputation as a womanizer with “a thousand pubic scalps dangling from his belt,” Fontane makes his move on the girl. Thanks to his damaged voice, he refuses to sing for her and instead delicately puts his hand between her thighs. Sharon, however, rebuffs his advances, and the two instead spend an awkward evening talking before she leaves earlier than planned. Soon after, Johnny’s first wife, Ginny, calls him on the phone.

After talking to Virginia, Johnny decides to visit her at her home. The two are back on platonic terms but will never again have a romantic relationship. Johnny wallows in self-pity over his botched date and tells Virginia she looks good. Virginia recognizes this as cheap flattery from a man who could have any of the “young beautiful girls” who flooded Hollywood “like lemmings.” Johnny tells her he wants to spend more time with her and their two daughters.

Suddenly, Tom Hagen calls and tells Johnny he is coming on the morning plane to discuss a new plan Don Corleone has for the film business. Johnny agrees and Virginia allows him to stay the night so he can meet Hagen early the next day. In the morning, Virginia and his two daughters greet Fontane with breakfast in bed. His womanizing notwithstanding, Johnny is devoted to his daughters. The girls and Virginia walk him to the door as he departs to meet Hagan.

Hagen and Johnny settle into the latter’s house. Hagen tells Johnny that Jack Woltz is paying off powerful people to prevent Johnny from winning an Academy Award for his role in Woltz’s recent picture. He offers Don Corleone’s aid in the matter if Johnny is willing to start acting like “a guy with muscle.” Hagen tells Johnny that the Don will convince his California bank to loan Johnny 20 million dollars to start producing and starring in his own films (with the Don receiving part of the profits, of course). The proposal stuns Fontane, but he agrees to it.

Johnny drops Hagen off at the airport and returns to Virginia’s house. At 35, he is a “washed up” star who welcomes Don Corleone’s ability to secure him the Academy Award that will easily boost his flagging career. He relishes the many years he spent deflowering Hollywood virgins and resents the sexual frustration he experienced with his second wife, Margot. He enjoys spending time with Virginia and decides to stay with her for a few weeks as he ponders a new book he wants to make into a movie.

Because Johnny Fontane has constructed his identity around sexually dominating women, he begins to question his identity whenever a woman rejects him. Just as Margot Ashton’s cheating drove Johnny to Don Corleone, Sharon Moore’s refusal to sleep with him drives him into the arms of his ex-wife, Virginia (Ginny).



Virginia resents Johnny’s tawdry self-pity because, as a woman, she knows that her rejection weighs heavily on his ego. However well-intentioned, Johnny’s plan to spend more time with Virginia and his daughters also seems like an attempt to reassert dominance over a different group of women after losing his dominance over Margot Ashton and Sharon Moore.



Johnny may be devoted to his daughters, but his devotion to Don Corleone’s crime Family takes precedence over his blood family. So wide reaching is the Godfather’s influence that he is able to control even the lives of people like Virginia and the girls who are indirectly within his orbit of control.



Don Corleone’s use of Fontane as a springboard into yet another profit-making enterprise further demonstrates the calculated nature of even his close personal relationships. Although Johnny is the Don’s godson, here the Don reveals the true reason he aided Johnny in the Woltz affair: Johnny has become his new business connection in the movie industry.



Johnny’s selfishness stands out even in a novel where most of the characters are exceedingly selfish. His sexual frustration and soured relationship with women are problems of his own making, yet he relies on women to nurture and support his attempted recovery.



As evening sets in, Johnny thinks about his good fortune with Virginia and resents the day he decided to leave her and his daughters for the “whore tramp of a bitch who was his second wife,” Margot Ashton. To put the past behind him, he resigns “never to hate a woman” again for the sake of his relationship with his first wife and his daughters.

Johnny thinks about the course his life has taken. After he made it big in radio and stage shows, he graduated to Hollywood films, where he “screwed the women he wanted to” but never let his infidelity “interfere” with his personal life. He fell for Margot Ashton just as his film career was tanking and his singing voice was disappearing. In an effort to marry her, he gave Virginia more than a fair settlement and ensured that his daughters would be set for life.

Rather than let Margot destroy him, however, Johnny decides that he will “continue to love women no matter how treacherous and unfaithful they were.” Rejuvenated by this newfound commitment to women, Johnny calls his onetime musical partner, Nino Valenti, and offers him a job in his new film venture. Nino accepts Johnny’s offer.

CHAPTER 13

The narrative shifts backward in time to a few weeks before the hit on Don Corleone. Johnny and Nino are recording new music in Los Angeles. Nino fiddles nervously at a piano while drinking a glass of whiskey. They are recording a set of classic old Italian and Sicilian songs: a Christmas gift for Don Corleone. Johnny sees that Nino is nervous and offers to fix him up afterward with Deanna Dunn, a famous starlet. He and Nino sing together, but Nino handles the main melodies to spare Johnny’s vocal cords.

Later that evening, Johnny takes Nino to a party that functions as a “Movie Star Lonely Hearts Club,” where he insists that Nino will be able to meet and have sex with Hollywood “broad” and “dames” who can get Nino work. “It doesn’t hurt to be charming after you knock off a piece,” Johnny advises Nino. Held at the home of Woltz’s press agent, Roy McElroy, the party is a mixture of young actors and experienced starlets. Nino meets Deanna Dunn at the party and she performs oral sex on him during a darkened film screening.

That Johnny Fontane casts himself as a martyr when he vows to stop hating women attests to the deeply patriarchal culture in which he lives. Only within a culture that relegates women to objects with which men can do as they please could a serial womanizer and philanderer blame women for his womanizing and philandering.



Even Fontane’s generous divorce agreement with Virginia stems from his own self-interest, not generosity. Much like how Don Corleone rejected the drug trade because it would threaten his other businesses and contacts, Johnny gave Virginia a better divorce deal as a means of securing his new marriage to Margot Ashton.



Within the realm of the patriarchal Mafia culture, men’s selfish desires always carry the day. So enamored is Johnny of his decision to forgive women for their transgressions, that it actually rejuvenates his desire to get his career going once again.



Fontane and Nino’s new collaboration stems from Johnny’s desire to both please his Godfather and reassert control over his life. By offering Nino a chance to make it big in the entertainment industry, Johnny believes he can demonstrate his good faith for Don Corleone as a means of thanking him for his help. He also feels sorry for ignoring Nino for so many years after he hit it big in Hollywood and wants to make it up to his old friend.



The “Movie Star Lonely Hearts Club” is appropriately named. Although decked out in all of the glitz and glamor befitting a Hollywood event, Puzo presents the party as a sordid affair where sad people go to unleash their frustrations through illicit sex and substance abuse.



Although Nino enjoyed Deanna Dunn's service, he feels that "his masculinity was insulted" because Dunn had treated him "like a goddamned male whore." Johnny understands that Nino cannot help but feel insulted when others do him favors, and that this trait explains why he never became successful. He leads the drunken Nino out of the party.

Johnny's brief sexual dalliance with Deanna Dunn happens in a darkened screening room while Johnny is drunk. Afterwards, he feels used and Dunn feels empty. By presenting sex stripped of all intimacy, Puzo suggests that Hollywood culture is a triumph of style over substance, where wealthy people are often devoid of everything but money. Nino seems to recognize this reality and responds by further numbing himself with alcohol.



When Johnny learns about the attempt on Don Corleone's life, he wonders if he will still receive the financing for his film production venture. Hagen, however, assures him the money is secured, but for one film at a time. Johnny begins production on his first movie but runs into trouble with Billy Goff, the union crony who is supposed to be on Don Corleone's payroll. When Goff demands a cut of the profits, Don Corleone has him killed. Meanwhile, Johnny and Nino's new record is selling well, he secures a divorce from Margot, and spends time once a week with Virginia and his daughters.

Don Corleone's deal to finance Johnny's film productions once again demonstrates that violence is the secret weapon in his illegitimate business arsenal. Even men like Billy Goff who are loyal to the Don suffer immediate and murderous consequences once they decide to cross him for any reason. Moreover, the Don's continued support for Johnny shows how he manages to profit from everything. Far from doing a mere kind deed for his godson, Don Corleone is helping Johnny because, in doing so, he stands to make a lot of money.



Nino and Johnny attend the Academy Awards, where Johnny wins the Oscar for best actor. The two men attend an Academy Award after-party that descends into an orgy. The event repels Nino, who remains uncharacteristically sober, and drives Johnny home.

Puzo's depiction of the film industry's relentlessly hollow debauchery suggests the frankly immoral consequences of abundant wealth. It is fitting that the Mafia has a firm grip on Hollywood, because Hollywood, like the Mafia, is a shady, cutthroat culture that thrives on favoritism, backroom deals, bribery, and hedonism—though it operates within the confines of legitimate society.



CHAPTER 14

The narrative shifts backward in time to explore the Godfather's origins. The Godfather was born Vito Andolini in the village of Corleone, in turn-of-the-century Sicily. There, the Mafia acted like a "Second government" that was more powerful than the actual government in Rome. When Vito was 12, the local Mafia Don murdered Vito's father and older brother after a protracted feud. Fearing that the adolescent Vito would seek revenge, the Don attempted to kill Vito first. However, Vito escaped to America, where he took the last name of his home village as his own and became Vito Corleone.

By going back in time to show Don Corleone's backstory in Sicily, Puzo helps illuminate why he chose a criminal's life in America. Crime in The Godfather is a self-perpetuating entity. Thievery and vengeful murder are integral features of young Vito Corleone's society. It is hardly surprising, then, that a society dominated by criminals only breeds more criminals.



After arriving in New York, Vito boards with a family named the Abbandandos, works in their family grocery store, and befriends their son, Genco. In Vito's Little Italy neighborhood, a man named Don Fanucci (a representative of the proto-Mafia "Black Hand") uses threats of physical violence to extort money from other Italians. One day, a group of punks slit Fanucci's throat from ear to ear, leaving a horrific scar, but failing to kill him. Later, one of the punks turns up dead and the families of the other two pay to keep Fanucci from retaliating. The attack increases Fanucci's notoriety, allowing him to charge more "protection" money.

Vito has grown up and is married with two children when Fanucci buys a share in the Abbandando's store and forces Vito to give up his job to the Fanucci's own nephew. Vito works other odd jobs while nursing a hatred for Fanucci. One evening, a young man named Clemenza asks Vito to hide some guns in his apartment. Vito agrees and, in return, Clemenza steals a rug for Vito from a wealthy neighbor's house. Clemenza and Vito soon collaborate with another local hood, Tessio, and they start hijacking goods from delivery trucks and selling them in the neighborhood for a profit.

Don Fanucci, clad in his cream-colored suit and fedora, has gotten word of Vito's hijacking efforts. He tracks Vito down and demands a portion of the profits earned. "You should let me wet my beak," he threatens, and tells Vito that if he hands over \$300 than he will forget the insult Vito has given by not recognizing Fanucci's influence over the neighborhood. Vito responds that Clemenza and Tessio share the money, so he will have to speak to them first. Vito's calmness impresses Fanucci, who agrees to give him time to collect the money.

That evening, Vito, Tessio, and Clemenza meet at Vito's home. "Why do we have to pay him?" Vito asks, "what can he do to the three of us?" Clemenza answers that the Black Hand has powerful "brutes" for friends who can retaliate against those who do not pay up. Vito, however, knows that Fanucci has no real connections; otherwise, he would have killed all three men that slit his throat. He tells his friends that they will pay Fanucci just \$200. Vito then instructs Tessio to send Fanucci to Vito's apartment, where Vito will "reason with him."

The Sicilian Mafia has partially transplanted itself in America via the presence of the "Black Hand." Even though hoodlums attack Don Fanucci, he shows how far a criminal can get on reputation alone. Fanucci's reputation as a dangerous man secures him "protection" money, and young Vito Corleone takes notice of how Fanucci uses fear as a social currency.



Vito Corleone's chance encounter with Peter Clemenza marks the beginning of a lifelong partnership. The men's simple exchange of favors—a rug for some hidden guns—teaches Vito the value of performing a service in exchange for a service. He eventually carries this knowledge into his criminal career and uses it as a major source of his power.



Here, Puzo offers up Fanucci as a kind of prototype for the man Vito Corleone will become, but with a crucial difference. Don Fanucci threatens Vito if he refuses to pay protection money, relying on his reputation as a feared man as insurance. Vito will later rely on his own reputation to get what he wants from people, but unlike Fanucci, will back his reputation with the very real capacity to inflict violence.



This segment marks the first time Vito Corleone attempts to "reason" with another man in order to secure what he wants. The "reason" he will use, however, is really a stalling technique that he will use to lure Fanucci into a trap. Like the calm air that precedes a rolling thunderstorm, Vito understands that careful planning and forethought are more valuable than outward displays of aggression.



Before Fanucci arrives at Vito's apartment, Vito sends his family away for the evening. He plans to murder Fanucci and thereby save a total of \$700: the \$300 he owes Fanucci, plus the \$400 from Tessio and Clemenza. He does not fear the police or the electric chair, because he "had lived under a sentence of death since the murder of his father." When Fanucci arrives at 9:00 p.m., Vito gives him \$500 and says he will pay the additional \$200 when he finds more work. Impressed by Vito's courage, Fanucci agrees on the delayed payment and exits Vito's building.

As Fanucci turns the street corner, Vito runs up the stairs to the building roof. He follows Fanucci from above over the building roofs and descends the fire escape to the street, right across from Fanucci's apartment house. Vito creeps past the nearby tenement houses and slips into the hallway of Fanucci's domicile, where he draws his gun and waits until Fanucci enters, and then he fires the gun, killing Fanucci. With the murder completed, Vito takes Fanucci's wallet (which is practically empty save for Vito's money) and flees back to the rooftops. He takes the money back and tosses his gun down one airshaft and Fanucci's wallet down another.

Much to his surprise, the police never question Vito about Fanucci's murder, treating it as just another gangland hit. After two weeks, Vito meets again with Tessio and Clemenza, who greet him with "obvious respect." Clemenza suggests taking over Fanucci's extortion rackets, but Vito refuses. The men understand without ever saying so that Vito had killed Fanucci. Within a few weeks, the entire neighborhood treats Vito as "a man of respect." Hearing of Vito's new reputation, a widow named Signora Colombo implores him to talk to her landlord, who kicked her out because her son got a dog.

Vito "reasons" with the landlord, Mr. Roberto, and pays him for the widow's rent. "I'm asking you a favor, only that," Vito explains, "one never knows when one might need a friend, isn't that true?" Mr. Roberto is at first indignant but changes his mind upon learning of Vito's reputation. He allows the widow to stay and even returns Vito's money to avoid crossing a "man of respect" who is "reputed to be a member of the Mafia of Sicily."

Vito's meeting with Fanucci is a form of displayed negotiation: he has no plans to pay Fanucci any money, but he understands the value of letting Fanucci believe that a negotiation is occurring. Rather than murder Fanucci outright, Vito makes him believe that an exchange has occurred per usual, thereby causing Fanucci to let down his guard.



Vito's murder of Fanucci is swift and calculated in the manner that the future Don will approach all of his "business" dealings. The fact that Fanucci has little cash in his wallet and lives not in a large house, but in an apartment row supports Vito's initial suspicion that Fanucci is not a wealthy, well-connected gangster, but a mere confidence man.



Vito Corleone's newfound reputation as a "man of respect" is a euphemism. In this case, people respect Vito because they fear him. Even his partners, Tessio and Clemenza, understand Vito's capacity for violence and begin respecting him for the fear he instills. Moreover, other people in the neighborhood, such as Signora Colombo, recognize that Vito now has the power to challenge others with power.



Vito's interaction with the landlord epitomizes the approach he will soon perfect as a crime boss. He does not utter a threat. Instead, he appeals to Mr. Roberto's goodwill and sympathy while assuring him that he is the kind of man who knows how to return a favor. Vito does not threaten the landlord because he does not have to: his reputation—which, unlike Fanucci's, is backed by the capacity to act—is now all the threat he needs.



Steadily, the now feared and respected Vito Corleone builds his own criminal operations. He intercedes on behalf of storeowners plagued by young hoodlums in exchange for being “properly rewarded.” He then opens his own olive oil importing business, *Genco Pura*, named after his new Consigliere. Although it is nominally a “legitimate” business, Vito strong-arms storeowners to carry his oil and threatens competitors with violence. Vito, “like many businessmen of genius,” learned “that free competition was wasteful, monopoly efficient.” He establishes his monopoly through violence: he burns competitors’ warehouses, hijacks their shipments, and beats those who resist.

The institution of Prohibition in 1920 proves a boon to Vito’s criminal operations: he amasses great **wealth** by smuggling alcohol from Canada into the United States. In his neighborhood, Vito becomes Godfather to people in the neighborhood by performing services in exchange for their loyalty to him. He also formalizes the major hierarchies in his crime family by making Genco Consigliere, Tessio and Clemenza his caporegimes, and putting “layers of insulation between himself and any operational act” so as not to implicate himself as the Don of a criminal syndicate. He also forbids the *caporegimes* from associating with each other in order to dissuade them from conspiring against him.

Don Vito Corleone’s charitable actions—loaning money to those in need, protecting them from physical threats, serving as an alternative to legal justice—helps him amass **wealth** and power. “There [is] some self-interest in this generosity,” and he uses his growing connections and web of loyalties to consolidate his power “with all the foresight of a great national leader.”

When Don Corleone proposes a partnership with the Mafia boss Salvatore Maranzano, who controls the gambling rackets in Brooklyn, Maranzano spurns his offer. Corleone retaliates by using his political connections and the brute force of his caporegimes and their soldiers against Maranzano’s best men. When Maranzano allies with Chicago Mafia boss Al Capone to have Corleone killed, Don Vito enlists Luca Brasi to intercept the would-be assassins and brutally murder them with an axe. This sends a message to Capone to not interfere in quarrels between Sicilians.

Throughout the novel, Puzo often suggests that there is a fine line separating a criminal from a capitalist, and this passage provides a prime example of that. Vito operates an olive oil business to give his operations the veneer of legitimacy, but he uses shady techniques to destroy his competition. Just like “businessmen of genius,” Vito understands that breaking the rule of “free competition” and other formal rules of capitalism is the best way to become a successful capitalist. Given that other businessmen in the novel are corrupt, Vito’s methods comes across as understandable, if not entirely agreeable.



As Puzo has already demonstrated, the constant fear of betrayal underlies the Mafia lifestyle. Even as he is forming his crime Family with his two closest partners, Tessio and Clemenza, Vito is acutely aware that his powerful position will make him the target of intrigue and treachery. His edict forbidding the caporegimes from socializing shows that Mafia members do not—and cannot—have friends, only partners and potential enemies. Genuine friendship is built on trust, and trust is something the Mafia cannot afford to embrace.



Vito Corleone’s methods for forging connections with others appear to involve generosity, but this generosity is merely an excuse to reap rewards for his own benefit. Vito’s skill as a gangster rests in his ability to make people think that swearing loyalty to him will be worth their while, whatever the price he ultimately demands from them.



Don Corleone may revert to violence as a last resort, but when he does use violence, he is ruthless. His duel with Al Capone demonstrates Corleone’s capacity to match the violence of even the most vicious opponents. Moreover, by sending Luca Brasi to murder the Capone soldiers, Don Corleone shows how the Mafia uses violence for its symbolic effect in addition to its practical benefits. In this case, a single gruesome attack is more effective than an all-out war with the Capone organization.



Don Corleone's humiliation of Al Capone earns him further respect in the criminal underworld. He now attacks Maranzano's gambling parlors, co-opts his allies and soldiers, and cripples his ability to make profits. Finally, some of Maranzano's own men betray him, allowing Tessio and his soldiers to murder the boss while he eats lunch. The war now over, Don Corleone incorporates Maranzano's operations into his own empire.

Don Corleone has established himself as New York's most powerful crime lord, and his influence begins to rub off on his son Sonny, who takes part in an armed robbery. A furious Don Corleone lectures Sonny on the foolishness of his behavior until Sonny reveals that he witnessed his father murder Don Fanucci. The Don recognizes his hypocrisy in lecturing Sonny, who wants to join the "family business." Don Corleone continues to reprimand Sonny for his temper but realizes that he can use his son's anger to his own advantage.

Seeking to rid New York of all organized crime save for the five major Mafia families, Don Corleone enlists Sonny as his go-to executioner behind only the more fearsome Luca Brasi. By 1939, through a combination of calculated violence and tactful negotiation, Don Corleone organizes a working peace between the Five Families that control the criminal underworld. As World War II breaks out, the Don takes comfort in his powerful status: "his world was safe for those who had sworn loyalty to him; other men who believed in law and order were dying by the millions."

Don Corleone also continues to help those who swear their loyalty to him. Nazorine the baker comes to him after a furniture wholesaler swindles him out of \$300. In response, the Don sends Genco to speak with the wholesaler, who "caught the drift immediately" and arranges for Nazorine to get the furniture. In addition, Don Corleone decides to move his family to suburban Long Beach, where he can bask in the anonymity of suburban life. When an unscrupulous furnace crew demands exorbitant sums to repair the Don's furnace, Sonny holds them at gunpoint until they finish the work free.

In addition to using violence, Don Corleone uses the Mafia's penchant for betrayal to his own advantage by coopting soldiers from Maranzano's Family. Because Mafia loyalty is only as good as the profits that it promises, Don Corleone knows that the promise of wealth and power is enough to test his enemies' loyalty in the midst of a mob war.



Don Corleone's attempt to lecture the teenage Sonny about the pitfalls of criminality ring hollow coming from a man who relied on crime to build his fortune and his reputation. Yet the Don is nothing if not resourceful, and he recognizes that Sonny's characteristic hotheadedness can be a powerful asset in a "business" that places a premium on the will and capacity to do violence.



His willingness to use violence notwithstanding, Don Corleone is intelligent enough to recognize that violence is ultimately too destructive. He reasons that a calculated peace that ensures profits for all is in the interest of all of the Five Families. By becoming the "Boss of bosses" within the New York Mafia, Don Corleone appears to demonstrate that organized crime can "work" much like a legitimate business, and that it need not rely on bloodshed and chaos. Later in life, he will see the folly of this belief.



Here, Puzo emphasizes that the Don views crime as a means to achieving a very ordinary American life, replete with a very ordinary suburban house in a quiet neighborhood. Yet the Don brings the criminal life right into this "normalcy" when he uses Sonny to threaten a crew of shady furnace repairmen. On the other hand, the presence of the furnace men's minor organized crime ring suggests that there is no real escape from American crime, even in the quietest suburbs.



CHAPTER 15

Kay Adams peers out of her bedroom window from her home in small-town New Hampshire. She sees two burly men emerge from their **car** and knock at her door. When she answers, the men identify themselves as Detective John Phillips and Detective Siriani from the New York police department. They enter and begin questioning Kay about Michael Corleone and his possible connection to the murders of Sollozzo and McCluskey. Kay's father, Mr. Adams, also greets the detectives. Kay insists, "Mike wouldn't do anything like that [...] he never had anything to do with his family."

The detectives lay out the circumstantial evidence that ties Michael to the murders, including his argument with Captain McCluskey outside of the hospital and several anonymous informers who have fingered Mike for the crime. Kay, however, remains convinced that Michael is innocent. After the detectives leave, Mr. and Mrs. Adams reveal they have been opening Kay's mail and are well aware of her affair with Michael.

Three days after her meeting with the detectives, Kay visits the Corleone mall in Long Beach. There, she meets Tom Hagen and inquires about Michael's whereabouts. "We know he's all right but we don't know where he is right now," Tom tells her. He confirms the detectives' story about McCluskey breaking Michael's jaw but denies any link between her fiancé and the murders. "Mike was never a vindictive man," he says. "I'm sure that had nothing to do with what happened."

Kay asks him to deliver a letter to Michael, but Tom refuses, claiming that doing so would implicate him as having knowledge of Michael's whereabouts. Before leaving the mall, Kay greets Mama Corleone. She offers Kay coffee and tells her that Don Corleone and Michael are fine but does not reveal where Michael is hiding. She advises Kay to "forget about Mikey," and as two men drive Kay home, she wrestles with the unavoidable reality that "the young man she had loved was a cold-blooded murderer."

CHAPTER 16

Carlo Rizzi resents the Corleone Family. Following his marriage to Connie, Don Corleone gave him a small bookmaking operation on Manhattan's Upper East Side. The operation pays the bills, but it is not the lucrative, high-status position Rizzi envisioned he would have. He likens the Don to an out-of-touch "Moustache Pete," and he takes out his resentment towards the Don by physically abusing Connie.

Puzo emphasizes how Kay now lives in a different world from Michael. When separated from his family at Dartmouth, Michael was able to connect with Kay as a person who wanted to strike out on his own rather than accept his predetermined fate within his family. Having not been with Michael since the murders of Sollozzo and McCluskey, however, Kay still believes that Michael has maintained that distance from his family, and she still believes him incapable of the kind of horrible deeds that she knows his family engages in.



Kay's refusal to believe that Michael is capable of murder is understandable given the context of their relationship up to this point. Her parents, however, display more suspicion about him even if they are unaware of the nature of his "Family business."



Tom responds to Kay not as a potential family member, but as a lawyer. He speaks in a formal, straightforward manner with minimal sympathy for Kay's loss of Michael. That he must lie to Kay about the true nature of Michael's involvement in the murders understates what Michael will himself say to her later: she cannot have any knowledge about his "business."



Mama Corleone's interactions with Kay foreshadow the kind of existence Kay will have once she marries into the Corleone Family. Like Mama Corleone, she will almost exclusively tend to domestic duties in a sphere separate from that of the men who run their Mafia world. Mama Corleone advises Kay to forget her love for Michael because she knows that crime Family always trumps traditional family.



Carlo's violent abuse towards Connie represents yet another way that women serve as objects for men's pleasure in the character's patriarchal world. In contrast to Johnny Fontane, who builds his identity around sexually conquering virginal girls, Carlo uses Connie as a vent for his frustration towards her Family.



One morning, a now-pregnant Connie tells Carlo that she is going to visit her father in Long Beach, where he is still recuperating. Carlo asks her if Sonny is still in charge, and when she feigns ignorance on the matter, he viciously slaps her several times on the face. Connie's face is now so swollen that she decides against visiting the Don. "Slapping the spoiled little bitch around" makes Carlo feel good because it alleviates "some of the frustration he felt at being treated so badly by the Corleones." He tells her he will not be home until late and leaves the apartment.

Carlo is able to beat Connie with relative impunity because Vito and Mama Corleone vow they will not interfere in their children's marriages. Shortly after the wedding, Connie told her parents how Carlo squandered all of their wedding money and that he beats her relentlessly. Although Connie had always been Don Corleone's favorite child, he exclaims that "she is my daughter [...]" but now she belongs to her husband." He instructs Connie to "go home and learn how to behave so that he will not beat you."

Sonny Corleone, however, does not share his father's opinion about Connie's marriage to Carlo. Despite his temper and proclivity towards violence, Sonny abhors violence against women. One day, following a visit to his mistress Lucy Mancini's apartment, Sonny visits Connie after Carlo goes to work. When Connie answers the door showing the bruises and swelling from Carlo's latest beating, Sonny flies into a murderous rage. Connie insists "it was [her] fault" and convinces Sonny to come inside the apartment. Sonny promises her that he "won't make [her] kid an orphan before he's born" (i.e., he won't kill Carlo) and leaves.

It is a Sunday and Carlo sits in his bookmaking office alongside his associates, Sally Rags and Coach. He meticulously jots down the odds for various sports bets in his record notebooks in order to report the records to Tom Hagen. After he jots down the bets, Carlo joins Sally Rags and Coach on the building's outside stoop, where he brags about abusing Connie. Suddenly, Sonny pulls up his **car** and leaps from the driver's seat. He grabs Carlo and beats him with his fists. Carlo clings to the stoop railing, refusing to fight back.

The Corleone Family's vast wealth makes it a magnet for shady individuals wishing to take some of that wealth for themselves. Puzo emphasizes that Carlo did not marry Connie because he loved her, but that he instead married her Family, so to speak, with the hopes of earning a prestigious position in the Family rackets. When Don Corleone gives him a meager bookmaking operation instead, Carlo beats Connie because he cannot attack the Don directly.



Connie is the victim of two distinct strains of patriarchy. As a woman, she is unable to have a role in her father's crime business and must instead rely on her husband for support. When Carlo abuses her, Connie receives no protection from her parents because they subscribe to a patriarchal version of family relations that makes a wife her husband's property, with which he can do as he chooses.



Sonny is protective over Connie in a way that Don Corleone is not. Yet Sonny's distaste for violence against women stems not from a belief that women are his equal, but from a patriarchal notion that frames men as natural protectors of women. Connie herself does not embrace Sonny's intervention in her marriage because she knows it will only inspire Carlo to beat her more.



That Carlo spends Sundays (a traditional day of rest and family time) at his bookmaking office speaks to his general indifference to his pregnant wife, Connie. By arriving and attacking Carlo on a Sunday, Sonny tries to reestablish (albeit violently) the importance of family togetherness in his sister's marriage by forcing Carlo to treat her better.



Carlo responds to Sonny's attack with "complete subjugation" because he knows that Sonny will not kill him, lest he anger Don Corleone. "You ever beat up my sister again I'll kill you," Sonny warns before leaving Carlo a bloody pulp on the stoop. Sally Rags reports the incident to Rocco Lampone, who then reports it to Clemenza. The caporegime curses "that goddamn Sonny and his temper" and reports the incident to Tom Hagen. The Consigliere worries that the Corleone Family's enemies might learn of Sonny's location, so he orders Clemenza to send bodyguards to locate him. Sonny eventually arrives home safely.

This incident embodies the way that blood family and crime Family are bound inextricably together in the Corleone's world. Carlo is both a member of the family and an employee of the Family. As such, Sonny and Don Corleone are his "bosses." In beating Carlo, however, Sonny acts like a brother, not an employer, yet his insistence on resolving a family dispute make him vulnerable to retaliation from his crime Family's enemies.



CHAPTER 17

The 1947 war between the Corleone and Tattaglia families proves costly to both sides, especially since police departments are clamping down on their "protection" for various mob rackets until they solve the murder of McCluskey. Eventually, however, newspapers print stories containing definitive proof (which Tom Hagen supplies) that links McCluskey to Sollozzo's drug rackets. The revelation shocks police departments across the city not because McCluskey had taken graft, but because "he had taken the dirtiest of dirty money; murder and drugs money." In the complex code of police morality, McCluskey's transgression is "unforgivable."

Much as Don Corleone struggles to differentiate "legitimate" crime from a "dirty" business like drugs, New York's corrupt cops try to draw a line at what constitutes acceptable graft. In both cases, drugs prove to be the deciding factor, as both police and the Don think trafficking in drugs is a step too far for both groups. This conclusion, however, is not universal, and other cops (McCluskey) and other mobsters (Sollozzo) see no fault with dealing in the most profitable of criminal rackets. Like Don Corleone, the cops who think drugs are too "dirty" are fighting a losing battle that profit, not morality, will always win.



Hagen knows that police will justify modest graft such as gambling and prostitution because they perform dangerous, often unappreciated work for low pay. Police, however, draw a firm line at "dirty graft" that puts them in league with known murderers and drug dealers, whose actions attack police officers' "personal authority" and therefore "cannot be countenanced." As the police "desire for vengeance" against the Mafia fades, departments once again let the Families operate most of their operations with minimal interference.

Police and mobsters alike are deeply concerned with maintaining at least some level of unquestioned authority in their respective organizations. Ironically, despite their antagonistic relationship, the police and the mob collaborate in order to maintain a certain level of authority in their respective organizations. Thus, the police tolerate several mob rackets, while the mob must observe that only extreme circumstances justify the gangland murder of a police captain.



By mid-February, following the Christmastime attack on his life, Don Corleone's family moves him from the hospital back to the mall, which is now an "impregnable" fortress rife with guards at all ends. Don Corleone's surgeon, Dr. Kennedy, forbids him from discussing any business matters, but the Don plans to ignore this edict. Meanwhile, Fredo now works in Las Vegas, where he helps run a luxury hotel-casino complex under the protection of a California Don. The hotel-casino is part of the Corleone Family's West Coast empire.

The Don's departure from the hospital reveals that despite his godlike status, he is indeed a mortal man. He is still too injured to work, and his home becomes a fortress built to protect him from further treachery. Meanwhile, in a symbolic move, Fredo, the son who failed to protect his father in his hour of greatest need, has been far removed from the Don's presence and sent to work in the Family's Las Vegas rackets. This physical separation further underscores Fredo's unworthiness to fill his father's shoes as boss of the Family.



After informing Don Corleone about Michael and the murders of Sollozzo and McCluskey, Hagen and Sonny exit Don Corleone's bedroom to discuss the ongoing war between the Corleones and the Five Families. Tessio explains that the other families have lost money in the wake of the McCluskey affair, and they justifiably blame the Corleones. He reasons that unless the Corleone Family negotiates a deal with the Five Families to participate in narcotics distribution, the other families will continue to attack the Corleones' bookmaking and gambling operations. Sonny refuses any narcotics involvement until the Don decides otherwise.

Hagen states that because the Corleone Family's money comes from "bookmaking and policy," it is therefore "out in the open" and vulnerable to attacks. By contrast, the other families' money is not "out in the street" because they control prostitution, loansharking, and union infiltration—operations that are, by nature, more clandestine and therefore less vulnerable to attack. Meanwhile, the Five Families continue to murder Corleone associates in the garment and banking sectors, and they manage to persuade Corleone bookmakers to switch their loyalties to the other families. These attacks force Sonny and the caporegimes to "go to the mattresses."

The Mafia war reveals the Corleones are unsuited for a protracted struggle. Tessio and Clemenza are competent caporegimes, but their age and mellowed ruthlessness hampers their fighting ability. Tom Hagen is also not suited to be a wartime Consigliere due to his preference for negotiation over violence. Moreover, Sonny is unable to address these weaknesses because he is only acting Don and therefore must still defer to the still-recovering Don Corleone on major Family matters. The war is now in a stalemate, but only because the Five Families have not yet dealt a crippling blow to the Corleone Family.

CHAPTER 18

The undertaker Amerigo Bonasera is dining with his wife at home. It is evening, and he tells her he will be going back to work. As "a strict chaperone of death," Bonasera not only embalms the dead, but also offers a consoling presence to the families who patronize his funeral parlor. His daughter now lives in Boston. Surgery has restored her face, but she lives with the psychological damage from her attack over a year ago by the punks that Don Corleone's men punished. As Bonasera finishes his coffee, he answers a phone call from Tom Hagen.

Don Corleone's unique talent for negotiation proves to be a major weakness for his Family once he is temporarily unable to fulfill his role as boss of the Family. While Michael's killing of Sollozzo and McCluskey was necessary to save the Don's life, it has pit the Corleones in a war with the Five Families that cannot be won through violence alone.



Ironically, Don Corleone's refusal to traffic in drugs, lest it harm his other businesses, has still brought harm to his other businesses. In a display of power and contempt for the Don's moralizing stance, the Five Families intentionally target the very same rackets that Don Corleone sought to protect from blowback caused by drug trafficking. Sonny's decision to "go to the mattresses" reflects his helplessness to do anything but fight until the Don is fit enough to negotiate again.



At the beginning of the novel, the Corleone Family enjoys a position of power and dominance within New York's Mafia underworld. Power, however, attracts those who wish to take that power from themselves, and the shooting of Don Corleone reveals the many structural inadequacies in his Family that left it vulnerable to attack. However, while the other Families have weakened the Corleones, they have not yet broken them.



Bonasera's solemn presence as a "chaperone of death" foreshadows an impending tragedy. Puzo emphasizes that Bonasera does not merely prepare the dead for burial, but also comforts those who have lost loved ones. With this information at hand, the reader knows that the call from Tom Hagen will not bring comforting news. In calling the "chaperone of death," Hagen must provide the chaperone with someone to watch over.



Hagen tells Bonasera, “you owe the Don a service,” and instructs him to meet the Godfather at his funeral parlor in one hour. At the funeral home, Bonasera waits for Don Corleone “with a feeling of the utmost despair.” He is well aware of the ongoing Mafia war and fears that he may be targeted by Don Corleone’s enemies. Suddenly, he hears several **cars** approaching outside. Several men emerge from the cars and carry a body on a stretcher into the funeral home. Don Corleone follows them in. “Well, old friend, are you ready to do me this service?” he asks Bonasera.

Bonasera has known for over a year that in receiving the Don’s justice, he must repay the Don in some form. Yet, the prospect of providing Don Corleone with a funeral fills the undertaker with “despair” because he knows the Corleone Family are criminals. Thus, aiding the Family will make Bonasera an accomplice to their crimes and even potentially make him a target for the Corleones’ enemies. This is the price for seeking out mob justice: doing so turns law-abiding citizens into default criminals.



In the embalming room, Don Corleone’s men remove the blanket covering the body on the stretcher, revealing the “bullet-smashed face of Sonny Corleone.” The Don implores Bonasera to restore Sonny’s mangled visage so he can have an open-casket funeral.

It seems that the other Families have finally dealt a significant blow to the Corleones: Sonny has been violently, brutally murdered.



CHAPTER 19

The narrative goes back in time. As the Mafia war rages on, Sonny Corleone massacres an army of pimps, “shylocks,” union officials, and bookmakers who work for the Five Families. The slaughter proves satisfying, but it does not turn the tide of the war because it leaves the leadership of the other Families untouched. Sonny lacks Don Corleone’s “strategical genius,” and Hagen warns him to lay low because the Five Families have made him a “marked man.” However, despite the danger of being out in the open, he continues to see Lucy Mancini.

Sonny is a skilled enforcer. He specializes in violence but falters when violence alone fails to solve a problem. Here, Puzo foreshadows Sonny’s own downfall: by pointing out that Sonny’s violent acts on behalf of the Family are not enough to stop the war, Puzo suggests that Sonny’s personal failures as acting Don are mortal failures. Echoing the biblical injunction that those who live by the sword will die by the sword, Puzo indicates that Sonny’s violent life can only end in a violent death.



One evening, an anonymous woman telephones the residence of Carlo and Connie. Connie answers, and the girl tells her that she is unable to see Carlo that evening. Later, when Carlo comes home from the racetrack, a furious Connie berates him for his infidelity. She scrapes his face with her fingernails and demands that he stay home. She points to the dinner she made for him but he says he is not hungry.

Once again, a woman is caught between the machinations of the Mafia’s male members. Unable to act on her own behalf, Connie unwittingly plays the role of pawn in the chess game between the Corleone Family and their rivals.



Enraged, Connie throws Carlo’s dinner plates to the floor. Carlo grabs his belt. “You filthy guinea spoiled brat,” he screams, “clean that up right now or I’ll kick the shit out of you.” He beats her with the belt, then gets drunk on whiskey and falls asleep. As Carlo sleeps, Connie calls her family in Long Beach. Mama Corleone answers but is unable to interpret Connie’s “hysterical” speech. She passes the phone to Sonny. She begs Sonny to send a car to bring her to the mall but insists that he himself should stay put.

Carlo’s latest attack on Connie symbolizes the state of the Corleone Family as a whole at this point in the story. Like Connie herself, the Family is sustaining constant beatings, and there appears to be no way to stop the violence.



Unable to contain his rage, Sonny pays no heed to Connie's request that he stay put. "The fucking sonofabitch" he mutters as he leaves the house, gets into his **car**, and heads towards Connie's apartment. One look at Sonny's face lets Hagen know that "all reasoning power had left him." He orders two bodyguards to follow Sonny's car as he drives onto the Jones Beach Causeway.

Sonny drives down the Jones Beach Causeway until he reaches a tollbooth. He shuffles his pockets for money to pay the toll and approaches approach the gate, where another **car** is ahead of him. He hands the tolltaker a dollar bill and notices the car ahead of him has stopped. In a flash, the tolltaker raises a gun and fires it at Sonny. His body "spilled out of the car" as two men in the car ahead of him also shoot him in the head, and then get out and kick his face "to disfigure his features even more."

The assassins flee the scene shortly before Sonny's bodyguards arrive. They call Tom Hagen to tell him that Sonny is dead. As Mama Corleone bustles around in the kitchen, "quite content not to share the pain of her men," Hagen retreats to the conference room and begins shaking. He understands now that he is not a fit wartime Consigliere, that the other families had fooled him by waiting patiently "to land one terrible blow" against the Corleones. Still shaken, Tom calls a still-drunk Carlo and tells him that Sonny is dead and that the family is moving him to the mall and giving him a more lucrative job.

Hagen must now wake Don Corleone and tell him that his son is dead. As he struggles to find the words to deliver the news, Don Corleone emerges fully dressed from his room. "Outside my window I saw my caporegimes coming to the house and it is midnight," he says. "So, Consigliere of mine, I think you should tell your Don what everyone knows." Hagen delivers the news. For a moment, the Don seems drained of his strength, but he quickly recovers. Clemenza and Tessio arrive, and Hagen gives the men the full story of Sonny's murder.

Once Hagen has finished with the details, Don Corleone explicitly forbids any of the men to seek vengeance without his approval. "There will be no further acts of war against the Five Families without my express and personal wish," the Don insists. He also orders all Family business to cease until after Sonny's funeral. When he finishes speaking, Don Corleone goes to speak with his wife, and Hagen calls Amerigo Bonasera "to redeem the favor he owed to the Corleones."

This passage chronicles the moment where Sonny finally fails in his role as acting Don. Hagen's recognition that Sonny has lost "all reasoning power" contrasts Sonny's weaknesses with his father's strengths. Don Corleone is a master negotiator and is calm and meticulous, but Sonny is none of those things. Thus, in order for the Don to rise again, his son must fall.



Once again, a car foreshadows impending death. In this case, Sonny's car becomes his coffin, and he fittingly dies a vicious death on his way to commit murder himself. That Sonny dies in the process of exchanging money also symbolizes the harsh cost the Corleones pay for engaging in the criminal lifestyle. In their pursuit of money, they lose the things, such as family, that should matter the most.



Don Corleone's absence and Sonny's death causes a moment of reckoning for Hagen. Up until this point, he has fancied himself a skilled negotiator who trained at the master feet of the Don himself. However, Hagen, like Sonny, lacks the Don's understanding that negotiation only works when backed by the assured threat of tactical violence. While Hagen understands negotiation and Sonny understood violence, neither man fully recognized how to wield the two tools together as effectively as Don Corleone.



Don Corleone survives his assassination attempt, but after his recovery, he enters a different Mafia world than the one he knew before. Whereas the Corleone Family was the most powerful of the Five Families before the hit on the Don, his absence from the scene has put the Family at the edge of destruction. Thus, the Don must not only reckon with the death of his son, but also with the potential death of all he has built over the course of his life.



In his first act as Don following his recovery from the shooting, Vito Corleone immediately contrasts his leadership style with that of Sonny. Whereas Sonny waged violent war, the Don now calls for a negotiable peace. In this respect, Sonny has unwittingly sacrificed his life in order to save his family: his death has roused the Don back to life.



CHAPTER 20

Sonny Corleone's death hits the criminal underworld like a lightning bolt, as the Five Families scramble to prepare for the retaliation they believe is sure to come from the Corleones. Instead of bloody vengeance, however, Don Corleone sends emissaries to each of the families to propose a peace meeting. He invites the New York Families, as well as the heads of families from across the country. The heads of the other families are initially suspicious, sensing that Don Corleone is preparing a trap. The Don proves his good intentions, however, by enlisting the services of the Bocchicchio Family.

The Bocchicchio Family has roots in southern Sicily, where it was among the most fearsome of all Mafia branches. Members of the Family embrace a blood loyalty that is "severe even for a society where Family loyalty came before loyalty to a wife." In Sicily, they earned their income through flourmills, which they guarded against competitors with unmatched ferocity. When powerful landowners and government agents encroached on their land to erect new mills or build dams (which blocked the water that powered the mills), the Bocchicchios went to war. When Mussolini came to power in the 1930s, they lost half of their numbers fighting against him, and then fled to New York's Hudson Valley.

In New York, the Bocchicchio Family established a successful garbage-hauling firm, but in order to amass the **wealth** that could buy "the finer things America had to offer," they "became negotiators and hostages in the peace efforts of warring Mafia families." They specialize in hostage swapping to ensure protection for mob representatives. When Michael Corleone, for example, met with Sollozzo and McCluskey, the Corleone Family held a Bocchicchio Family member in his place. This ensured Michael would be safe because any injury done to one of their own would bring on the Bocchicchio's "primitive" lust for vengeance against those who caused that injury (i.e., anyone who had harmed Michael).

Now, having arranged for the Bocchicchios "to supply hostages for all the Families to come to the peace meeting," Don Corleone meets with the heads of the Five Families and of the other Families across the country. The meeting takes place in the conference room of a commercial bank whose director is a Corleone Family ally.

As Don Corleone prepares to host a peace summit with the Five Families, Puzo lays the groundwork for the Don's master plan. Don Corleone will save his Family in much the same manner that he created it: through an act of calculated, reasoned negotiation, that is actually a front for decisive acts of violence.



The Bocchicchio Family's history reiterates the novel's fundamental point that the Mafia is a cancerous element in any society that it inhabits. Having staked their claims to flourmills, the Bocchicchios resisted all attempts, both legal and illegal, to challenge their criminal hold over the mills and the water sources that powered them. Even when pit against Mussolini's Fascist regime, the Bocchicchios merely emerge as another power broker concerned with self-interest alone, not the interest of broader society. However corruptible the legitimate law is, the Mafia is never a legitimate substitute.



Puzo's detailed backstory about the Bocchicchio Family reiterates the fundamental truth at the heart of the Mafia: there can be no true loyalty because betrayal is a criminal's most useful currency. That the Bocchicchios must provide literal bodies to prevent any acts of treachery shows how deep treachery runs in the world of organized crime. Even the "justice" the Bocchicchios provide is itself a "primitive" perversion of legitimate justice that respects nothing beyond ancient blood ties.



The mobsters meeting in a bank is symbolic of the Mafia's true values and goals. Although Don Corleone has ostensibly called the meeting to address the loss of his son, Sonny's death, much like the death of Bruno Tattaglia, comes down to money, and money alone.



The first to arrive after Don Corleone and Tom Hagen are Carlo Tremonti, boss of the American southern territory, Joseph Zaluci from Detroit, and the West Coast Dons, Frank Falcone and Anthony Molinari. Others follow, including Domenick Panza from Boston and Vincent Forlenza of Cleveland. The representatives from the New York Families are last to arrive. They include Anthony Stracci, who controls gambling and shipping in New Jersey, Ottilio Cuneo, who runs smuggling in upper New York State, Emilio Barzini, head of the second most powerful Family behind the Corleones, and Phillip Tattaglia, whose Family dominates prostitution in New York.

Don Corleone is the first to speak at the meeting of the Dons. He thanks the representatives for attending the meeting and compliments them as all “honorable men.” He outlines the backstory behind his refusal to do business with Sollozzo.” The affair involved drugs, in which I have no interest,” he states, “I had no objection to his earning his living in this fashion. He took it ill and brought misfortune down on all our heads.” The Don notes how he and Tattaglia have both lost sons, and that is he is willing to “make the peace.”

Don Barzini responds to Don Corleone’s “reasonable” opening statement. “Don Corleone is too modest,” he states, adding that Sollozzo and the Tattaglia Family could not run narcotics without protection from the judges and politicians on the Corleone Family payroll. Barzini says flatly that Don Corleone’s refusal to share his political allies with the other Families “is not the act of a friend,” and that he must “let us draw water from the well.” Barzini’s statement is a firm declaration that Don Corleone does not have the luxury of staying out of the drug trade without incurring severe penalties.

“When have I ever refused an accommodation?” Don Corleone responds, “but I had to refuse this time. Why? Because I think this drug business will destroy us in the years to come.” The Don believes that drugs are unlike whiskey, gambling, and women, vices that people want, but which the pezzonovantes in the church and in governments forbid. Dealing in drugs, will cost him his political and law enforcement allies, because they believe narcotics to be a dangerous, unseemly business. Nonetheless, Don Corleone is willing to make a deal on drugs “in order to adjust other matters.”

The assembled grouping of Dons effectively represents a parasitic entity that thrives beneath the seemingly healthy hide of American society. Just behind the legitimate veils of private and public power, the Mafia feeds like a parasite on the broader American host. Like fleas or ticks on a dog, the Mafia bores into American society and leaches from its institutions and people to enrich itself while slowly corrupting its societal host in the process.



Don Corleone tactfully begins the meeting by truthfully claiming that he had no objections to Sollozzo’s drug business, he just personally didn’t want any part in it. Yet this fact only underscores the impossibility of separating his personal family from the world of his crime Family. Whether he likes it or not, other criminals do not respect decisions that impede their ability to make a profit. This harsh reality cost Don Corleone his eldest son.



As a fellow crime boss, Barzini sees through Don Corleone’s façade of “reasonable” negotiation. Barzini understands well that violent force lies just behind the veil of Don Corleone’s reason and modesty, and responds by demanding that Corleone drop this façade and admit openly that he is engaged in a power struggle that involves the potential for enormous profits.



Don Corleone’s position on drugs is self-serving, but not without merit. Before its run in with Sollozzo, the Corleone Family had experienced 10 years of relative peace. The Don’s belief that drugs could ultimately do more harm than good for Mafia business appears to be supported by the resulting war that followed the murders of Sollozzo and McCluskey. However, because the Mafia values profits above anything else, the other Dons are willing to risk their future on the promise of short-term gain from the drug trade.



Some of the other Dons speak up. They express personal distaste for drug trafficking but admit that the business is too lucrative and therefore impossible to avoid. Don Zaluci of Detroit proposes that the Mafia keep drugs “respectable” by not peddling narcotics near schools and limiting the trafficking to “colored” people. The other Dons concur, and they agree to permit a regulated drug traffic—controlled mostly by the Barzinis and the Tattaglias—with Don Corleone supplying some political protection for it in the East.

Phillip Tattaglia, however, still has concerns that Don Corleone will seek “individual vengeance” for the murder of Sonny. In response, Don Corleone vows not to seek vengeance, claiming that to do so would not bring Sonny back to him. “We are all men who have refused to be fools, who have refused to be puppets dancing on a string pulled by the men on high,” he states. He notes how all of the Dons have sons who are members of legitimate society, and that this legitimacy is the future for which the Mafia rulers should strive.

“The time is past for guns and killings and massacres,” Don Corleone concludes, “we have to be cunning like the business people, there’s more money in it and it’s better for our children and our grandchildren.” However, he warns that if the other Families kill his son Michael, this transgression will force him to break the newly established peace. “If some unlucky accident should befall my youngest son,” he says, “I would blame the ill will felt by people here.” With this statement, Don Corleone ends the meeting. He lingers for a bit to thank the San Francisco Don for looking after Fredo, and then he departs.

When Don Corleone and Tom Hagen arrive home, Clemenza dismisses the Bocchicchio hostage that acted as surrogate for the Don. The men discuss the newly made peace and Don Corleone makes clear that bringing Michael home safely should be the Family’s top priority. He is more concerned about the police than the Five Families in regards to Michael’s situation. Despite the new peace, Don Corleone orders even more fortifications of the mall and asks that a Family representative go to Las Vegas to check on Fredo. Expressing his desire to semi-retire and tend to his garden, he dismisses the meeting.

Here, the Mafia’s hypocrisy is on full display. The Dons claim to be concerned about the corrupting influence drugs will have on their communities, yet such concerns do not prevent them from participating in drug trafficking. In this case, drugs reveal the inherent tragedy of the Mafia itself: by convincing themselves that they hold values beyond mere greed, the Mafia bosses delude themselves into thinking they can control the chaos that they regularly unleash into society.



Here, Don Corleone tries to have his cake and eat it too. He claims that the Mafia leaders are not “fools” because they refuse to live by the pezzonovante’s supposedly unjust rules, yet he also complains that his superior lifestyle has resulted in the death of his son. That the Don admires Mafia children who have assimilated into legitimate society speaks to the unease he feels over being a member of the criminal underworld.



Even as he tries to forge a future path out of the Mafia lifestyle, that same lifestyle has too strong a hold on the Don. He claims that “killings and massacres” are passé, yet immediately threatens violent retaliation should any of the other Families kill his son Michael. This is the ultimate tragedy of Mafia life: like quicksand, it sucks back in even those who consider escaping from it.



Despite having just returned home from a “successful” peace summit, Don Corleone immediately orders more fortifications for war. In the Mafia, there can be no peace, only the uneasy promise of mutually assured destruction. The Don’s desire to retire is therefore a tacit admission of the ultimate futility of reason alone. Reason is toothless unless it is backed by violence, a fact that Michael Corleone will come to understand all too well.



Inside the house, Don Corleone reiterates to Hagen that he should explore every possible legal avenue and spend as much as needed to bring Michael home from Sicily safely. The Don suspects that Barzini knows Michael is there and will send assassins after him. This revelation leads Hagen to conclude what the Don already knows: Barzini was behind Sollozzo and is still allied with the Tattaglias. Understanding that the Godfather is concocting a plan to deal with Barzini, Tom expects “a day of reckoning” in the near future.

This passage underscores the fact that the peace meeting exchange between Don Barzini and Don Corleone was, in fact, a mutual attempt by the two men to identify each other's remaining weaknesses. Don Corleone recognizes that Michael represents his biggest vulnerability, so he develops a plan to both protect Michael and kill Barzini.



CHAPTER 21

A year passes before Michael is able to return to New York. The scheme to bring him back involves a Bocchicchio Family member named Felix, who bucked the Family business to become a lawyer. However, when two of Felix's associates defrauded Felix and exposed the Bocchicchio's criminal activities, Felix ended up serving three years in prison. After his release, Felix's Bocchicchio blood got the better of him, and he murdered the lawyer and the businessman in full view of witnesses. A judge sentences Felix Bocchicchio to the electric chair.

Here, Puzo further reiterates the intractable pull the Mafia has on even those who attempt to escape its clutches. In theory, Felix obeys the laws of legitimate society and builds a lucrative career outside the realm of organized crime. Yet, his Family ties draw him back into the underworld and lead him to commit a brazen murder that he will pay for with his life.



When Tom Hagen and Don Corleone get word of the affair, they propose to the Bocchicchio Family that if Felix (who is doomed anyways) confesses to the murders of Sollozzo and McCluskey, thereby-exonerating Michael, the Corleone Family will provide for Felix's family for the remainder of their lives. The Bocchicchios agree, and Felix's confession clears the way for Michael to return home.

Like Sonny Corleone before him, Felix Bocchicchio plays the role of martyr who sacrifices himself so that the Corleone Family may live. By taking the fall for Michael's crimes, Felix clears a path for the Corleone Family to reestablish its power in the underworld.



CHAPTER 22

Sonny Corleone's death devastates Lucy Mancini. He was the only man who could ever bring her to sexual orgasm. Lucy now lives in Las Vegas, where she is relaxing at the Corleone Family's hotel pool with the hotel's resident physician, the slender, blond-haired Dr. Jules Segal. He is caressing her body as she remembers her long affair with Sonny. After Sonny's death, she tried to overdose on sleeping pills. While recovering in the hospital, Tom Hagen arranged for her to move to Las Vegas, where the Corleone Family now provides her an annuity, per Sonny's request before his death.

Lucy Mancini is the only woman in the novel who experiences redemption from her association with the Corleone Family. Unlike Kay Adams, Mama Corleone, and Connie Corleone, Lucy ends up leading a relatively independent life (albeit one that Corleone money supports) free from the personal dominance of Corleone men. Whereas Connie and Kay live to serve their respective husbands, Lucy meets Jules Segal, a man who is all too happy to serve her.



Now a resident of Las Vegas, Lucy has regained a sense of happiness and is dating Jules Segal, whom she met following a physical checkup in his hotel office. She is also an unofficial owner of five “points” in the hotel, making her a front that masks the Corleone Family’s ownership. She also agrees to look after Fredo Corleone, who, under the wings of casino magnate Moe Greene, has become a hopelessly reckless womanizer.

Lucy’s romance with Dr. Jules Segal blooms quickly after her first visit to his office. His informal dress and casual manner of speech attracts her. “You don’t know how unorthodox I am. And I didn’t know how rich you were,” he tells her early in their courtship. They dated for several months but Lucy still will not yet have sex with him. Now, as they lie by the poolside, Jules convinces her to come to his room, where they finally make love.

After they make love, Jules finally learns the secret of why Lucy had refused sex for so long; Lucy has a “pelvic malformation” that causes an enlarged vaginal opening and a subsequent difficulty achieving sexual climax. Jules assures her that a simple surgery can repair the malformation, which will make sex more pleasurable and prevent further health complications. “Think of it as a piece of elastic in your body that has lost its elasticity,” he tells her, “by cutting out a piece, you make it tighter, snappier.”

Since Jules now knows Lucy’s secret, he tells her his own secret. Segal was once a gifted surgeon in New York who specialized in abortions until his superiors caught him performing the then-illegal procedure. His colleague, Dr. Kennedy (Don Corleone’s doctor), connected Segal with Tom Hagen, who got him a job in Las Vegas to escape the Eastern medical establishment’s blacklisting. At the hotel, Segal now performs abortions on cocktail waitresses whom Fredo Corleone recklessly impregnates.

Jules tells Lucy that a Los Angeles surgeon he knows can perform her surgery and she agrees to it. Two weeks later, Dr. Frederick Kellner successfully performs the operation on her. The next morning, Lucy awakens to find Fredo, Jules, Nino Valenti, and Johnny Fontane at her bedside. As she greets the men, Jules notices that Fontane has a strained throat. “Didn’t you get a doctor to look at it? Maybe it’s something that can be fixed,” Jules asks. His probing irritates Fontane, who lists all of the specialists who failed to cure his voice troubles.

Here, Fredo cements his status as a failure among the Corleone men when Lucy Mancini becomes his unofficial guardian. In a Mafia culture that prizes machismo and male dominance of women, Fredo’s reckless behavior makes him appear weak and directionless. Despite his relentless womanizing, Fredo lacks self-control and therefore fails the Corleone leadership test.



Lucy and Jules’s romance is a reversal of the novel’s standard gender roles. While most of the men in the novel pursue women from a dominant role, Lucy holds much of the power in her courtship with Jules, who must repeatedly promise to treat her with respect in exchange for the opportunity to make love to her.



Not only does Lucy control the levers of power in her relationship with Jules, but Jules also offers to provide her with the means to enjoy sex permanently through surgery. Jules’s offer is at least partially self-serving (he wants to have sex with her more often, after all), but it also appears to be a genuine recognition that her needs matter in their relationship. Lucy is Jules’s partner, not his object, and she therefore has an equal stake in their relationship.



Given the long shadow of crime that the Mafia casts, it is fitting that a blacklisted doctor who specializes in criminalized medical operations becomes a fixer of sorts for the Corleone Family. By cleaning up the “messes” that Fredo Corleone leaves in the casino hotel, Jules Segal becomes a tacit partner in the Family’s criminal operations.



In many ways, Jules Segal shares qualities with Don Corleone because he is a man who can fix problems that other men fail to fix. He is the only man to notice Lucy’s pelvic malformation, and he suspects that other doctors have failed to properly diagnose Johnny Fontane’s vocal cord ailments. Segal is one of the novel’s many powerful men, though he operates mostly in the legitimate world rather than in the world of crime.



Jules convinces Fontane to let him examine the singer's throat. He concludes that Fontane has a growth on his vocal cords and insists that he can identify it in a few hours. An angry Fontane criticizes Jules for trying "to fuck around with my throat," but Jules argues that Fontane's career—and possibly his life if the growth is malignant—depends on further examination. With Nino's support, Fontane grudgingly agrees. The examination reveals that Johnny has warts on his vocal cords, which a surgeon can easily remove.

Although he has been a powerful man for much of his professional life, Johnny Fontane is consistently beholden to the whims of more powerful men than he is. Whether it is Don Corleone, Jack Woltz, or Jules Segal, Johnny owes his career in large part to men who can handle problems that Fontane is unable to resolve on his own. As a character, Fontane embodies Puzo's notion that true power lies behind the scenes, and that those who publicly display their power are often not nearly as powerful as the people who operate in the shadows.



Following the diagnosis of warts, Fontane defensively accuses Segal of threatening his singing career by proposing surgery. An angry Segal reminds Johnny that warts are far better than cancer and that he should be grateful for the favor. A drunk Nino thanks Segal for his help. Segal responds by warning Nino that he will die in five years if he keeps drinking so heavily. "Five years?" Nino responds, [...] "is it going to take *that* long?"

Just as he lives in a state of denial over how his own shortcomings contributed to his failures with women, Fontane also lives in denial about who is truly responsible for his career success. That he takes a surgeon's positive diagnosis and generous offer to help as a threat to his masculinity demonstrates how fragile that masculinity is to begin with.



A month has passed since Lucy's operation, and she and Jules are celebrating by planning to make love for the first time since before she went under the knife. Jules presents her with an engagement ring. "That shows you how much confidence I have in my work," he says. They make love multiple times.

The relationship between Jules and Lucy is the only male-female relationship in the novel that comes close to being an equal partnership. Although the couple certainly uses each other for their own personal fulfillments, they both hold power in the relationship, which cannot be said for the novel's other male-female relationships.



CHAPTER 23

The narrative flashes back in time. It has been five months since Michael Corleone fled to Sicily. Being in Sicily helps Michael understand why his family became Mafia criminals. In Sicily, "he saw what they would have been if they had chosen not to struggle against their fate." Most importantly, Michael learns the importance of omerta, "the law of silence." Upon arriving in Sicily, Michael settled in the town of Corleone under the protection of the local Mafia chief, Don Tommasino, who owed Don Corleone a service. Michael is staying in the home of Don Tommasino's elderly uncle, Dr. Taza.

Earlier in the novel, Puzo uses a flashback to explain how and why Vito Corleone became a gangster. In the same vein, he now charts Michael's final transition from civilian to gangster by transplanting the narrative to Sicily, the birthplace of the Mafia. There, Michael finally understands why his father became a Mafia Don and gains a greater perspective on why he must ultimately follow his father's path in life.



Don Tommasino controls an extensive estate and oversees the estates of the rich, guarding them against claims from the poor. He also dominates water in the region and vetoes any attempt at dam building by the government in Rome. Dr. Taza is fond of both books and prostitutes, and he entertains Michael with stories of the Mafia's past exploits. Michael learns that the word "Mafia" originally meant "a place of refuge," and referred to the secret organization that protected Sicilians from centuries of exploitation by outside invaders.

The Mafia established its power through the code of omerta and its role as an organization that protected the poor from the powerful. Over time, however, the Mafia devolved into "the legal arm of the rich" and a "degenerate capitalist structure [...]" placing its own taxes on every form of business endeavor no matter how small." Ironically, Michael learns that men like his father turned to crime as the only way to escape the degradation of being under the Mafia's thumb, for they assumed that an organization similar to it existed in America.

Michael's facial bones never properly healed after McCluskey's attack, leaving his left cheek misshapen. Dr. Taza offers to repair it, but Michael refuses because Taza "read everything but his medical literature" and only passed his medical exams "through the good offices" of a Mafia chief. This demonstrates why the Sicilian Mafia is "cancerous to the society it inhabited." Under Mafia rule, "Merit meant nothing. Talent meant nothing. Work meant nothing. The Mafia Godfather gave you your profession as a gift." Michael contrasts Sicily's natural beauty—botanical flowers, sunshine, and Roman architecture—with the ugliness of the Mafia.

Michael is protected by two shepherd bodyguards armed with lupera shotguns. He passes time by reading, taking long walks, and thinking about Kay. The pain in his face grows stronger, which Dr. Taza attributes to a damaged facial nerve (a favorite spot on the body for Mafia torturers). Don Tommasino is dealing with delinquent Mafia thugs in Palermo who view him as a Moustache Pete. One morning, Michael hikes across a field with his bodyguards. The older shepherd is called Calo, the younger, a former sailor with a distinctive tattoo of a man murdering his wife and her lover, is named Fabrizio.

It is ironic that the Mafia began as an organization that protected ordinary Sicilians from exploitation by more powerful groups, but ultimately became a group that preys on ordinary Sicilians. Puzo emphasizes that the nature of power is such that it ultimately corrupts those who wield it for any significant length of time. In keeping with his emphasis on destiny throughout the novel, Puzo depicts the Mafia as becoming the very monster it set out to kill.



Again, Puzo depicts the Mafia as the perverse mirror image of capitalism. Capitalists tout such noble virtues as competition and social betterment to justify their exploitation of other people, but the Mafia makes no pretense that its goal is to make money, exploitation be damned. The tragedy of the Mafia, however, is that it self-perpetuates. By abusing people like Vito Corleone, the Mafia drives these very same people into its ranks.



Dr. Taza utterly embodies the cancerous nature of the Mafia in Sicilian society. By gradually eroding trust in and infiltrating legitimate institutions, the Mafia has established itself as the sole authority in the land. Thus, mob bosses, rather than medical professionals, grant medical degrees. This form of social rot proves devastating to the ordinary people left beholden to the Mafia's cruel whims. It also demonstrates why legitimate law and institutions are the only real safeguard against the Mafia's rot.



Given Michael's eventual role as the savior of the Corleone Family, it is fitting that shepherds flank him during his time in Sicily. Like Jesus, another young savior whose arrival was heralded by a star in the nighttime sky that shepherds first behold, Michael must first wander the wilderness before he can embrace his true destiny as the new Don of his father's crime Family. Fabrizio's tattoo depicting violence and betrayal, however, hints at his eventual role as Judas—the man who betrayed Jesus in exchange for silver coins—to Michael's Jesus.



Despite Sicilians' relative poverty, their country is "a land of gushing plenty, carpeted with flowers scented by lemon blossoms." As Michael walks and observes the beauty, his injured face distracts him. The improperly healed bone is pressing on his sinuses, causing his nose to run continually. It is the heaviness in his head, rather than the mucus or the pain, which bothers Michael the most. A group of flower-picking girls near an ancient Roman villa, however, distracts Michael and the shepherds.

One of the girls is so beautiful and catches Michael's eye so forcefully that Fabrizzio claims he has been "hit by the thunderbolt." The girl's oval-shaped eyes, long lashes, and her dark, creamy skin entrance Michael. Unlike his love for Kay, which was fueled in part by her sweetness and her status as his equal partner, Michael's attraction to the peasant girl is "an overwhelming desire for possession [...] and he knew she would haunt his memory every day of his life if he did not possess her."

Fabrizzio and Calo take Michael to the girl's village in order to speak with her. They stop to rest at a café porch, where the elderly owner serves them his homemade wine mixed with oranges and lemons. Michael asks the owner if he knows the girl with "creamy skin," to which the owner curtly replies "no" and vanishes into the café. Fabrizzio learns that the girl they seek is actually the owner's daughter, and he has threatened to send his burly sons their way if they do not leave. Michael, however, gives the shepherds an icy stare worthy of a "man of respect."

Michael brings the café owner out to the porch and apologizes to him for disrespecting his daughter. He then identifies himself and asks for permission to meet the girl. "I am an American hiding in Sicily, from the police of my country [...] you can inform the police and make your fortune but then your daughter would lose a father rather than gain a husband," he tells the man. The café owner's confidence sinks as he asks Michael if he is "a friend of the friends," meaning the Mafia.

Although Michael denies being a member of the Mafia, the café owner surmises otherwise. He identifies himself as Signor Vitelli and tells Michael to return on Sunday to meet his daughter. Later that evening, Michael reveals to Don Tommasino that he plans to marry the peasant girl with or without the approval of Don Corleone. Don Tommasino knows the Vitelli family and gives Michael his blessing. He also gives the Vitellis his word that Michael is to be treated with respect.

The contrast between Sicily's natural beauty and the ugly corruption of its society further highlights the Mafia's cancerous nature. Even Michael himself, a naturally handsome man, has been deformed by his role in the Mafia's operations in the form of his now disfigured jaw.



Michael's descent into the Mafia lifestyle profoundly reshapes his approach to women. Earlier, when he tries to escape the confines of his family, Michael views his relationship with Kay as one of equality. This is a direct rejection of his family's traditionally patriarchal style of courtship. Now that he is embedded in Sicily's Mafia culture, however, Michael's approach to women becomes obsessively possessive. He does not want to be the peasant girl's partner; he wants to be her owner.



Like the fragrant wine and fruits that Michael and the shepherds consume at the café, Michael likens the beautiful girl with "creamy" skin to yet another delicious thing he is free to consume. Only upon learning that the girl's father owns the café does Michael adopt a façade of respect. This respect, however, is a tactic to win the graces of the girl's father—not the girl herself—whom he views as an obstacle to his goal of "possessing" the girl.



Michael's "respect" towards the café owner is an act of hollow formality: he follows it up with a threat on the café owner's life. For all of his understanding about the Mafia's corrosive nature, Michael is now too seduced by the power that being "a friend of the friends" entails. Not only does Mafia membership give Michael power over other men's lives, it also gives him the power to take a woman as he sees fit.



Signor Vitelli knows that Michael is lying about his membership in the Mafia and wisely fears him. Moreover, the fact that Michael has chosen to marry the girl before even meeting her properly and giving her a say in things speaks to Sicily's deeply patriarchal domestic culture. The Mafia embraces this culture because it gives men total dominance over the women in their lives.



Dr. Taza gives Michael a drug to stop the mucus from running from his nose. On Sunday, Michael visits Signor Vitelli and Signora Vitelli and gives them presents before meeting their daughter, Apollonia. Michael quivers in her presence, and “nothing was going to stop him from owning this girl, possessing her, locking her in a house and keeping her prisoner, only for himself.” He presents her with “a heavy gold chain.” The next day, Michael again meets Apollonia at her father’s café.

Michael’s first meeting with Apollonia is a purely commercial exchange. It demonstrates the negligible amount of control that Sicilian women have over their own destinies. Michael offers Apollonia a “gift” of a “heavy gold chain,” but in reality, the chain acts as currency with which he purchases Apollonia from her parents like a common commercial good. The “heavy gold chain” also speaks to Michael’s desire to “lock[] her in a house and keep[] her prisoner, only for himself” chaining her down to the domestic sphere and linking her only to himself.



Over the next few weeks, Michael and Apollonia court. Michael brings her gifts each day and she becomes less shy. With Don Tommasino ensuring proper safety precautions, the couple soon gets married. Calo and Fabrizzio serve in the wedding party. After the ceremony, the newlyweds settle into Dr. Taza’s fortified villa with Signora Vitelli. When Michael and Apollonia are finally alone in their large bedroom, Michael looks over the bride that he “legally possessed.” They make love to the point where “falling away from each other was like the tremble before death.”

Michael continues his purchasing of Apollonia’s flesh over the course of several weeks before she finally accepts the inevitable and “agrees” to marry him—something she had no choice in whatsoever. Now that he possesses her, he is free to do whatever he wants to her. For Mafia men, women are yet another commodity to lust over and own, much like the flashy cars and suits, which they collect in order to display their powerful status.



Living with Apollonia instills in Michael a new appreciation for virginity, which gives him “a sensuality mixed with a feeling of masculine power.” Apollonia brings a woman’s touch to Don Tommasino’s villa, and they make many trips into the countryside. The marriage, however, has made Michael’s presence there known to the Corleone Family’s enemies. Necessary precaution restricts the couple inside the villa’s walls, but Michael relishes his days as a newlywed and spends the time teaching Apollonia English and instructing her to drive a car.

Following the wedding ceremony, Michael completes his conquest of Apollonia by deflowering her in a bout of intense lovemaking. It is not coincidental that his conquest of her happens before his ascent into the highest level of power in his Mafia Family. Mafia men mold their dominating natures by first conquering and owning the women in their lives. They then then exercise that same dominance over other men through their criminal activity.



One evening, an old Sicilian woman named Filomena visits Michael and asks if he is Don Corleone’s son. She says that the Don once saved her life, and when she learns that Luca Brasi is dead, she curses his soul to “roast in hell for eternity.” She tells Michael the story of when she worked as a midwife in New York City. One night, Luca Brasi called on her to come to his hideout to deliver a baby.

Filomena’s flashback elaborates on a point that Puzo has already established: Luca Brasi was a man devoid of any feeling, empathy, or compassion for other human beings.



The baby's father was Brasi, and its mother was an Irish prostitute. After Filomena delivered the child, Brasi instructed her to "take it down to the basement and throw it in the furnace." Filomena at first refused, but Brasi threatened her with a knife, his face "the gargoyle of the devil" against the furnace's flames. She murdered the child as instructed, and two days later, Brasi murdered the child's mother. Terrified for her own life, Filomena went to Don Corleone, who then recruited Brasi to prevent him from going after Filomena. The morning after hearing this story, Michael learns that Sonny is dead.

The casualness with which Luca Brasi commits infanticide is characteristic of his demonic nature. He is the logical result of criminality that is devoid of all conscience and morality. Yet the fact that he refused to murder the child himself, and instead forced Filomena to perform the abominable deed, suggests that Brasi did indeed fear something. Brasi feared himself, and the child reminded him of this fear.



CHAPTER 24

Michael awakens in bed next to Apollonia. It is the last morning they are to spend at the villa, as Don Tommasino has arranged for them to move to a town on Sicily's southern coast. The previous evening, the Don told Michael that his marriage brought him into the sight of his enemies. Michael looks out the window and sees Fabrizzio in one of the garden chairs. Michael instructs him to get the **car**. In the kitchen, Filomena bids Michael goodbye, and Calo arrives to tell Michael that Apollonia is sitting in the driver's seat of the car.

Michael marries Apollonia against his father's wishes, because Don Corleone knows that the wedding will catch the attention of Michael's enemies. Michael is aware of this threat but seems to think he can outwit his enemies. The presence of the car, however, indicates that death is approaching, and that his membership in the Mafia will cost him dearly.



Michael peers out of the kitchen to see Apollonia in the **car**. She is waving at him to stay where he is so she can drive to him. Michael notices that Fabrizzio is missing, and swiftly concludes what is going to happen. He shouts at his wife, "No! No!" but the explosion that follows her putting the key in the ignition drowns out his calls. The force blows Michael back to the villa wall and kills Apollonia and Calo.

Fabrizzio's betrayal—and the fact that Michael anticipates Fabrizzio's betrayal, even if too late—is yet another example of how treachery thrives in the Mafia. It also further shows that the Corleones cannot spare their personal families from the ramifications of their criminal activity.



The explosion that was clearly meant for Michael knocks him unconscious, and he awakens after nearly a week. Fabrizzio has disappeared. Dr. Taza informs Michael that his enemies believe he died in the explosion and have therefore stopped looking for him. As a result, he will be returning to New York soon. "You know, you're a widower," Dr. Taza states, "that's rare in Sicily." Two months later, Michael arrives back in New York.

Like Sonny and Felix, Apollonia plays the role of sacrificial martyr. Her death allows the Corleone family to live on. Because his enemies believe that he is dead, Michael can now safely return to New York and retaliate against those enemies in order to restore his Family's status as the most powerful Mafia organization in New York.



CHAPTER 25

Kay Adams has finished college and now works as a grade-school teacher in New Hampshire. For six months after Michael vanished, she calls his mother to inquire about him, but stops calling after doing so proves futile. She lives alone for two years but becomes lonely. She visits New York City to see some college friends, and there, she stays in a hotel room that reminds her of her time with Michael. She decides to call Long Beach for the first time in ages.

Both Michael and Kay have moved on in the years since Michael "made his bones" by killing McCluskey and Sollozzo. While Michael is away, Kay lives a life of relative independence by working as a teacher. She also divorces her thoughts from Michael's memory before finally deciding to call him again. This decision to reconnect with him will draw her back into the Corleone Family's web of crime.



Kay speaks to Mama Corleone, who informs her that Michael has been home for six months. Kay is shocked. “You want to see Mikey, you come out here now. Give him a nice surprise,” Mama Corleone says. Kay refuses, thinking Michael would have called if he wanted to see her, but Mama Corleone tells Kay to come visit *her*. Kay arrives in Long Beach by taxi, where Michael’s mother greets her at the door. She tells her to surprise Michael when he arrives soon.

When Michael arrives, Kay notices the “broken half of his face” before she uncontrollably jumps into his arms. Michael takes the crying Kay to his **car** and they drive off. “I couldn’t write you or anything,” Michael tells her. “You have to understand that before anything else.” Kay asks if the police apprehended the man who killed Sollozzo and McCluskey, and Michael says that it was reported in the papers. He denies that he was involved in the murders. Eventually, they arrive at Michael’s brownstone house and make love.

Kay tells Michael that she never really believed that he killed those men. “It doesn’t matter whether I did or not,” he responds, “you have to understand that.” Kay is taken aback by the coldness in his voice. Michael asks if their potential marriage hinges on the truth about the murders, and Kay responds by telling him that she loves him, and that is all that should matter.

They make love again, and afterwards, Michael again asks Kay about marriage. “I’m working for my father now,” he says, “I won’t be telling you anything about my business. You’ll be my wife but you won’t be my partner in life, as I think they say.” Kay believes that Michael has now become a gangster, but he assures her that he cares for her and that “if everything goes right, the Corleone Family will be completely legitimate in about five years.” He adds that Kay may become a widow in the process.

Despite repeatedly urging Kay to forget about Michael in the past, Mama Corleone is the one who begins the process of drawing Kay back into Michael’s world. In doing so, she is fulfilling the role expected of women in Mafia families: she is keeping her family together at all costs.



Although he often lies to Kay, Michael is nonetheless upfront about the sacrifices Kay must make if she wants to be with him. He makes clear that his Family is more important than anything else—so important, in fact, that it prevented him from ever contacting her during his exile in Sicily. In addition, the fact that he explains this matter to Kay while in a car suggests another impending death. This time, however, the death is metaphorical: by getting back together with Michael, who is now deeply enmeshed in the Mafia and its patriarchal culture, Kay will symbolically kill her independence and acquiesce to Michael being her new “owner.”



Michael’s cold response to Kay’s question about the murders suggests that he does not care whether she is outraged over his participation in such an act. For her part, by telling Michael that she would still love him even if he were a murderer, Kay is already playing the role of the dutiful Mafia wife who ignores her husband’s “business” and shows him unconditional loyalty.



Michael once again reveals his possessiveness towards women by denying that Kay could ever be his “partner”—a sharp contrast from their equal relationship at the beginning of the novel, before Michael became ensnared in the Mafia’s grasp. Against her better judgement, Kay does not let Michael’s transformation into a gangster alter her plans to be with him. Moreover, Michael’s insistence that the Corleone Family’s “business” will eventually become legitimate echoes Don Corleone’s own conflicted dream of joining the world of the very pezzonovante that he claims to despise.



Kay continues to press Michael on why he will not say that he loves her, and why she would be kept in the dark about his business were they to marry. He makes one “final explanation” about his family to her. He insists that Don Corleone is a businessman trying to provide for his family, but he “doesn’t accept the rules of the society” because they are ill-suited to a man of his greatness. Kay asks Michael if he believes that. “I believe in you and the family we may have. I don’t trust society to protect us,” he answers.

This moment marks the final transformation in Michael’s thinking, from a man who once vowed not to follow his father into a life of crime into a man who now plans to succeed his father in that life. Like Don Corleone, Michael now embraces the belief that the powers that control legitimate society cannot be trusted to look after his own interests, because those powers are inherently self-interested. That Michael cannot see how his own self-interest actually threatens his family is among the novel’s most significant tragedies.



CHAPTER 26

Johnny Fontane and Nino Valenti are in a garish Las Vegas hotel suite. Nino is playing blackjack. He is now fully drunk and eager to gamble, and he is having a major winning streak. Johnny brushes off the calculated advances of a beautiful cocktail waitress while he watches Nino get drunker and continue to gamble. Nino eventually passes out and several casino workers carry him to his room and put him to bed. A concerned Johnny calls Jules Segal to check on Nino.

In this passage, Puzo suggests that the fantasies of wealth and glamor that Las Vegas promises dangerously shallow. Johnny and Nino are now jaded veterans of Las Vegas’s illusions of happiness, and they are even more miserable for it. For Nino, the emptiness of Las Vegas’s shallow fantasies only enables his already deadly addiction to alcohol. Meanwhile, even the normally sex-addicted Johnny is repulsed by the cocktail waitresses’ deliberate seduction act that is geared towards making him spend more money in the casino.



Jules thanks Johnny for the check he sent, then explains that Nino has adult stable diabetes and seems “firmly determined to drink himself to death.” He recommends that Nino be committed to a psychiatric ward, which shocks Johnny. Soon, Lucy Mancini arrives and Nino wakes up, clamoring for another drink. Jules advises against it, but Johnny gives him a glass of whiskey. After drinking it, Nino has a severe reaction that Jules quells with a needle to Nino’s neck.

Johnny’s shock over Jules’s recommendation that Nino be institutionalized may stem from his assumption that emotional weakness conflicts with “real” masculinity. Johnny prefers that Nino tough it out rather than admit that he has a life-threatening mental illness. Johnny thrives in a culture that equates “masculinity” with unflinching displays of strength and the suppression of “feminine” feelings. This is, of course, hypocritical of Johnny, who appeared before Don Corleone earlier in the novel in a state of emotional wreckage. The Don’s insistence that Johnny act “LIKE A MAN” only further cements Johnny’s belief that men do not show their feelings.



Johnny knows that Jules expected the reaction, and Jules admits as much to show the severity of Nino’s alcoholism. While he considers having Nino committed, Johnny asks Jules why he became an abortionist. “He wanted to help girls in trouble, girls who might commit suicide or do something dangerous to get rid of the baby,” Lucy says. Jules adds that he grew tired of working hard to save people who had terminal diseases or who did not want to be saved. Abortions, Jules says, “are nice and easy, everybody happy, like washing the dishes and leaving a clean sink.”

Puzo uses Jules’s career as an abortionist to comment on the hypocritical nature of how people approach healthcare. They refuse to do simple things like stop drinking, even though such simple acts will save their lives. Yet abortion is illegal because people make the disingenuous claim that they do not want abortions. By merely resigning himself to performing the procedures people want, and refraining from telling them what they need, Jules absolves himself of further responsibility for his patients’ fate.



Johnny tells them that Michael Corleone and Tom Hagen are arriving in Las Vegas. Lucy says she and Jules are having dinner with Michael, Tom, and Fredo tomorrow, and that Michael got his face fixed after consulting with Jules. Nino wakes up again and Johnny tries to console him. Jules orders him a nurse, but he knows Nino is on borrowed time.

The narrative flashes back to a year earlier. Johnny Fontane is depressed despite producing a successful movie starring himself and Nino. Having undergone surgery to have the warts removed from his vocal cords, Johnny wants to sing but is afraid to try and risk permanently damaging his voice. Jules Segal tells him to try, but the results are “hoarse and lousy,” causing Johnny to give up. Singing is “the only thing he really knew,” and the thought of never singing again terrifies him. He spends the weekend with Virginia and the kids but becomes irritated when Virginia indicates jealousy over his revived career.

Fontane leave’s Virginia’s house and invites Nino and two girls for a weekend at his Palm Springs house. As Nino and his girl fool around upstairs, Johnny begins humming along to his piano while his date, makes a drink. He starts singing an old standard of his. Much to his surprise, there is no pain in his throat, and his voice carries just as it used to. Johnny immediately arranges for a band, and he and Nino practice like in the old days. His voice is richer and more mature now, “nothing less than masterful.”

The next morning, Johnny wakes up to a fully restored voice, but Nino is either dead or asleep as a nurse wheels in his medication. Johnny realizes that Nino “didn’t care enough about anything to make him want to stay alive.”

CHAPTER 27

Michael Corleone arrives in Las Vegas with his new bodyguard, Albert Neri, and Tom Hagen. That evening, Michael dines with Fredo, Tom, Lucy, Jules, Nino, and Johnny. Everyone notes how Michael resembles his father in both speech and manor. Michael reveals, “the Corleone Family is thinking of moving out here to Vegas. Selling out all our interests in the olive oil business and settling here.” He says that Moe Greene will sell his interest to give the Corleones full ownership of the hotel. Fredo is unsure Moe will sell, but Michael promises to “make him an offer he can’t refuse.”

Nino’s indifference towards his own life renders moot all of Johnny’s efforts to turn him into a star in order to curry favor with Don Corleone. By introducing Nino in his debauched Hollywood world, Johnny has essentially condemned him to die in a manner befitting a mob boss’s godson.



Johnny’s depression over the potential loss of his voice suggests that singing is the real source of his identity—“the only thing he really knew.” To ease the insecurity he feels over his vice, Johnny resorts to womanizing as a form of self-medication and distraction. Virginia knows Johnny better than he knows himself, and she expresses jealousy when the source of his insecurity has the potential to disappear.



Johnny’s ability to sing again reveals the shallowness of the womanizing existence he has led for so long. Despite having a beautiful young girl at his disposal, the joy he finds singing again cause him to ignore her completely. Unlike Nino, who never overcomes his penchant for drinking to self-medicate, Johnny rediscovers his purpose in life. Meanwhile, the success of Jules procedure hints at the value of true expertise—a kind of expertise that stands in contrast to that of the doctors in Sicily, where the identification of expertise has been corrupted by the mafia.



Nino, much like Luca Brasi, embraces a nihilistic existence. Both men ultimately succumb to their own inner demons: Nino to alcohol, Brasi to his sociopathic heart.



Michael’s gradual transformation into a man like his father is nearly complete. Not only does he share his father’s mannerisms and speech, but also his father’s strategic use of “negotiation” backed by the implied promise of violence. Michael repeats Don Corleone’s line regarding an “offer he can’t refuse” because he understands what must be done to restore the Corleone Family’s position of power in the underworld.



Michael requests that Johnny sign a contract to appear at the hotel five times per year for weeklong engagements to draw in visitors. “I’ll do anything for my Godfather, you know that, Mike,” Johnny responds. Next, Michael promises Jules a surgeon’s job in a special hospital under construction in Las Vegas and makes him medical director for the Family’s existing hotels until the hospital opens. Michael tells Fredo that Don Corleone has special plans for him, and Fredo wonders if the Don is angry over the hotel losing money. Michael tells him not to worry.

Moe Green unexpectedly arrives and requests to talk to Michael. Greene buys the group a round of playing chips and demands to know why the Corleone Family thinks it can buy his casino. “I’ll buy you out. You don’t buy me out,” he says. “Your casino has been losing money against all the odds,” Michael explains, “[...] maybe we can do better.” Michael’s “quietly reasonable” proposition infuriates Moe, who curses out the “goddamn Dagos” and calls them ungrateful for him looking after Fredo.

Michael coldly accuse Moe of “slap[ping] [Fredo] around in public.” Fredo sticks up for Moe, claiming that “Moe didn’t mean anything” by it and that they’re “good friends,” while Moe claims he merely “straightened [Fredo] out” because Fredo kept sleeping with the cocktail waitresses. Michael chafes at this disrespect towards the Corleone Family. He explains that he has reduced Tom’s position from Consigliere to Family lawyer, and he urges Moe, “don’t insult people who are trying to help you.” Michael then turns to Fredo and warns, “you’re my older brother, I have respect for you. But don’t ever take sides with anybody against the Family again.” Fredo and Moe leave the room without further discussion.

The next morning, Fredo tells Michael that Moe will not give up his casino, to which Michael shrugs. They visit Fontane and Nino in their suite. They are shocked to see that Nino is clearly at death’s door. Before they depart for the airport, Al Neri tells Michael that he has Moe Greene “mugged and numbered up here.”

Like Don Corleone, Michael knows that dispensing favors and then cashing in on them is an essential step towards the success of a new business venture. However, he leaves Fredo conspicuously out of the Family’s new Las Vegas plans, suggesting that Fredo has lost the Family’s confidence to run any major operation for this point onward.



Michael expertly applies his father’s advice to the process of negotiation. When Greene responds angrily to the offer to buy him out, Michael remains calm and displays no anger of his own. Even in the face of Greene’s ethnic slurs, Michael adheres to Don Corleone’s rule that those in positions of power can be taken care of at the proper time.



Michael’s warning to Fredo not to cross the Family underscores the severity with which the Mafia treats potential disloyalty. In addition to expressing his own misgivings about Michael’s offer to buy out Greene, Fredo has inadvertently disrespected his Family’s reputation by allowing Greene to reprimand him physically in a public setting and for standing up for Moe in front of Michael.



Michael is unconcerned by Greene’s refusal to sell because he expected this refusal and already has a plan to deal with it. Al Neri confirms this plan when he tells Michael that Greene has been “mugged,” indicating that Michael has robbed him blind even if Greene is unaware that he has been mugged.



CHAPTER 28

Michael flies back to New York and prepares to execute a plan that has been two years in the making. After steady tutelage under Don Corleone and Tom Hagen, Michael is now fully aware of the extent of his Family's **wealth** and power (in addition to their rackets, they have holdings in banks, real estate, and the garment sector). He is now married to Kay, and they have a baby girl. Kay has grown closer to Mama Corleone and she considers converting from Protestantism to Catholicism. Mama Corleone attends church every morning, where she prays for her husband's soul.

Kay is still uncertain how Michael feels about Connie's husband, Carlo. Although Michael told her about Carlo's indirect role in Sonny's death, he responded by giving Carlo and Connie a house at the mall and promoted Carlo to a job running a labor union racket. Carlo also stopped drinking, gambling, visiting prostitutes, and beating Connie, all of which pleased the Family.

After he arrives home from Las Vegas, Michael holds an evening meeting with Don Corleone, Tom Hagen, Carlo, Clemenza, and Tessio. Since the meeting of the Five Families and Don Corleone's retirement, the Corleone Family's strength has declined, leaving the Barzini Family as the strongest in New York. Michael is now positioned to take over as the new Don, and though the caporegimes respect Michael, they are unsure of his leadership qualities. The Don, however, has "absolute faith" in Michael, who lays out his master plan to revive the Family's power.

Michael reveals that the Family will sell all of its eastern assets so it can move west and fully enter the casino business. He instructs Tessio and Clemenza to wait until the end of the year, after which they can split from the Corleones and start their own crime Families. Michael also reveals Tom is "out" as Consigliere. Tessio wants to add more men to his regime to fend off encroachment from the Barzinis, but Michael tells him to wait. "There are things being negotiated which will answer your questions and resolve your doubts," Michael insists, demonstrating his clear power as the new acting Don.

The Don's genius as a crime boss lies in the way he has so intricately woven his "legitimate" businesses with his criminal rackets. Having one foot in the legitimate world gives him the impression that he can eventually extract his Family from their Mafia environment. However, the all-consuming nature of the Mafia is such that even as he longs for legitimate power, he plots with Michael to secure his illegitimate power by murderous means.



Kay still harbors suspicions about the true extent of Michael's criminality, yet her love for him continues to draw her further (and blindly) into his clandestine world. Meanwhile, the Family gives Carlo an expanded role in the business, and he responds by adjusting his behavior to ingratiate himself to the Corleones. Michael, however, seems to be lulling Carlo into a false sense of security by treating him like an animal being fattened up to slaughter.



Don Corleone positions Michael as the potential savior of the Corleone Family. Yet Michael must demonstrate his qualifications beyond merely being the Don's son. The caporegimes are justifiably unsure of Michael's abilities to lead the Family back to power. Thus, Michael's master plan to cripple the other Families also functions as a demonstration of his personal power and influence—a statement of his worthiness to become the next Don Corleone.



Again, Michael demonstrates the essential qualities of patience and forethought that make him a natural successor to his equally patient and deliberate father. Unlike Sonny, whose rashness and unwillingness to bide his time in the face of attacks from the Five Families led to his downfall, Michael has placed his faith in a single calculated blow that can only be achieved by waiting until the right moment to strike.



Michael adjourns the meeting and shares a drink with Hagen and Don Corleone. Tom wants to know why he is “out” of the Family business, to which Michael responds that he is simply not fit to be a “wartime” Consigliere. Don Corleone tells Hagen that he must respect Michael’s wishes. “I never thought you were a bad *Consigliere*, I thought Santino a bad Don, may his soul rest in peace,” the Don says.

After Hagen leaves the meeting, Michael tells Don Corleone that his coming plan will serve as both vengeance for Apollonia and Sonny as well as a way to wrest power from Don Barzini. “Revenge is a dish that tastes best when it is cold,” the Don responds. With the Don’s blessing, Michael indicates that the wait is over and the he will begin implementing his master plan to restore the Corleone Family’s power. In the meantime, Kay gives birth to a baby boy and Nino Valenti dies of a cerebral hemorrhage.

After Nino’s funeral, authorities find Moe Greene shot to death in his mistress’s Hollywood home. A month later, Al Neri returns home to New York after a vacation in the Caribbean by way of Las Vegas. Michael greets him with compliments and a lucrative new bookmaking operation.

CHAPTER 29

It is a sunny Sunday morning. The Corleone women are attending church and Don Corleone is tending to his garden. He moves among the plants spraying invading ants with his bug sprayer as his young grandson, Michael’s child, draws near. The Don waves his hand to warn the boy away, and then collapses “into the earth.” The child retrieves Michael, who helps the Don to the patio and calls for an ambulance. “Life is so beautiful,” the Don says. They are his final words.

Don Corleone’s funeral is a “royal” occasion. The Dons of the Five Families attend with their caporegimes and Consiglieres, and a small army of Don Corleone’s friends come to pay their respects. Amerigo Bonasera prepares the Don’s body for its final rest, and in this, he performs his finest work. Michael spends most to the day meeting mourners and discussing plans with his inner circle. He imagines his future now that his father has passed. “He would follow his father. He would care for his children, his family, his world. But his children would grow in a different world.”

Tom is dismayed that his years of loyalty have resulted in a demotion. In demoting Tom, it seems that Michael plans to distinguish himself from his father by gradually surrounding himself with new faces in the upper ranks of his Family.



Michael has taken to heart Don Corleone’s belief that the most effective vengeance involves careful planning and preparation—like waiting to eat food when it is cool as to not get burned. In waiting to enact his plan, Michael risks losing support from the caporegimes, who have already told him they want to break away from the Corleone Family. Nonetheless, Michael’s confidence in his plan is such that he is willing to test the loyalty of his father’s most loyal lieutenants.



Neri receives more lavish compensation for committing murder than he ever did for enforcing the law as a police officer. This further demonstrate how the Mafia is able to lure people from legitimate society into its criminal ranks.



Don Corleone dies a peaceful, pastoral death in his beloved garden. This grace is particularly lucky for a man who spent much of his life living by the sword. The Don’s final words, however, underscore the complicated nature of his legacy. He dies a devoted family man who nonetheless caused great harm to his family, harm that he justified as necessary, if regretful, given the nature of his “business.”



Don Corleone’s funeral is a ceremony fit for a king. Yet, just as both loyal subjects and traitors have always surrounded kings, friends and enemies alike attend the Don’s funeral to maintain the veneer of respect in the midst of a bloody Mafia war. Fittingly, the Don’s passing marks the moment where Michael completes his transformation from family outsider into the new leader of the Family. Like his father before him, he now plans to care for “his world,” and his world alone.



The morning after Don Corleone's funeral, Michael tells the caporegimes that his plan for moving forward remains unaltered. Clemenza warns him that "the Barzinis and Tattaglias are going to move in on us real hard [...] you gotta fight or have a 'sit-down' with them." Tessio adds that Barzini has already attacked by setting up bookmaking operations in Tessio's Brooklyn territory. Michael assures them that "the Corleone Family is a lot stronger than anybody thinks," and urges patience.

Michael then tells Hagen that Don Corleone warned before his death that an inside traitor will betray the Corleone Family by setting up a peace meeting between him and Barzini. Michael knows that this meeting will be a trap for Barzini to kill him. The next morning, Tessio telephones Michael to say that he has set up a peace meeting with Barzini—Tessio is the traitor.

Michael reasons that Tessio's plan makes sense: by setting up the hit, Tessio stands to inherit the Corleone Family and forge an allegiance with Barzini that will end the long-simmering war between the Five Families. Unlike the late Don Corleone, however, Tessio does not understand that "political connections and power are worth ten *regimes*." A day before the scheduled meeting with Barzini, Michael stands as Godfather to Connie and Carlo's child at a baptism ceremony. "I think Carlo and Mike are going to be real friends now," Connie tells Kay.

CHAPTER 30

Albert Neri is in his Bronx apartment dressing in his police officer's uniform to prepare for an important job. Before becoming Michael Corleone's bodyguard, Neri was among the most feared police officers in New York City. He is physically strong and quick to handle punks with his favored weapon, a long, heavy flashlight. "With awesome, quick ferocity," he would "beat them bloody and throw them into the patrol car." His temper caused strains with his wife and nephew, but proved valuable on the job.

One night in Harlem, however, Neri beat a pimp, drug dealer, and abuser named Wax Baines so badly that Baines died. A court convicted Neri of manslaughter and sentenced him to prison. Aware of his tough reputation and Sicilian heritage, the Corleone Family enlisted Tom Hagen to get Neri's sentence suspended. Disenchanted with legitimate society's laws, Neri agreed to meet with Don Vito and Michael Corleone. He understood that "the Corleone Family approved that act of his which society condemned and had punished him for."

With Don Corleone gone, the threat the Five Families pose to the Corleones only intensifies. Michael's confidence in the Family's position, however, continues to test the loyalty of the caporegimes. This test is intentional on Michael's part, as it will soon reveal a traitor in his midst.



Tessio has dedicated a lifetime of loyal service to Don Corleone, but with the Don's passing, he reasons that the Family's future is too uncertain and throws in his lot with the Barzini Family. As betrayal never goes unpunished in the Mafia world, Tessio's actions will cost him dearly. In the Mafia, a single act of treachery cancels out a lifetime of loyalty.



Michael understands Tessio's reasoning for betraying the Family, demonstrating just how much treachery is an expected part of the Mafia lifestyle. Unlike Michael, however, Tessio underestimates the role that connections have in shoring up a crime Family's power. As the leader of a crew of soldiers, he has mostly relied on brute force and intimidation to serve the Family, not careful alliances and quiet favors.



Neri's donning of his police uniform in order to commit crimes in the service of a mob boss is symbolic of the kind of perverse "justice" in which the Mafia specializes. Even as a cop, however, Neri demonstrates the violent qualities that the mob looks for in their members. Like Don Corleone himself, Neri's fate lies in the underworld.



Like the other men who come to the Corleone Family for "justice," Neri first dedicated himself to the legitimate powers who run society. When he feels that legitimate justice has failed him, however, the Mafia is there to welcome him warmly by promising "justice" in exchange for a lifetime of servitude.



Before his death, Don Corleone believed that Neri could be a new “Luca Brasi” for the Family. Once, Michael asked his father why he used an “animal” like Luca Brasi. “There are men in this world [...] who go about demanding to be killed,” the Don told Michael. “Luca Brasi was such a man,” he continued, “most of these people are of no concern to ourselves but a Brasi is a powerful weapon to be used.” Al Neri was just such a man, and after the Don’s passing, he swore his full loyalty to Michael.

Back in the present, and dressed in his police uniform, Al Neri prepares to do battle for Don Michael Corleone.

Neri’s similarities to Luca Brasi connects Don Corleone’s lineage to his son Michael. Just as the Don relied on Brasi as a directionless tool of malevolence and violence whom the Don could control for his own ends, Michael offers Neri a purpose in life that his previous life as a police officer denied him.



Ironically, Michael murdered a corrupt police officer for colluding with Sollozzo against the Corleone Family. Now, Michael has enlisted a corrupt police officer to save his Family from the war Michael started by murdering a police officer.



CHAPTER 31

Connie Corleone boards a plane to Las Vegas for a vacation while Carlo remains in New York per Michael’s request that he stay at Long Beach for a few days before joining his family in Las Vegas. Meanwhile, a man walks into a Buffalo, New York, pizza parlor and asks the parlor owner for a slice. “I hear you got a great tattoo on your chest,” the customer says. He then pulls out a gun and kills the pizza shop owner. “Fabrizio, Michael Corleone sends you his regards,” the assassin says before fleeing the parlor.

Rocco Lampone drives his **car** to a small hotel off the Jones Beach Causeway where Barzini’s and Tattaglia’s assassins murdered Sonny Corleone. He enters a hotel room to find a naked Phillip Tattaglia having sex with a prostitute, and fires four bullets into his stomach. Later, Lampone drives Al Neri to Rockefeller Center, where Neri approaches Don Barzini and his bodyguards en route to meet with Michael Corleone and shoots Barzini in the chest, killing him.

Tessio is waiting for Michael to arrive while sipping coffee in the Corleone family’s kitchen. He tells Hagen that he hopes Michael can secure “a good deal” at the meeting with Barzini. As Tessio and Hagen prepare to leave for the meeting, a group of bodyguards surround the caporegime and tell him that Michael will take a different **car** to the meeting. Tessio immediately understands that he is a dead man. “Tell Mike it was business, I always liked him,” he says to Hagen before asking for mercy “for old times’ sake.” Hagen refuses, and the bodyguards lead Tessio to a waiting car, where he will take his last ride.

Michael’s plan demonstrates just how much patience he has been willing to endure in order to destroy all of the threats to the Corleone Family’s power. Michael’s revenge against the traitorous Fabrizio—long after Apollonia’s tragic death—shows the value in careful planning and execution, or, as Don Corleone would have put it, serving a dish after it has had plenty of time to cool down.



Michael executes his father’s plan that, true to the Don’s form, involved formal negotiation as a front for implicit violence. The late Don arranged the peace meeting with Tattaglia and Barzini knowing that the two Dons would not stop their attacks on the Corleone Family. Thus, Michael’s murder of Barzini and Tattaglia is the ultimate fulfillment of his father’s plan to use negotiation as his enemies’ last chance to surrender in order to avoid a killing blow. After Tattaglia and Barzini refused to surrender, Michael delivers the blow.



Michael waits patiently for Tessio to put his traitorous plot into motion before marking him as a traitor. When Tom Hagen’s bodyguards surround Tessio, he echoes Tom’s earlier claim that “business” need not be personal, and that he intended no personal insult to Michael. Of course, the fact that Tessio planned to harm Michael in the most personal and extreme way possible—by killing him—reveals the absurd hollowness of this claim.



Carlo Rizzi sits nervously waiting in a house at the mall where he is to meet with Michael. He calls his mistress to tell her he is going to be late for their date that evening. Suddenly, Michael arrives. Rocco Lampone and Tom Hagen accompany him. "You have to answer for Santino," Michael says, "you fingered Sonny for the Barzini people." A terrified Carlo swears his innocence, but Michael cuts him off to tell him that Barzini and Tattaglia are dead. He tells Carlo not to be frightened. "Do you think I'd make my sister a widow?" he asks.

When Michael asks which of the other Dons approached Carlo to betray Sonny, Carlo says it was Barzini. As punishment, Michael says he will send Carlo to Las Vegas and exile him from the Family Business. Michael, Hagen, and Lampone then lead Carlo to a **car** parked outside the home.

Carlo settles in the front seat and closes the door. In the back seat, Clemenza wraps a garrote around Carlo's neck, and his body leaps "like a fish on a line." His feet smash the windshield and he loses control of his bowels. After a few minutes, Carlo breathes his last breath. "The victory of the Corleone Family" is now complete.

To dispose of any remaining traitors, Clemenza and new caporegime, Lampone take control of the remaining Barzini rackets and murder those men still loyal to the murdered Don. Those Barzini and Tattaglia *caporegimes* who are not killed immediately switch their loyalties to the Corleone Family.

Meanwhile, Connie returns to Long Beach from Las Vegas and angrily confronts Michael about Carlo's death. "You lousy bastard," she screams, "You killed my husband [...] you blamed him about Sonny, you always did [...] but you never thought about me." When Kay tries to tell Connie that she does not know what she is saying, Connie responds, "you think you know your husband? Do you know how many men he had killed with my Carlo? Just read the papers."

Michael purposefully sets up Carlo's murder inside the confines of the Corleone Family home to reference Carlo's earlier betrayal of not just the Corleone Family, but the Corleone blood family as well. Because Carlo's betrayal resulted in Sonny's death, Carlo will live his last minutes as man marked for death in the same domestic environment that his betrayal ruptured.



Michael coldly insists that he will only banish Carlo, not kill him. However, the mention of a car outside indicates that Michael is lying, and that Carlo's death is immanent.



Like the other Corleone Family traitors, Paulie Gatto and Sal Tessio, Carlo meets his end inside of a car, which becomes his coffin. Notably, while Carlo's presence as Connie's groom first introduces the Corleone Family at its peak strength, his exit from the scene secures the Family's "victory" and its reclamation of the strength it steadily lost in the years after Carlo's wedding to Connie.



In true Corleone fashion, Michael accepts the loyalties of the soldiers he does not kill. Like his father before him, who earlier in life incorporated the remnants of Maranzano's empire into his own Family, Michael strengthens the Family not just by killing, but also by forging connections.



Connie's rage over Carlo's murder further exemplifies the diminished role women have in the Mafia's operations. Connie's input in the Family business is nonexistent to the point where the men around her can operate freely, even when their options bring horror into her own life.



A shocked Kay asks Michael if what Connie says is true. “Just believe me, this one time I’m letting you ask about my affairs, and I’m giving you an answer. It is not true,” Michael answers. Relieved, Kay goes into the kitchen to make drinks when she sees Clemenza, Neri, and Lampone enter Michael’s room with their bodyguards in tow. “Don Michael,” Clemenza says. Kay watches as Michael receives the men’s homage like the “Roman emperors of antiquity, who, by divine right, held the power of life and death over their fellow men.” She begins to cry.

This passage underscores the cruel patriarchy that is at the heart of the Mafia’s conception of male power. In order to take his formal place as the new Don of the Corleone Family, Michael must literally excise Kay from that part of his life. In this scene, Kay’s tears over her banishment only strengthen Michael’s status as a crime boss. To control his criminal empire, he must also control the women in his life.



CHAPTER 32

After a year of “delicate maneuvering” following Michael’s perfectly executed execution of his enemies, the Corleone Family’s former power is restored. He sells off the Family’s remaining New York real estate and assets and moves the Family to Las Vegas. Peter Clemenza now leads his own New York Family, while Rocco Lampone is now the Corleone’s senior caporegime. Al Neri is in charge of security in the Corleone-owned Vegas hotels, while Tom Hagen stays as the Family’s lawyer. Connie Corleone remarries. Kay converts to Catholicism against Michael’s wishes, as he wanted his children to grow up as American Protestants.

The transition of power from Don Vito Corleone to Don Michael Corleone accompanies a move from east to west that symbolizes the replacement of the old order with the new. By selling off his father’s olive oil business in New York, Michael symbolically sheds his ties to the “Old World” of his father and sets off for the American West, a longtime symbol of opportunity and rebirth in American culture. Michael also enlists new henchmen to serve under his Family in its transition from east to west.



Kay enjoys the dry Las Vegas climate and Michael buys a legitimate construction business as a front for his criminal activity. Kay and Michael travel back to New York one final time to arrange the packing and shipping of the family’s remaining items. One morning, Kay wakes in the mall and tells Michael she is going to church. “If you’re such a strict Catholic, how come you let the kids duck going to church so much?” Michael asks. Kay becomes irritated and says she will make the kids attend church regularly after they complete the move to their Vegas home.

By settling in with her family in Nevada, Kay appears to embrace the roles and expectations of a Mafia wife. Moreover, her conversion to Catholicism signifies a break not just from her Protestant upbringing, but also from her entire previous life. Much like those converting to Catholicism must be baptized into the faith, by baptizing into Catholicism, Kay is also converting herself into a Corleone.



Outside of the mall, Kay meets Mama Corleone, who is sitting in a **car** “dressed in her widow black.” Kay gets into the car, and Mam Corleone makes sure that she skipped breakfast, as those taking Catholic communion must fast beforehand. Kay says “yes” and they drive to the church.

Throughout the novel, cars symbolizes impending death, both literally and symbolically. By entering the car with Mama Corleone, Kay signifies the death of much of her previous identity.



The inside of the church is cool and dark. Candles faintly illuminate the walls as Kay has a flashback about the moment a year ago when Michael lied to her about killing Connie’s husband, Carlo. She took the children and left him for her parents’ New Hampshire home. Soon after, Tom Hagen visited her, and they spent the afternoon talking. “I expected to see some of the ‘boys’ get out of the car with their machine guns to make me go back,” she coolly told Hagen. The normally cool Hagen became angry.

Kay’s presence in the church inspires a flashback to the moment where she almost broke free from the Corleone Family’s clutches. Despite proclaiming her love for Michael, she maintains her moral compass and views sanctioning murder as beyond the pale.



Kay told Tom straight out that she ran away because Michael lied to her about killing Carlo. Tom asked her to consider a possible justification for the murder: “What if Carlo beating up Connie that time was a deliberate plot to get Sonny out in the open,” he asks, “What if Carlo had been paid to help get Sonny killed?” Kay asked why Michael could not forgive Carlo. Tom says that forgiveness was possible in Kay’s world but not in Michael’s.

“He warned you never to ask about business,” Tom says of Michael. He told Kay of Tessio’s betrayal; that Tessio died just as Carlo died “because treachery can’t be forgiven.” Tom explained that forgiving the traitors would have put Michael’s crime Family *and* his personal family at risk, and Michael was not willing to take that risk. Tom concluded by explaining that Kay and his children were the only people that Michael could never harm. “If you told Michael what I’ve told you today, I’m a dead man,” Tom said. Kay eventually went back to Michael and became a Catholic.

Kay kneels in front of the priest at the altar of Catholic church and receives her Communion wafer. Now that she is “washed clean of sin,” Kay bows her head and prays. She empties her mind of everything and everyone she cares about, except for her husband, and she prays “the necessary prayers for the soul of Michael Corleone.”

Tom’s ability to convince Kay that Michael’s murders of Sollozzo and McCluskey were not only justifiable, but also necessary, speaks to the insidious way that the Mafia corrupts most everyone who encounters it. That Tom views forgiveness as “impossible” within the Mafia’s ranks indicates the extent of the mob’s moral rot.



In a deeply symbolic development, Kay responds to Tom’s insistence that forgiveness is impossible in the Mafia by becoming a dedicated Catholic. Asking forgiveness via the Catholic sacrament of confession allows Kay to square her love for Michael with the evil world she knows he embodies. She cannot expect forgiveness from Don Michael Corleone, but she seek forgiveness from God.



The final scene in the novel places Kay at the feet of a Godfather even more powerful than Michael. She knows that her husband lives a life defined by sin, and, unable to intervene directly in his world, she pleads for mercy from the ethereal world above. Just as Mama Corleone used to go to Mass to pray for her husband’s soul, now Kay does too, marking her full transformation into a true Corleone woman and Mafia wife. Kay’s act marks the final act of martyrdom for the Corleone Family, as she risks her own soul in order to save her husband from eternal damnation.





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