

The Godfather Trilogy [4K]

THE GODFATHER

By

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Courtesy:

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Book One

Chapter 1

Behind every great fortune there is a crime – Balzac

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

a word, pressing the fresh linen against his mouth.

The parents of the animales were coming by now, two men and two women his age but more American in their dress. They glanced at him, shamefaced, yet in their eyes was an odd, triumphant defiance.

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

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

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

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

screen.

"Where the hell were you?" Johnny Fontane asked.

"Out fucking," she said.

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

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

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

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

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

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The baker, Nazorine, pudgy and crusty as his great Italian loaves, still dusty with flour, scowled at his wife, his nubile daughter, Katherine, and his baker's helper, Enzo. Enzo had changed into his prisoner-of-war uniform with its green-lettered armband and was terrified that this scene would make him late reporting back to Governor's Island. One of the many thousands of Italian Army prisoners paroled daily to work in the American economy, he lived in constant fear of that parole being revoked. And so the little comedy being played now was, for him, a serious business.

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

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

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

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

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

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All of these people and many others received engraved invitations to the wedding of Miss Constanzia Corleone, to be celebrated on the last Saturday in August 1945. The father of the bride, Don Vito Corleone, never forgot his old friends and neighbors though

The Godfather Trilogy [4K UHD]>>

he himself now lived in a huge house on Long Island. The reception would be held in that house and the festivities would go on all day. There was no doubt it would be a momentous occasion. The war with the Japanese had just ended so there would not be any nagging fear for their sons fighting in the Army to cloud these festivities. A wedding was just what people needed to show their joy.

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

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

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

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

thought the Don himself was the lucky groom.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

When Michael Corleone was discharged early in 1945 to recover from a disabling wound, he had no idea that his father had arranged his release. He stayed home for a few weeks, then, without consulting anyone, entered Dartmouth College in Hanover, New Hampshire, and so he left his father's house. To return for the wedding of his sister and to show his own future wife to them, the washed-out rag of an American girl.

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

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

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

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

Don Corleone knew who they were. His closest and most intimate friends had been advised to attend the wedding in automobiles not their own. And though he disapproved of his son's foolish display of anger, the tantrum served a purpose. It would convince the

interlopers that their presence was unexpected and unprepared for. So Don Corleone himself was not angry. He had long ago learned that society imposes insults that must be borne, comforted by the knowledge that in this world there comes a time when the most humble of men, if he keeps his eyes open, can take his revenge on the most powerful. It was this knowledge that prevented the Don from losing the humility all his friends admired in him.

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

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

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

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

She thought him incredibly handsome. Carlo Rizzi had worked in the open desert air while very young— heavy laborer's work. Now he had tremendous forearms and his

shoulders bulged the jacket of his tux. He basked in the adoring eyes of his bride and filled her glass with wine. He was elaborately courteous to her as if they were both actors in a play. But his eyes kept flickering toward the huge silk purse the bride wore on her right shoulder and which was now stuffed full of money envelopes. How much did it hold? Ten thousand? Twenty thousand? Carlo Rizzi smiled. It was only the beginning. He had, after all, married into a royal family. They would have to take care of him.

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

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

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

stopping to talk with a guest here and there as he worked his way through the crowd.

All eyes followed them. The maid of honor, thoroughly Americanized by three years of college, was a ripe girl who already had a "reputation." All through the marriage rehearsals she had flirted with Sonny Corleone in a teasing, joking way she thought was permitted because he was the best man and her wedding partner. Now holding her pink gown up off the ground, Lucy Mancini went into the house, smiling with false innocence; ran lightly up the stairs to the bathroom. She stayed there for a few moments. When she came out Sonny Corleone was on the landing above, beckoning her upward.

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

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

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

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

The baker told the story of his daughter and Enzo. A fine Italian lad from Sicily; captured by the American Army; sent to the United States as a prisoner of war; given parole to help our war effort! A pure and honorable love had sprung up between honest Enzo and his sheltered Katherine but now that the war was ended the poor lad would be repatriated to Italy and Nazorine's daughter would surely die of a broken heart. Only Godfather Corleone could help this afflicted couple. He was their last hope.

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

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

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

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

The next man Hagen brought in was a very simple case. His name was Anthony Coppola and he was the son of a man Don Corleone had worked with in the railroad

yards in his youth. Coppola needed five hundred dollars to open a pizzeria; for a deposit on fixtures and the special oven. For reasons not gone into, credit was not available. The Don reached into his pocket and took out a roll of bills. It was not quite enough. He grimaced and said to Tom Hagen, "Loan me a hundred dollars, I'll pay you back Monday when I go to the bank." The supplicant protested that four hundred dollars would be ample, but Don Corleone patted his shoulder, saying, apologetically, "This fancy wedding left me a little short of cash." He took the money Hagen extended to him and gave it to Anthony Coppola with his own roll of bills.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Fifteen years ago," Michael said. "Everything's been peaceful since then." He was afraid he had gone too far.

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

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

"Did he really kill six men?" Kay asked.

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

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

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

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

So that was what he wanted to do. Hagen noticed the change in Don Corleone. The

The Godfather Trilogy [4K UHD]>>

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

The money in the envelope was sure to be more than anyone else had given. Brasi had spent many hours deciding on the sum, comparing it to what the other guests might offer. He wanted to be the most generous to show that he had the most respect, and that was why he had given his envelope to the Don personally, a *gaucherie* the Don overlooked in his own flowery sentence of thanks. Hagen saw Luca Brasi's face lose its mask of fury, swell with pride and pleasure. Brasi kissed the Don's hand before he went out the door that Hagen held open. Hagen prudently gave Brasi a friendly smile which the squat man acknowledged with a polite stretching of rubbery, veal-colored lips.

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

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

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

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

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

Kay Adams was thrilled. "That's really romantic," she said. "Your father must be a

warmhearted person. To adopt somebody just like that when he had so many children of his own."

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

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

Michael laughed. "Because my father said it would be disrespectful for Tom to change his name. Disrespectful to his own parents."

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

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

* * *

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

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

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

Now as she ran up the steps toward Sonny a tremendous flash of desire went through

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