

Fools Die

A Novel by the author of *The Godfather*

Mario
Puzo

FOOLS DIE

Books by Mario Puzo

DARK ARENA

THE FORTUNATE PILGRIM

THE RUNAWAY SUMMER OF DAVIE SHAW

THE GODFATHER

THE GODFATHER PAPERS AND OTHER CONFESSIONS

LAS VEGAS

FOOLS DIE

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a novel by

MARIO PUZO

G.P. PUTNAM'S SONS

New York

Fourth Impression

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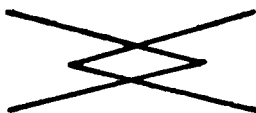
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FOR ERIKA

BOOK I

Chapter

1



“LISTEN to me. I will tell you the truth about a man’s life. I will tell you the truth about his love for women. That he never hates them. Already you think I’m on the wrong track. Stay with me. Really—I’m a master of magic.

“Do you believe a man can truly love a woman and constantly betray her? Never mind physically, but betray her in his mind, in the very ‘poetry of his soul.’ Well, it’s not easy, but men do it all the time.

“Do you want to know how women can love you, feed you that love deliberately to poison your body and mind simply to destroy you? And out of passionate love choose not to love you anymore? And at the same time dizzy you with an idiot’s ecstasy? Impossible? That’s the easy part.

“But don’t run away. This is not a love story.

“I will make you feel the painful beauty of a child, the animal horniness of the adolescent male, the yearning suicidal moodiness of the young female. And then (here’s the hard part) show you how time turns man and woman around full circle, exchanged in body and soul.

“And then of course there is TRUE LOVE. Don’t go away! It exists or I will make it exist. I’m not a master of magic for nothing. Is it worth what it costs? And how about sexual fidelity? Does it

work? Is it love? Is it even human, that perverse passion to be with only one person? And if it doesn't work, do you still get a bonus for trying? Can it work both ways? Of course not, that's easy. And yet—

“Life is a comical business, and there is nothing funnier than love traveling through time. But a true master of magic can make his audience laugh and cry at the same time. Death is another story. I will never make a joke about death. It is beyond my powers.

“I am always alert for death. He doesn't fool me. I spot him right away. He loves to come in his country-bumpkin disguise; a comical wart that suddenly grows and grows; the dark, hairy mole that sends its roots to the very bone; or hiding behind a pretty little fever blush. Then suddenly that grinning skull appears to take the victim by surprise. But never me. I'm waiting for him. I take my precautions.

“Parallel to death, love is a tiresome, childish business, though men believe more in love than death. Women are another story. They have a powerful secret. They don't take love seriously and never have.

“But again, don't go away. Again; this is not a love story. Forget about love. I will show you all the stretches of power. First the life of a poor struggling writer. Sensitive. Talented. Maybe even some genius. I will show you the artist getting the shit kicked out of him for the sake of his art. And why he so richly deserves it. Then I will show him as a cunning criminal and having the time of his life. Ah, what joy the true artist feels when he finally becomes a crook. It's out in the open now, his essential nature. No more kidding around about his honor. The son of a bitch is a hustler. A conniver. An enemy of society right out in the clear instead of hiding behind his whore's cunt of art. What a relief. What pleasure. Such sly delight. And then how he becomes an honest man again. It's an awful strain being a crook.

“But it helps you to accept society and forgive your fellowman. Once that's done no person should be a crook unless he really needs the money.

“Then on to one of the most amazing success stories in the history of literature. The intimate lives of the giants of our culture.

One crazy bastard especially. The classy world. So now we have the poor struggling genius world, the crooked world and the classy literary world. All this laced with plenty of sex, some complicated ideas you won't be hit over the head with and may even find interesting. And finally on to a full-blast ending in Hollywood with our hero gobbling up all its rewards, money, fame, beautiful women. And . . . don't go away—don't go away—how it all turns to ashes.

"That's not enough? You've heard it all before? But remember I'm a master of magic. I can bring all these people truly alive. I can show you what they truly think and feel. You'll weep for them, all of them, I promise you that. Or maybe just laugh. Anyway, we're going to have a lot of fun. And learn something about life. Which is really no help.

"Ah, I know what you're thinking. That conning bastard trying to make us turn the page. But wait, it's only a tale I want to tell. What's the harm? Even if I take it seriously, you don't have to. Just have a good time.

"I want to tell you a story, I have no other vanity. I don't desire success or fame or money. But that's easy, most men, most women don't, not really. Even better, I don't want love. When I was young, some women told me they loved me for my long eyelashes. I accepted. Later it was for my wit. Then for my power and money. Then for my talent. Then for my mind—deep. OK, I can handle all of it. The only woman who scares me is the one who loves me for myself alone. I have plans for her. I have poisons and daggers and dark graves in caves to hide her head. She can't be allowed to live. Especially if she is sexually faithful and never lies and always puts me ahead of everything and everyone.

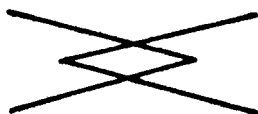
"There will be a lot about love in this book, but it's not a love book. It's a war book. The old war between men who are true friends. The great 'new' war between men and women. Sure it's an old story, but it's out in the open now. The Women's Liberation warriors think they have something new, but it's just their armies coming out of their guerrilla hills. Sweet women ambushed men always: at their cradles, in the kitchen, the bedroom. And at the graves of their children, the best place not to hear a plea for mercy.

"Ah well, you think I have a grievance against women. But I

never hated them. And they'll come out better people than men, you'll see. But the truth is that only women have been able to make me unhappy, and they have done so from the cradle on. But most men can say that. And there's nothing to be done.

"What a target I've given here. I know—I know—how irresistible it seems. But be careful. I'm a tricky storyteller, not just one of your vulnerable sensitive artists. I've taken my precautions. I've still got a few surprises left.

"But enough. Let me get to work. Let me begin and let me end."



BOOK II

Chapter

2

ON the luckiest day of Jordan Hawley's life he betrayed his three best friends. But yet unknowing, he wandered through the dice pit of the huge gambling casino in the Hotel Xanadu, wondering what game to try next. Still early afternoon, he was a ten-thousand-dollar winner. But he was tired of the glittering red dice skittering across green felt.

He moved out of the pit, the purple carpet sinking beneath his feet, and moved toward the hissing wheel of a roulette table, pretty with red and black boxes, punishing green zero and double zero. He made some foolhardy bets, lost and moved into the blackjack pit.

The small horseshoe blackjack tables ran down in double rows. He walked between them like a captive through an Indian gauntlet. Blue-backed cards flashed on either side. He made it through safely and came to the huge glass doors that led out into the streets of the city of Las Vegas. From here he could see down the Strip sentineled by luxury hotels.

Under the blazing Nevada sun, a dozen Xanadus glittered with million-watt neon signs. The hotels seemed to be melting down into a steely golden haze, a reachable mirage. Jordan Hawley was trapped inside the air-conditioned casino with his winnings. It would be madness to go out to where only other casinos awaited him, with

their strange unknown fortunes. Here he was a winner, and soon he would see his friends. Here he was shielded from the burning yellow desert.

Jordan Hawley turned away from the glass door and sat down at the nearest blackjack table. Black hundred-dollar chips, tiny cindered suns, rattled in his hands. He watched a dealer sliding cards from his freshly made shoe, the oblong wooden box that held the cards.

Jordan bet heavy on each of two small circles, playing two hands. His luck was good. He played until the shoe ran out. The dealer busted often, and when he shuffled up, Jordan moved on. His pockets bulged chips everywhere. But that was no sweat because he was wearing a specially designed Sy Devore Vegas Winner sports coat. It had red crimson trim on sky blue cloth and specially zippered pockets that were optimistically capacious. The inside of the jacket also held special zippered cavities so deep no pickpocket could get at them. Jordan's winnings were safe, and he had plenty of room for more. Nobody had ever filled the pockets of a Vegas Winner jacket.

The casino, lit by many huge chandeliers, had a bluish haze, neon reflected by the deep purple carpeting. Jordan stepped out of this light and into the darkened area of the bar lounge with its lowered ceiling and small platform for performers. Seated at a small table, he could look out on the casino as a spectator looks on a lighted stage.

Mesmerized, he watched afternoon gamblers drift in intricate choreographed patterns from table to table. Like a rainbow flashing across a clear blue sky, a roulette wheel flashed its red, black numbers to match the table layout. Blue-white-backed cards skittered across green felt tables. White-dotted red square dice were dazzling flying fish over the whale-shaped crap tables. Far off, down the rows of blackjack tables, those dealers going off duty washed their hands high in the air to show they were not palming chips.

The casino stage began to fill up with more actors: sun worshipers wandering in from the outdoor pool, others from tennis courts, golf courses, naps and afternoon free and paid lovemaking