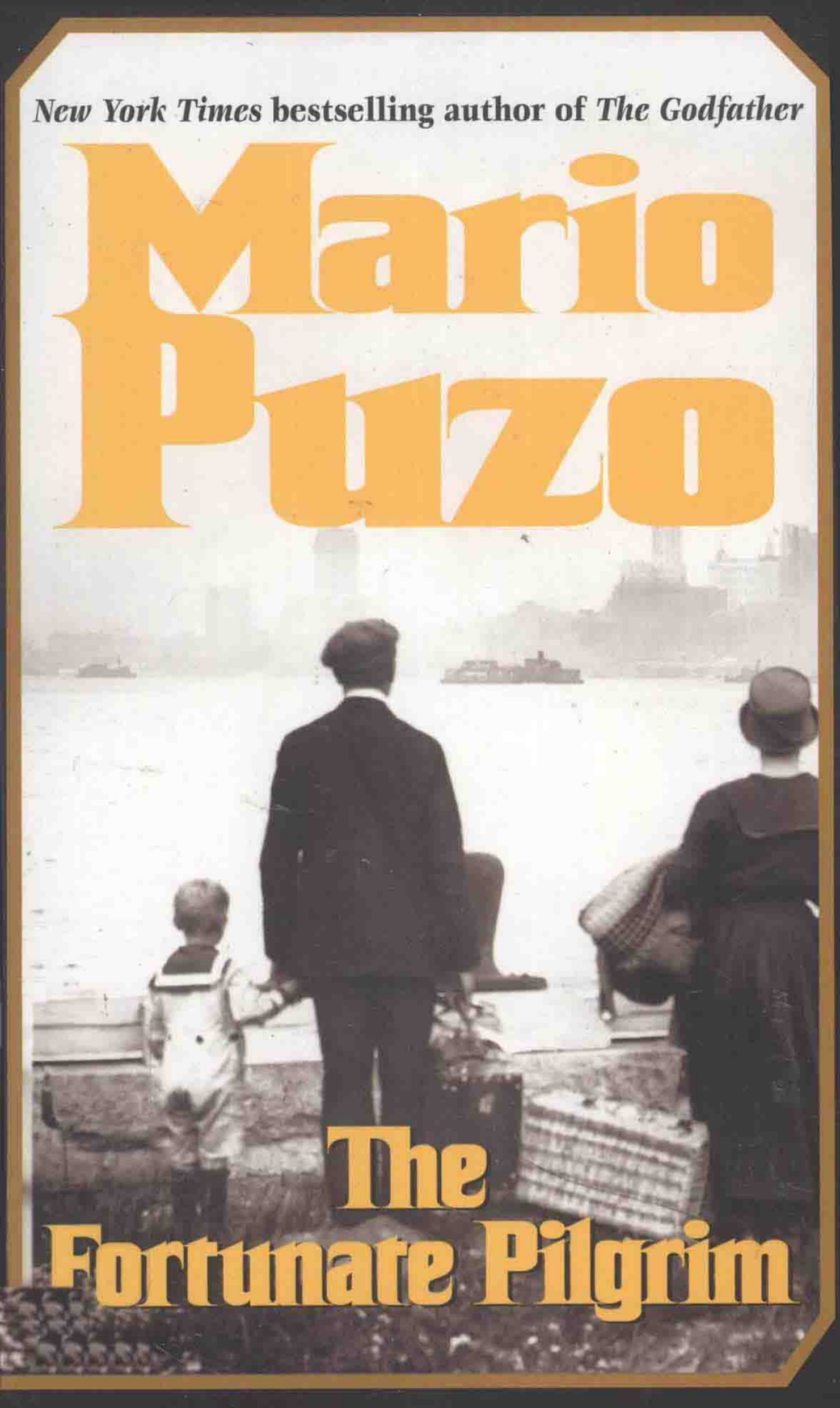
New York Times bestselling author of *The Godfather*

Mario Puzo



The Fortunate Pilgrim

The Fortunate Pilgrim

A Novel

Mario Puzo

BALLANTINE BOOKS • NEW YORK

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are the products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

A Ballantine Book
Published by The Random House Publishing Group

Published in the United States by Ballantine Books, an imprint of The Random House Publishing Group, a division of Random House, Inc., New York, and simultaneously in Canada by Random House of Canada Limited, Toronto. Originally published by Atheneum Books, a division of Simon & Schuster, New York, in 1964.

www.ballantinebooks.com

ISBN 978-0-345-47672-2

This edition published by arrangement with the author and Random House, Inc.

Manufactured in the United States of America

First Ballantine Books Edition: August 1998
Second Ballantine Books Edition: October 2004

OPM 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3

"THE BEST THING PUZO'S EVER WRITTEN . . .
What sets this book apart is that Puzo wrote it from the heart."
—The Rocky Mountain News

"The conflicts of new and old, poverty and riches, crime and punishment make for a rich work of fiction."
—The Denver Post

"Call it *The Godmother*. Lucia Santa Angeluzzi-Corbo is easily the equal of Don Corleone, a calculating, tough peasant woman who came to the New World to marry a man she scarcely remembered. . . . The author lovingly but starkly evokes the street life of New York's Lower West Side. . . . If you are not already a Puzo fan, this gorgeously written and deeply moving book will make you one."
—American Way

"Among Puzo's books, *The Fortunate Pilgrim* comes closest to the texture of the everyday life of Italian-American immigrants. Yes, it has some sex and crime, but it is quieter in tone, less macho, more real, than *The Godfather*."
—Lexington Herald-Leader

"There is no doubt that in both form and content, *The Fortunate Pilgrim* is Puzo's greatest contribution to American literature. . . . The best of *The Godfather* comes out of this novel. . . . The saga of the Angeluzzi-Corbo family brings out the best and the worst of Italian ghetto life, which Puzo dramatizes through an urban realism that can match the best writers of this genre. . . . Puzo should have become famous for this novel. . . . We should buy this book because it will give us a greater understanding of who we are by showing us where we came from."
—Italian America

By Mario Puzo

Fiction:
THE DARK ARENA*
THE FORTUNATE PILGRIM
THE GODFATHER
FOOLS DIE
THE SICILIAN*
THE FOURTH K
THE LAST DON*
OMERTA*
THE FAMILY
THE GODFATHER RETURNS *(by Mark Winegardner)**
THE GODFATHER'S REVENGE *(by Mark Winegardner)*

Nonfiction:
THE GODFATHER PAPERS
INSIDE LAS VEGAS

Children's Book:
THE RUNAWAY SUMMER OF DAVIE SHAW

**Published by The Random House Publishing Group*

For my Family and Norman

At the bottom of the heart of every human being from earliest infancy until the tomb there is something that goes on indomitably expecting—in the teeth of all crimes committed, suffered, and witnessed—that good and not evil will be done to him. It is this above all that is sacred in every human being.

—SIMONE WEIL

PREFACE

I CONSIDER MY second book, *The Fortunate Pilgrim,* my best novel and my most personal one. It proved also to be my most interesting book because it was full of surprises.

When I began, the plan was to make myself the hero. It was supposed to be the story of a struggling writer, poorest of the poor, whose mother, sister, and brothers were enemies of his art, and how, in the end, he succeeded in spite of them. It was written to show my rejection of my Italian heritage and my callow disdain of those illiterate peasants from which I sprang.

But what a surprise it was when I discovered that my mother turned out to be the hero of the book. And that my sister was more honest, trustworthy, and braver than me. Through the writing, those immigrant Italians who worked twelve hours a day in gray, sweat-soaked fedoras, wearing great handlebar mustaches, had the dignity of heroes. How it happened, I never knew.

All young writers dream of immortality—that hundreds of years in the future the new generations will read their books and find their lives changed, as my life was after reading *The Brothers Karamazov* at the age of fifteen. I vowed I would never write a word that was not absolutely true to myself. And I felt I had achieved that in *The Fortunate Pilgrim.* I assumed that such a writer would automatically become rich and famous.

I received marvelous reviews. But then came the next surprise: Nothing happened. I didn't become rich and famous.

In fact, I was poorer than before; I had to work two jobs instead of one.

I was furious, but only at myself. I rethought my whole life. Why should the public care that I put so much of myself into that book, so much care into each sentence? Why should my family care about my writing when it didn't earn my daily bread? Why should they indulge my eccentricity? And the public, why should they care about tragedies that didn't reflect their own experience? I concluded that I had worked ten years of my life in sheer self-indulgence. I thought myself that most despised figure in Italian culture, a "chooch"—that is, a man who could not earn a living for himself or his family.

But then came another surprise. In reaction to my disappointment, and to feed my family, I decided to write a bestseller. And to use some stories that my mother—who is *Pilgrim*'s heroine, Lucia Santa—told us as we were growing up. That book was *The Godfather.* It took me four years to write, still working two jobs. But it accomplished my aim. It was a bestseller, and this time I became rich and famous. I had done the right thing.

But there were more surprises to come. Whenever the Godfather opened his mouth, in my own mind I heard the voice of my mother. I heard her wisdom, her ruthlessness, and her unconquerable love for her family and for life itself, qualities not valued in women at the time. The Don's courage and loyalty came from her; his humanity came from her. Through my characters, I heard the voices of my sisters and brothers, with their tolerance of human frailty. And so, I know now, without Lucia Santa, I could not have written *The Godfather.*

It is thirty years since I wrote *The Fortunate Pilgrim.* The changes in the culture, and the change in women's roles, as well as the growing interest in ethnic subjects, have made this book in many ways contemporary. The human experience, I hope, is timeless.

I am immensely flattered that Random House is republish-

ing it after all this time. That it still holds its power, maybe more now than then.

I've reread the book and I still love it, and most of all I love my mother and hold her in true reverence. She lived a life of tragedy and still embraced life. She is, I can see from this vantage point, in every one of the books I have written. And I know now I am not the hero of my life, she is. All these years later, her tragedies still make me weep. And the book cries out, "Behold how she was wronged."

—Mario Puzo
November 1996

The Fortunate Pilgrim

PART ONE

CHAPTER 1

LARRY ANGELUZZI SPURRED his jet-black horse proudly through a canyon formed by two great walls of tenements, and at the foot of each wall, marooned on their separate blue-slate sidewalks, little children stopped their games to watch him with silent admiration. He swung his red lantern in a great arc; sparks flew from the iron hoofs of his horse as they rang on railroad tracks, set flush in the stones of Tenth Avenue, and slowly following horse, rider and lantern came the long freight train, inching its way north from St. John's Park terminal on Hudson Street.

In 1928 the New York Central Railroad used the streets of the city to shuttle trains north and south, sending scouts on horseback to warn traffic. In a few more years this would end, an overhead pass built. But Larry Angeluzzi, not knowing he was the last of the "dummy boys," that he would soon be a tiny scrap of urban history, rode as straight and arrogantly as any western cowboy. His spurs were white, heavy sneakers, his sombrero a peaked cap studded with union buttons. His blue dungarees were fastened at the ankle with shiny, plated bicycle clips.

He cantered through the hot summer night, his desert a city of stone. Women gossiped on wooden boxes, men puffed cigars of the De Nobili while standing on street corners, children risked their lives in dangerous play, leaving their blue-slate islands to climb on the moving freight train.

All moved in the smoky yellow light of lamp posts and the naked white-hot bulbs of candy-store windows. At every intersection a fresh breeze from Twelfth Avenue, concrete bank of the Hudson River, refreshed horse and rider, cooled the hot black engine that gave warning hoots behind them.

At 27th Street the wall on Larry Angeluzzi's right fell away for a whole block. In the cleared space was Chelsea Park placed with dark squatting shapes, kids sitting on the ground to watch the free outdoor movies shown by Hudson Guild Settlement House. On the distant giant white screen, Larry Angeluzzi saw a monstrous horse and rider, bathed in false sunlight, thundering down upon him, felt his own horse rise in alarm as its tossing head caught sight of those great ghosts; and then they were past the intersection of 28th Street, and the wall had sprung up again.

Larry was nearly home. There was the pedestrian bridge that spanned Tenth Avenue on 30th Street; when he passed beneath that bridge he would be home, his work done. He set his cap at a jauntier angle, rode straight in the saddle. All the people sitting on the sidewalk from 30th to 31st Streets were relatives and friends. Larry made his horse gallop.

He passed swiftly beneath the bridge, waved to the children leaning on its rails above his head. He made his horse rear up for the people on the sidewalk on his right, then turned the animal left into the open railroad yards that formed a great spark-filled plain of steel down to the Hudson River.

Behind him the huge black engine chugged white clouds of steam, and as if by magic, the bridge and its children vanished, leaving behind them thin beautiful screams of delight rising to the pale, almost invisible stars. The freight train curved into the yards, the bridge reappeared, and scores of damp children hurtled down the stairways to run along the Avenue.

Larry tied his horse to the hitching post by the switchman's shanty and sat on the bench against the shanty wall. On the other side of the Avenue, painted on a flat screen, the familiar world he loved came alive inch by inch.

The brightly lit bakery was near the corner of 30th Street,

its festooned lemon-ice stand surrounded by children. The *Panettiere* himself filled white-ridged paper cups with cherry-red, pale-yellow and glittering-white crystals of ice. He scooped generous portions, for he was rich and even went to race tracks to squander his money.

Next to the bakery, toward 31st Street, was the grocery, its windows filled with yellow logs of provolone in shiny, waxy skins and prosciutto hams, meaty triangles hanging in gaily colored paper. Then there was the barber shop closed for business but open for card playing, the jealous barber even now alert for any freshly cut heads that did not bear the mark of his scissors. Children covered the pavement, busy as ants, women, almost invisible in black, made little dark mounds before each tenement door. From each mound a buzzing hum of angry gossip rose to the summer, starry sky.

The dwarf-like switchman came from the tracks and said, "No more trains tonight, kid." Larry unhitched his horse, mounted, then made the animal turn and rear up.

As the horse rose in the air, the row of tenements, the western wall of the great city, billowed, tilted toward Larry like some fragile canvas. In the open window of his own home, on the top floor of the tenement directly opposite, Larry saw the dark shape of what must be his little brother Vincent. Larry waved but there was no answering motion until he waved again. In the wall there were only a few scattered panes of yellow light. Everyone was down on the street, everyone was watching him. He struck his horse across the neck and galloped up the cobblestones of Tenth Avenue to the stable on 35th Street.

Earlier that evening, in twilight, when Larry Angeluzzi saddled his horse in St. John's Park, his mother, Lucia Santa Angeluzzi-Corbo, also mother of Octavia and Vincenzo Angeluzzi, widow of Anthony Angeluzzi, now wife of Frank Corbo and mother of his three children, by name Gino, Salvatore and Aileen, prepared to leave her empty flat, escape the choking summer heat, spend her evening with neighbors in quarreling gossip and, most of all, to guard her children playing in the darkness of the city streets.

Lucia Santa was at ease tonight, for summer was the good time—the children never ill with colds or fevers, no worries about warm coats, gloves, boots for the winter snow and extra money for school supplies. Everyone rushed through supper to escape the airless rooms and move with the tide of life in the streets; there were no evening quarrels. The house was easily kept clean since it was always empty. But, best of all for Lucia Santa, her own evenings were free; the street was a meeting place and summer was a time when neighbors became friends. So now, heavy jet-black hair combed into a bun, wearing a clean black dress, she picked up the backless kitchen chair and went down the four flights of stairs to sit on the Avenue.

EACH TENEMENT WAS a village square; each had its group of women, all in black, sitting on stools and boxes and doing more than gossip. They recalled ancient history, argued morals and social law, always taking their precedents from the mountain village in southern Italy they had escaped, fled from many years ago. And with what relish their favorite imaginings! Now: What if their stern fathers were transported by some miracle to face the problems *they* faced every day? Or their mothers of the quick and heavy hands? What shrieks if *they* as daughters had dared as these American children dared? If *they* had presumed.

The women talked of their children as they would of strangers. It was a favorite topic, the corruption of the innocent by the new land. Now: Felicia, who lived around the corner of 31st Street. What type of daughter was she who did not cut short her honeymoon on news of her godmother's illness, the summons issued by her own mother? A real whore. No no, they did not mince words. Felicia's mother herself told the story. And a son, poor man, who could not wait another year to marry when his father so commanded? Ahhh, the disrespect. *Figlio disgraziato.* Never could this pass in Italy. The father would kill his arrogant son; yes, kill him. And the daughter? In Italy—Felicia's mother swore in a voice still trembling with passion, though this had all hap-