

Rocco and his Brothers, Part V

Luchino Visconti, Director (1960)

ROCCO, Installment 2

A rainy night in the city. Ivo – the friend who told Simone about Nadia and Rocco – stands at the window in a bar, waiting. He's wearing a kind of leopard print jacket. In the darkness outside, a lone figure approaches on a bicycle.

Simone opens the door to let in the cyclist, a young man in a leather jacket and a knit cap. Complaining of the cold, he runs to get a coffee.

"So?" asks Ivo.

Against the background of pop music from the jukebox, the cyclist tells his story. "So I followed him. He was with a woman."

"To where?"

"Over by the underpass. They go there, near where the train passes. In the middle of the Ghisolfa fields."

Simone looks in that direction, as if he could see something from the bar. Behind his back is a boxing poster: symbol of his failure.

He seems still to be in shock. He walks slowly and then stops, saying tentatively, "We could be wrong. It might be that it's not her."

"Don't be stupid. If I tell you it's her, it's her."

Simone agrees, "Come on, let's go see."

"Wait, I'll get my bicycle and I'll show you."

The men run towards the field. They see their friend Romeo pass in a car and call out, "We're here!" He turns the vehicle around, stops, and they all run to him.

"So?" Simone asks Romeo.

"They're there. Let's go."

"Okay. I'm coming. But then if it's not them I'll beat you all up!"

Simone and Ivo get in the car. They set off, followed by the guy on the bike and two other men from the bar.

They arrive at their destination. In the long shot, framed by the darkness, we see a low building and a bright haze of rain under the street lights. Romeo stops the car and they all get out. He points, saying, "They're down there, by the shack. They just got there."

Simone plans the attack. "Guys, you come down from this path. I'll go this way, got it?" He wanted her, she never loved him, and now she loves his brother. He's thought about what he's about to do. "Wait for my signal, okay? Go!"

Ivo stops him. "You're going there alone?"

"Yes."

Simone walks stealthily along in the grass, through a gate and down some stairs. Ivo follows close behind.

The place is overgrown with brush. Stopping, Simone parts the bushes and peers out.

Rocco and Nadia are standing next to a tumbledown structure, talking quietly and kissing. She's wearing a plain white trench coat. In close-up, Simone's face is a portrait of confusion and rage.

Suddenly the pair is startled by a sound. Alarmed, Rocco asks, "Did you hear? What could it be?" "Nothing." She shrugs. "It could be a cat."

Suddenly Simone emerges from the bushes and says, "Stop." "What's the problem with you?" asks Rocco. "Can't I be with whom I want?"

Nadia starts to tiptoe away. Rocco goes to her.

"Yes, with whom you want" answers Simone. "But not with this one here who was my girl! You won't make me a laughingstock! Understand?" "That's ancient history," answers Rocco. "It's two years since you've seen her."

Simone turns away, puts his fingers in his mouth, and whistles. Rocco and Nadia look at each other, shocked and afraid.

Men emerge from the bushes, looking threatening, ready for action. Nadia asks, "But what's happening? What do you want, Simone? What do you guys want?"

"First, ask my forgiveness." With a smile, Rocco asks, "But why, Simone?"

Simone punches Rocco in the face. As Rocco recoils from the blow, Nadia runs and embraces him. She tells Simone, "You're a coward!" "I told you to apologize." The other men stand and watch.

Nadia backs away, urging, "Rocco, come. Do you see he's drunk?" She's a dark silhouette, edged with light. Simone chases her and grabs her. Rocco yells at him to stop. Nadia screams, "Don't, Simone!" "I'll do what I want." As a train whistle sounds close by, Nadia tries to escape from Simone's grasp. A cloud of smoke rises from a campfire behind them.

Ivo grabs Rocco when he tries to intervene. We see the two couples locked in combat against an expanse of desolate wasteland, with a few cars and streetlights in the distance. Nadia breaks free momentarily, but Simone has other ideas. "Take a look at your Nadia. At how she makes love." He tears at her coat and she runs away again, only to be caught again. He pushes her down to the ground.

Rocco manages to break away from Ivo, but the other men overpower him. "Hold on to him! He has to watch! He has to learn his lesson!" orders Simone.

"Rocco, help me! No, Simone!" screams Nadia. Rocco struggles and calls, "Simone! Don't do it!"

Simone pulls off Nadia's panties and holds them up in the air. "Here, take them!" He tosses them at Rocco. They fall onto his head and then onto the ground. "Rocco, help me!" Nadia cries desperately.

Then the men release Rocco, who watches with horror what's happening. In the end, he cries into his hands.

Simone rapes Nadia; it doesn't take long. Then he stands up, facing away. Nadia sobs and struggles to her feet, ghostly and wreathed in smoke. "Rocco, talk to me. Tell me that... tell me..." But she can't finish her sentence. Rocco says nothing and he doesn't reach out for her. He looks down as she staggers away, her white coat covered with dirt.

The four men, her accusers, simply stand silently and watch as she passes. This young woman with her dreams of happiness, a man who loved her, who enrolled in school, turning her life around: she's just a prostitute in their eyes, a worthless thing, some discarded property that has caused a problem between two men.

Rocco, covered with mud, staggers over to a tree, sobbing, and leans onto it. Simone says fiercely, "You learned your lesson. We'll talk about the rest at home."

"You disgust me."

"Say it again if you're brave enough."

"You disgust me."

Simone punches him in the stomach.

"Enough, Simone!" says Ivo, whose only concern was getting even with Nadia, a matter that has now been taken care of.

Rocco screams, "You're my brother! What can I do?"

"Didn't you think before that I was your brother? Are you thinking about it now because you're afraid?"

"I'm not afraid."

"Oh, no? Then show me."

Rocco punches Simone right in the face and turns to leave. A train whistles as Simone chases him.

Pursued by Simone, Rocco staggers up from the rough ground and leans against a building for support. Staggering, Simone catches up to him and punches him again. Rocco falls.

Getting up again, with his hand covering one eye, he stumbles to a water fountain, where he throws cool water on his face. Simone also gets some water, eyeing Rocco, who stands there, practically spent. It seems to be over. But Simone pulls back his fist and hits him yet again.

Now in long shot, we barely see the brothers in the dark street, as they struggle. A series of lit buildings recedes into the distance behind them. Simone is relentless; Rocco doesn't seem to be able to get away from him. We hear another train whistle and the sound of an approaching car.

The car stops and Simone's friends climb out to get him. They force him into the car, passing right by Rocco, who has collapsed on the ground. The doors slam and the car takes off, leaving Rocco on the sidewalk, his head dangling into the gutter beside debris.

Vincenzo and Ginetta's apartment in the middle of the night. The doorbell rings and the baby starts crying. Ginetta wakes Vincenzo. "Vincè, they rang the bell! Go and see!"

It's a small, cluttered room. Vincenzo walks by rows of clothes hanging to dry and opens the door to see Rocco, who's a bloody mess.

"Rocco! What happened, Rocco?!"

Rocco falls into his arms. Vincenzo struggles to support him.

"Ginetta!"

"What is it?"

“Look!”

Ginetta is holding the baby. When she sees Rocco, she stifles a scream and gasps his name, “Rocco!”

Vincenzo lays Rocco down on the bed and asks him what happened.

“Nothing, nothing. Vince’, let me stay here with you.”

“Yes.”

“Let them know at home, so that Mama won’t worry,” he stammers, shivering. Then, all his strength gone, he passes out.

Rocco is with Nadia, but we see him in extreme close-up, which is unusual. Of her, we see only a little of her hair and the fur from her coat.

“How could I ever have known that Simone loved you so much? I knew that something had happened that changed him. He was so good.” As he talks, Nadia quietly weeps. “But I couldn’t know that the reason was actually you.”

“It’s not true, Rocco, it’s not true.”

“Only a man reduced to desperation does what he did the other night.”

Suddenly she lifts her head and we see her face. Rocco wears a bandage at the side of his eye, a remnant of the recent fight. “Only a vile, cruel man like him. I love you, Rocco. Don’t you believe me? Don’t you see that then everything is useless? I don’t believe in anything anymore! I beg you. If you go on like this, I’ll jump. I’ll kill myself. Do you understand?!”

She runs away and we see that they’re up high, in a heavenly open-air corridor. They’re atop the Milan Cathedral, on a walkway lined by sculptured pinnacles. In the distance, the sun is trying to break through the clouds.

As Rocco calls out to her to stop, Nadia runs towards an ornate arch at the far end. He hurries in pursuit.

She finally stops at an opening and starts to clamber through, but Rocco grabs her. “Let me go!” she cries out, breathlessly, then she turns and looks at him.

Mournful violin music plays, reminiscent of the film’s first scene.

Nadia explains, “You extended a hand to me. You helped me understand that the life I led was horrible. I learned to love you. And now, because of the brutality of a louse who wanted to humiliate me in front of you to bring us to his level, suddenly nothing is true anymore? What yesterday was beautiful and right becomes something to be guilty about today?”

“We’re both guilty. And me more than you. You must return to Simone.”

“What are you saying?” she cries, putting her hand on his chest, searching his face, trying to understand.

“Simone needs you.”

“Yes, Simone needs me. Yes, that I know. So what? But I also count for something, don’t I, Rocco? And so tell me: what do you want to do?”

“Only you can help Simone.”

She pulls away, suddenly, and turns her head, “He’s crazy, crazy!”

He walks away and she follows him. He says, “We thought we could start a new life together. We didn’t consider the evil that we did to others.”

“If I wanted a sermon, I’d go to church.” She takes his arm.

She presses her face to his shoulder, then looks at him, declaring desperately, “I love you, Rocco, I love you. And you love me too. What will become of all this love? Why do you torment me like this?”

She looks at him and he turns to her. Bandaged and bruised, this handsome boy looks like a fallen angel. “We won’t see each other anymore, Nadia.”

A tear runs down his cheek as she replies, uncomprehending, “It’s not possible, Rocco.”

“But if that is what you want, I swear you will regret it and it will be too late. I hate you! I hate you! I hate you!” she repeats and then she runs away from him.

He turns and gazes after her as she goes off.

Then, in a high-angle long shot, we see poor Nadia, always full of spirit, even in the hard times, a young woman who tried to find happiness and to better her life, looking so small and insignificant on the elaborate roof of the cathedral, almost invisible against the tiles.

Simone is seated at a gambling table. Ivo leaning over his shoulder, smoking. Ivo says, “No luck tonight,” as the dealer declares, “The house wins.”

As the dealer tells the players to place their bets, Simone takes off his watch to use as collateral. He gets some chips in exchange for his watch and Ivo wishes him luck. Simone, a cigarette drooping from his lips, seems to be hanging out with the wrong people, after all. But, of course, he is no longer boxing.

From offscreen, we hear a woman’s laugh. The dealer says, “Be quiet, ladies and gentlemen, we’re playing in here.” The camera pans to the next room, where there are people relaxing in comfortable chairs, drinking, and chatting.

That laugh came from Nadia, who is telling some sad story.

Suddenly, Ivo is in this room now, like an evil presence. He tells her, “Poor Nadia. But you’ll see that this too will pass. Everything passes.”

“I can swear to that.” She giggles flirtatiously and takes a swig of her drink.

She leans back with her eyes closed and says, “I’m sick.”

But Nadia is not one to wallow in sorrow. Earlier, she told Simone about a man who had molested her as a little girl, and then – seeing that he didn’t care – she retracted her story. Now, she opens her eyes, sits up and smiles with manic energy. “Do you all know the truth? There’s someone worse off than me. There he is.” She points to Simone, who comes in from the other room. “He’s the one that we have hurt so much,” she says sarcastically, quoting Rocco.

Simone looks downcast. His tie is loosened and he carries his jacket in his hand. “The victim!” she calls him and giggles some more. Then she stands and walks towards him.

She goes to the curtain behind Simone, he turns to her and says, “Are you crazy?”

She looks serious now. “I’m crazy? I’m the crazy one? Eh, you know what your brother told me?” He turns away, frowning.

Smiling but bitter, she tells the people in the room, “Yes, Rocco, his brother. Do you know what he told me? He said that I should go back to Simone, to console him. Because he’s too unhappy, poor thing.” While she says this, she tousles his hair. “That he can’t live alone. He needs someone to help him.”

She suddenly grabs his sleeve and presses her face against his back. The bouncer comes in saying, “Now, what’s going on? I don’t want trouble here, okay? If she’s drunk, take her out of here.”

Nadia defends herself: "Oh, sir, politely, okay? I'm a lady and I like courtesy, a lot of courtesy. I leave when I feel like it. You can't kick me out."

She walks away from him, laughing. Ivo tells her to calm down.

But Simone has something else on his mind. With a predatory look that we recognize from his encounter with Luisa in the drycleaners, he says, "What did you say? That you want to come back to me? I'm ready if you feel like it."

"Me? With you, never again! I hate you," she hisses. "Yes, I hate you," she repeats, as Simone shakes his head lightly with a little smile. "I swear to you, never again!"

She throws her glass down on the floor. "Not even if I were dead. I warn you, if you come near me, do you know what I'll do? I'll spit in your face in front of everyone."

The bouncer says, "Stop making trouble, you two."

Simone brushes him off and puts on his jacket as he slowly walks toward Nadia. She warns him, "Don't come near me." But he self-assuredly continues and she spits in his face.

Visconti has placed two women in platinum blonde bouffants in the foreground. We have to watch the scene around them.

Simone takes Nadia by the arms and she protests, "What do you want?! What do you want?! Let me go." He goes close to her, holds her tightly and pinches her cheek flirtatiously.

Now the camera rests in their claustrophobic exchange, in extreme close-up. The more horrible this story becomes, the more the director forces us to come into the players' space.

"Let's go," he coos.

She comments bitterly: "Even with the permission of the little brother."

"Let's go."

"For an hour or forever?"

"For me, it can be forever if you want."

She seems to relent. "Why not?" she asks rhetorically. "You or someone else, it's really the same thing." After all, she has lost Rocco, the only man she ever really loved.

"Let's go! Come on!"

But she laughs at him, "No. I will not come with you because I never loved you."

He kisses her forcefully, and she pulls away, staring at him. And then he kisses her again, almost violently.

She accepts his kiss this time and the camera pulls away from them as the people in the room, who have been staring at them all this time, return to their business.

Rocco sits sweaty and exhausted in the corner of a boxing ring. The coach gives him water; Cerri whispers to him. The coach instructs, "Keep your guard up and hit his wounded eye, the right one. Don't do the good one, hit the wounded eye, got it?" This is not the kind of work that our angel, Rocco, wanted to do. He is lost.

The bell rings and Rocco is back into the ring. The boxers hit each other.

A long shot shows us the darkened boxing hall with a square of light suspended above the ring. The two men face each other, throwing a lot of punches.

Finally, Rocco goes for his opponent's eye and the man goes down. He shakes his head, trying to find the strength to rise up again. Rocco returns to his corner as the crowd calls his name.

The boxer fails to get up and it's Rocco's match. Cerri and the coach give him a pat on his back and put their arms around him. The announcer names him the victor, "representing Italy." Rocco walks along the sides of the ring, alternately bowing and extending his arms. Then he slips out of the ring through the ropes.

The private area of the hall is a hive of activity: the fighters, their friends, coaches and assistants are engaged animated conversation. But Rocco walks straight through and leaves the frame. The defeated boxer is helped to get to his changing room.

Rocco sits at the bottom of a staircase, head bent down. His brother Ciro is with him. He asks, "What's wrong, Rocco? Aren't you well?"

Sweating and sniffing, exhausted and downhearted, Rocco tries to explain, "Winning came easy to me, because I wasn't fighting *him* anymore. It was like I was fighting someone else, someone who aroused hatred in me, all this hatred that I built up inside myself without even knowing it. It's an ugly thing, Ciro. You can't imagine how ugly it is."

Ciro puts a hand on his brother's shoulder. "Is that really you talking that way? You're not capable of doing anything bad. Come on, Rocco, cheer up! You'll be a champ! A great champion!"
The screen fades to black.