

Rocco and his Brothers, Part VI

Luchino Visconti, Director (1960)

CIRO, Installment 1

It's a celebration: young people are dancing and singing in the street. Children are in carnival costume. A young woman says, "Ciro, wait a minute! My father's arrived." It's Franca, Ciro's girlfriend.

He takes her hands and pulls her towards a newspaper kiosk, saying, "Come."

"No!" she exclaims as children throw confetti on them.

"Come! I have to tell you something. Just one minute."

She's a pretty blonde girl. "What?" she asks, smiling at him. He is very close to her, with a carnival mask pulled on top of his head. They both have confetti on their shoulders.

He asks her, "Tell me, do you love me?"

"Yes." She nods, smiling.

"Give me a kiss."

She looks to her left and right, a little shocked. "But, Ciro, here?"

"Why not?" He shrugs and gives her a chaste little kiss. Then he puts his mask back on.

She laughs, pulls off his mask and leans in for a longer kiss. The modern girls of Milan!

They walk over to a man in a fedora, who is waiting by a small truck.

"Hi, Dad," Franca says, "We had so much fun!"

The men shake hands and Franca's father asks if Ciro will be going to their house the next evening.

"How stupid of me! Ciro, listen, Dad asks if you're coming over tomorrow evening because he wants to talk to you." She adds happily, "He wants to know if we have serious intentions."

"If you want, I'll tell him right now."

"No," her father replies. "Let it be, we'll talk about it tomorrow. Let's give him at least a chance to escape, okay?" he says good-naturedly. He offers his hand again to Ciro and ends the exchange with a light pat on the cheek.

Ciro walks away, a pom-pom streaming from his pocket. Franca calls "Ciro!" and runs to catch up to him.

"You're not going back to the dance?"

"No."

"Go straight home," she instructs him. "Dancing without me: never!"

They say goodbye with a kiss on the cheek.

We see Ciro on a deserted street, littered with debris. In a building in the background, we notice some broken windows. Ciro enters his apartment building.

He enters the apartment, whistling, carefree. But, when he looks up, he stops short: in the kitchen he sees Nadia, seated at the table, smoking. By her, Luca leans against a cabinet.

"Good evening," she says.

"Good evening."

Stirring something on the stove, she asks, confirming, "You're number four, eh? We've already met. Do you remember?"

Luca explains, "She's Simone's girlfriend. Simone is back, too, he's there."
From the other room comes Rosaria's anguished cry: "Ciro! Come here a minute!"
"Yes, Mama, I'm coming."

Ciro goes to his mother. He still has confetti in his hair.

On the bureau is a small shrine dedicated to San Rocco, who must be the patron saint of the Parondis' home village: there's a statuette and small bunches of flowers to keep the spirit of the saint alive. The burning votive candles suggest that Rosaria has been praying to San Rocco.

His mother greets him with a trembling voice. "Ciro, my son..." She rocks back and forth, moaning.
"Don't worry, Mama. Tomorrow we'll see what we can do."
"Tomorrow? Tomorrow will be the same thing!"

As she paces about the room, we see a vanity with a tall mirror, a sewing machine, clothes hanging from a small rack. She's posted two of her religious images on one wall. The room is clean and bright but lacks warmth.

Rosaria illustrates her points with expressive gestures, imploring, anguished: "Tell me: is it my fault if all this is happening? Is it my fault if I wanted to bring my big, strong and beautiful sons to the city to get rich and not be damned on that unrewarding land like their father who died a thousand times before closing his eyes forever?"

"You have done nothing to blame yourself for, Mama, nothing."

"Your father couldn't bring himself to leave the land. But during the twenty-five years we spent together, I did not think of anything else but getting out of there, leaving, leaving, leaving."

"I wanted it for Vincenzo, Simone, Rocco and for you. For all of you. Nothing was beautiful there. The whole world seemed small. Here, at a certain point, I felt as if I could touch the sky. People on the street called me *signora*," she says, pressing her hand to her chest, "Imagine! *Signora*. Me! *Signora* in a big city like this one. Thanks to my sons."

"But now I don't know what's happening. Rocco has left home. And he seems to be the victim of a curse. And Simone is with a whore!" She plunges her face into her hands.

In the kitchen, Nadia has made herself at home. She's prepared some kind of concoction for Simone's hangover. She invites Luca to taste it, but he refuses, disgusted.

In the bedroom, Rosaria sobs. Cirò puts his arms around her. "Don't cry. Now I'll try to do something," he says. "Leave it to me, Mama."

Brushing off the last confetti from his shoulders, he walks down the hall to Simone's room. He stands outside the door, composed, his posture perfect. Then, as Luca peeks out from the kitchen, he opens the door and announces, "I have to speak to my brother a moment."

After Cirò has entered and closed the door, Luca crouches down outside, his ear pressed against it.

In our first glimpse of Simone's room, the foreground is occupied by Nadia's stockings, brassiere, and blouse, hung from a cord to dry. Standing in the rear of the shot, Cirò says to Simone, still off-screen, "You're irresponsible. At least show a little respect for our mother."

The camera pans across to the bed, where Simone and Nadia sit, as shadowy figures. Simone is drinking his hangover concoction, while Nadia polishes her nails. Her long legs are loosely crossed.

Simone replies, "Do you think I want to listen to your preaching? This is my house too. I'll bring whoever I want here."

He leans over and runs his hand along Nadia's leg, saying, "I already owe the motel 60,000 lira. Do you want to pay it?" Nadia blows on her nails and waves them nonchalantly in the air to dry them. "And, then: there's

room here. Rocco sleeps at Vincenzo's. So I thought that there was an extra bed. You don't like it? Leave me in peace, eh?"

Ciro approaches his brother, in a shot whose left edge is defined by a dangling stocking. He says, "We'll discuss it tomorrow."

"No, we'll talk about it when I feel like it and when it pleases me. Got it?"

Nadia has been listening to classical music all this time, holding her transistor radio up to her ear. Now, she chimes in, "I'm not responsible for this situation." She's dressed as she was the first time we met her: immodestly, in a sparkly low cut dress. "Of all of us, the one getting the worst deal is me," she continues, standing up and checking a stocking to see if it's dry. "Just so it's clear, eh?"

Ciro stands stiffly in his suit. Simone seems a hunched and crumpled figure. Hanging from the walls, we see Nadia's clothes. Her purse glistens. Messy bunches of Nadia's things are all over the room.

Ciro and Rocco are in the park. In the background, men work out among bare trees.

Ciro says, "Think about our mother who every morning even has to make that woman's bed."

"I know, I know," replies Rocco, who is leaning against a railing, with a towel wrapped around his neck. "I'm more ashamed about it than you."

Ciro's patience with Simone has run out: "A seed gone bad must be discarded. Just like when Mama has us clean the lentils." He shakes his finger at Rocco. "And think also about the danger it poses to Luca!"

Against all odds, Rocco cannot lose faith or hope. He defends his brother: "Simone hasn't changed. He's just demoralized. His pride has been wounded. Let me try again. I know what I can do."

As somber music begins to play, he continues, "Cerri's very interested in me. He knows that I could leave him from one day to the next. I'll tell him that I'll only fight for him if Simone fights too."

Rocco says, "Think about if we had never left home. But it seems that this was our destiny... yours, mine and Simone's."

"But do you think about the life that we would have had if we had remained there?"

"But we'd all still be together."

Suddenly, his trainer yells: "Rocco! Let's get to work!"

"Yes, I'm coming."

"Move it! Move it!" the coach yells to other boxers, out in the park for their training.

As the brothers are parting, we see the back of Rocco's jacket, inscribed with the name of his team: Aurora.

"Rocco," says Ciro. "I'll never understand you."

It's night. Light from the lobby of a theater floods the street. A sequence of neon lights decorates the marquee. We hear melancholy music.

Simone is with Luca across the street. "See that gentleman in the car? Tell him I'm waiting for him in that bar. Run!"

Luca hurries off to deliver the message.

Simone steps into the bar and orders a cognac. Before long, Duilio, the manager, walks in looking serious, dressed to the nines as always. He's framed by the reflection of neon lights. In fact, the set is pure glass here, the enormous windows of the bar, the door. We can see through everything and reflections are everywhere. Outside, Luca, in winter coat and gloves, is peering in.

Simone is sitting at the bar. As Duilio walks up to him, he throws back his drink.

“So, not fighting tonight?” inquires Duilio. “Jitters, eh?”

“I feel sick,” he says to the manager, as he tells the barman, “Another.”

“Then there’s no need to be here.” He gives Simone a pat on the arm, “Come on! Come on! Snap out of it!”

“We could go to drink something together in a quiet place.” Simone tosses back his next shot. “Want to?”

Duilio invites him.

“Okay.”

Luca pokes his head into the bar. “Simone, let’s go. Simone, it’s late.”

Annoyed, the older brother gets off his seat, gesturing. “Go away! Leave me alone! Go!”

Disappointed, Luca turns and walks away. We watch him through the glass door.

Duilio smiles at Simone: little brothers! But Simone doesn’t smile back.

Simone asks for a cigarette. He might be fighting, but he’s smoking again. He takes several cigarettes. So he is really down and out. “These are for later, sorry.”

As Simone drags on his cigarette, Duilio asks, “Feel better?” He seems genuinely concerned.

“I will when I’m far from here.”

“Oh, yes, it’s the jitters, I know. It happens when you realize that punches ruin your beautiful profile,” he says, smiling. “Now, where do we go?”

“You said your place, no?”

“I was always sure that one day you would ask me that.”

Duilio turns to the barman. “How much?”

“200 lira, sir.”

Although Simone looks a bit ragged, Duilio gives him an admiring look as they head out together.

As the men arrive at Duilio’s house, we see them only as shadowy silhouettes through opaque glass walls.

“Here it is, this is my home. Like it? Come in, come in. Don’t be afraid.”

Subdued music accompanies the men. In the living room, Duilio turns on a table lamp. Even so, the room is dark as he goes to get two glasses from a cabinet.

He brings Simone a glass and fills his glass too. For the second time that night, he gives Simone a pat, this time right on his face.

He walks to the other side of the room, puts his drink down and stands hands on hips. There, from the darkness, he orders Simone, “Sit.” Duilio looks at ease and confident in his sharp clothes. He eases himself out of his jacket and flexes his chest. We notice for the first time that he’s well-built.

Simone looks a wreck. He takes a swallow of his drink and wipes his mouth with his hand. He sits heavily into the chair, gazing desperately at the wealthier man.

The camera slowly zooms in on Simone. “I need money, a lot.”

“I understood that, you know,” replies Duilio, hands on hips, light shining on his torso.

He takes a drink, sighs, walks to the television, and turns it on. “After all, it’s not the first time, right?” He walks towards Simone, spreads his arms wide and says sarcastically, “Ah, the champion! I predicted it. I knew you’d end up like this.” In the background, fragments of Italian Renaissance masterpieces appear on the TV. “The day that I saw you at the gym for the first time: an Apollo, a real Apollo.”

He gives Simone a pat on the chest that turns into an arm squeeze and finally he touches his face. Simone recoils, jumps up out of his chair and moves away.

Simone is off-screen.

“But it’s closed for you. As a boxer you’re finished. And as a man, only someone like me can be interested in the wreck that you have become.”

“I need money.”

“To give to whores?” He laughs heartily. “Oh, it’s a good idea, yes. It’s a nice idea to save face.”

“Can I drink?”

“You can drain the whole thing if you want. Anyway you don’t have to box anymore.”

Simone holds the glass, but he guzzles straight from the bottle.

Duilio continues, “Do you want me to tell you what I think? You disgust me.” Behind him, on the television, we see a gentle image of a mother and child in repose.

“Now you should stop it,” Simone advises him. “Now it’s enough. You shouldn’t say that to me. Understand?”

He approaches the boxing manager and grabs his shirt, yelling, “Enough!”

But Duilio pushes Simone away and he falls down. The fragments of Renaissance paintings continue to appear behind them surreally, images from a civilized world contained within the television screen, while the conflict between the two men explodes in the real world.

Through a chandelier we see Simone sock the older man hard making him fall against the wall. They punch each other, but Duilio, in better shape, overcomes the younger man. Simone has fallen into the lamp and the room is totally dark now, except for the light from the television.

Simone, deep in thought in extreme close-up, wipes his sweaty face with his hand. He’s desperate enough to do just about anything for money. He closes his eyes. Duilio, also in extreme close-up, gazes back at him intently, with a mixture of sorrow and longing.

He goes to the television and turns it off. The screen goes dark.

Ciro is washing his face and hair in the kitchen sink. The space is well-lit and well-organized, so unlike the Parondi’s first kitchen in Milan. Rosaria calls out, “Ciro! Come here a minute! Hurry up!”

“Yes, I’m coming.” He grabs a towel and dries himself off as he goes to her asking, “What is it, Mama?”

On the balcony outside, some little boys are passing by who peer into the apartment. “Get a move on!” his mother calls out from off-screen. One of the boys steps into the Parondis’ doorway, beside the family portrait that watches over their home.

Ciro finds his mother at the open front door in a bathrobe, holding a broom. “What’s happened?”

“They’re looking for Simone.”

“What’s it about?”

“It’s the police. It seems they have an arrest warrant. Maybe you know something.”

“Go to your room. I’ll see what it’s about.”

She walks down the hall, looks back and he tells her not to worry. Behind her, the bathroom is bathed in sunlight.

Ciro steps out into the doorway, where two plainclothes police officers are waiting, wearing trench coats and fedoras of the same color. "Good morning," he says. "I think my mother told you that my brother Simone didn't come home last night."

"Yes."

"He hardly ever sleeps here. Would you like to see for yourselves?" he offers, opening the door and extending his arm.

"No, that won't be necessary."

"May I know why you're looking for him?"

"We have orders to bring him to the police station. There is a complaint against Simone Parondi."

"If I go to the police station with you, could I find out more?"

"Certainly, if you want, come."

"Come in. I'll get dressed and come with you."

One of the men goes in, instructing the other to wait outside.

As Ciro dries his hair and quickly dresses, the officer walks around the room, observing. He sees a photo of a boxer on the wall and asks Luca, who has just appeared, "Is this Simone?"

"Yes, yes," answers Luca politely. "It's him, my brother when he used to box."

"Good boy," says the officer, tousling Luca's hair.

These two brothers don't seem to feel any hostility to the police.

"If you want, we can go. I'm ready," Ciro tells the officer. He yells to his mother, "I'm going to the police station. I'll be right back."

When Rosaria bursts into the room, Nadia is lying in bed reading a newspaper, a cigarette between her lips, a hairbrush in her hand. Magazines are strewn across the bed. Nylon stockings are draped over a table lamp, drying. Clothes overflow from an open suitcase.

And there's a religious painting hanging over the bed. But Visconti has chosen to show us only the bottom half: the hands joined together bear an uncanny resemblance to the hands clasped over the horrified face in *The Scream* by the Norwegian painter Edvard Munch.

Nadia looks up as Rosaria announces, "The cops have come looking for him. What has he done? You know, eh?"

Nadia, unconcerned, looks at her newspaper as she replies, "Well, what he's done this time I don't know." She looks up and finishes, "But it's easy to imagine, no? He's a criminal, and so?" She shrugs. "Even you know that he's a criminal."

Rosaria is furious. "You?! You say that? How can you say it? You wretch! With you here, I'm ashamed to show my face at the window."

But Rosaria has met her match. Nadia sits up suddenly, throws down the newspaper, and retorts, "You allowed me to stay only to keep Simone with you. I can't stay here anymore!"

Rosaria, momentarily speechless, paces furiously to the wall and back. Then, with a caustic laugh, she retorts, "But you set yourself up here. You got a good deal!" She strides to Nadia's suitcase, from which she picks up all the clothes and tosses them on the bed, yelling, "Take your rags and get out of here!"

"No, no!" Nadia yells back. "Your son promised he'd keep me. This is not the way to keep a woman like me!" In her slip, she stands face to face with Rosaria. "He doesn't know how to do anything. He doesn't know how to work, or even steal. Yes, ma'am, you understood very well: steal!"

Furious, wide-eyed, Rosaria clenches her fists to her face and hisses, "Whore! You ruined him. He was the most envied of my sons." She storms to the door, then turns back to say, "But I'm sure that when he's free of you, he'll be the best of them all again. May you be damned!"

Behind Rosaria, we see that the neighbors on the balcony opposite have stopped to watch this tirade. Nearby, a clean sheet, blindingly white, hangs off the rail, drying in the sun.

With a gesture, Rosaria curses Nadia. “No! Don’t do that!” Nadia screams, covering her eyes. She approaches Rosaria, grabs her hands and assures her, “You can rest easy, I will go!”

She turns to pack her suitcase, but Rosaria goes after her and takes hold of her. “No, he must tell you when to leave.” Of course, according to her way of seeing things, it is up to the man to decide.

“No,” says Nadia, pushing Rosaria down on to the bed. “Why should I stay? Tell me. Simone has hit rock bottom. This is what I wanted, and now I leave happy. Give Rocco the news so he’ll understand who he sacrificed me to. I don’t want to talk to him. I want to go away from here and never see any of you again.”

She hunches over on the bed, sobbing, “Get away, away, away!”

As Nadia sobs in anguish, Rosaria stands, claps her hands to her face, then shakes them in the air, and finally clasps them together as if in prayer, as she walks out of the room onto the balcony.

A quick cut takes us to Duilio in his apartment. In a silky striped robe, he’s standing in front of a print of Van Gogh’s *Portrait of Armand Roulin* (1888), which looks uncannily like Rocco. This picture is very visible throughout this scene.*

**Armand was the teenaged son of Joseph Arlen, the warehouse keeper at the Arles post office. The Arlen family was very close to Vincent and he painted many portraits of family members.*

Duilio is saying to someone off-screen, “He thought I was afraid, so I told him: ‘If you touch that money, I’ll report you.’ He started laughing. He opened the desk drawer right before my eyes. There you have it.”

As he talks, Duilio paces around his room. He stops by a mirror with a gilt frame, into which photos of a young boxer have been tucked. It’s Duilio Loi, a European and Italian champion. Next to the mirror hangs a set of boxing gloves.

We see that Duilio is talking to the Parondi brothers. Ciro stands at the window. Vincenzo sits on the sofa, with his head bowed. The brothers are well dressed, in shirts, ties and wool overcoats. It could be a meeting of businessmen.

Rocco has a solution: “But you can say that you found the money, that there was a mistake. I’m ready to sign a promissory note to you. And I know that Cerri will vouch for me.”

“Ah,” replies Duilio, with a sneer. “Do you guys think I went to the police station for a lousy 60,000 or 70,000 lira?”

He opens the cabinet and takes out a bottle. “For almost a year now, your brother has been taking advantage of my weakness.” Apparently quite some time has passed since that first night in his apartment. He gets a glass, fills it, and drains it in one swallow.

Rocco crosses the room, face to face with Duilio. “Tell me what my brother owes you, and that’s it!”

“It’s not just a question of money. I stuck out my neck for him – and more than once. A while ago, I had to call in favors to get him out of a situation involving smuggling.”

Rocco replies angrily, raising his voice, “I asked you how much my brother owes you!”

Duilio has another drink and replies, “400,000 lira.”

Rocco looks shocked. He leans against the glass cabinet, the portrait of Armand gazing out over his shoulder.

After a long moment of silence, he responds, “Okay, I told you: I’ll sign the promissory note and I’ll pay within three months.”

Ciro crosses the room to Rocco, who looks desperate. “Are you crazy?” he asks. “You’ll ruin us.” Vincenzo adds, “I can’t do anything. Ginetta is expecting another child and then we’re still paying for the furniture.”

Rocco clarifies to his brothers: “This is something that concerns only me.”

Ciro takes his arm and entreats him, “You can’t do it. Where will you get so much money?”

Rocco turns to face the mirror, the reflection of Duilio on his left and the photos of the boxer Duilio Loi* on his right. “Are you very sure that Cerri will vouch for you?” asks Duilio.

Rocco turns. “Ask him.”

**Like Rocco, Duilio Loi was a light-footed, strategic boxer with terrific ring skills. He had an engaging personality and was loved by the people of Milan. His career began in the late 40s and was just coming to an end when this film was made.*

The camera zooms in for a brief close-up on Rocco’s face, his eyes in shadow, a line of sweat along his upper lip.

Then he turns to Duilio, who leaves the room to make his call, pausing briefly at the door to look at the brothers. We see his silhouette through the opaque glass wall.

Ciro says, “Rocco, this is craziness. Even if Cerri is disposed to make the guarantee for you, how will you manage to pay him back?”

With a sigh, Rocco sinks onto the arm of an easy chair, “He promised me a lot of money if I sign with him for ten years. He’ll bring me to Brussels, London... and anyway, what do you guys care?”

A low source of light projects the brothers’ shadows on the wall.

Vincenzo points out, “But have you always said that you didn’t want to box, or not? Now for that reckless guy, you want to change your life forever?”

“And so, do you guys know another way not to leave Simone to his fate?”

Duilio holds out the phone for Rocco to have him talk to Cerri. Gloomy music starts to play. Vincenzo urges Rocco to think it over.

Rocco takes the phone as Duilio stands behind him listening. “Yes, of course, I understand perfectly. Yes, whatever you guys say. I agree.” Duilio closes the door. Rocco continues on the phone, “I agree!”

Sweating, he loosens his tie as he talks with Cerri. “If I’m asking you for this guarantee, it means that I accept everything.” He seems to be in agony. “Yes.” He rubs his hand over his face. “Agreed. All right, tomorrow.”

Ciro is in a room with dirty wallpaper and old furniture. He’s counting out lira: “One, two, three, four, five. These are for you,” he says to Simone, whose undershirt is torn and soiled. “But get out of Milan for a while.” He holds out the bills and Simone snatches them. Luca sits, observing silently. “You have no job to lose anyway. Stay out of our house and don’t come back again!”

Simone chuckles. “Did the court of brothers decide that? I gladly won’t come back.”

“So much the better.”

Leaning on the wall, Simone proposes, “Let’s make a pact. Since you have so much money for that sack of shit Duilio, maybe you can give some more to your brother, no? 200,000 and I’ll leave for good.”

Ciro agrees to get him another 100,000 after Rocco’s next fight. So Simone will not leave town until then.

“We’re going. Come on, Luca.”

Ciro takes Luca by the hand. Simone grabs Luca and pulls him to his chest. Then, standing up, he grabs

Ciro roughly, as Luca pulls on his arm to make him stop.

“I don’t have leprosy. You have to stop with this tone,

Ciro. But who do you think you are? A skilled worker at Alfa Romeo?” he says contemptuously. “Some career! Get out of here.”

“You’re pitiful.”

They leave Simone alone in his grim, disheveled room, which, like the Parondis’ first apartment, is lit by bare bulbs. Simone collapses onto his messy bed and the screen fades to black.