

Rocco and his Brothers, Part VII

Luchino Visconti, Director (1960)

Ciro, Installment 2

As the scene begins, the lights go on inside a giant arena. With a simple image, Visconti has let us know that Rocco has made it big.

Outside, a crowd has gathered. As a car pulls up, the light bulbs of cameras flash and the crowd moves in a swarm, calling, "Rocco! Rocco!"

Backstage, the camera captures a crowded hallway between the dressing rooms, where fighters with towels around their necks chat with trainers and friends.

Ciro walks through the hallway, announcing, "Here he is! He's coming!"

Luca follows him. A black boxer goes up to Rocco and greets him in English, "Hi, Rocco!"

Rocco is dressed in a turtleneck, a cap, and a wool coat thrown over one shoulder.

"Did you sleep?" Cerri asks him.

"An hour."

"Good going." Cerri gives him an affectionate slap to the face.

And here's Vincenzo. He puts his arm around his brother's shoulder and asks, "How are you feeling?"

"A bit tense."

They enter Rocco's dressing room, equipped for an entourage of assistants and family members, with an array of coat racks and lockers along the sides. At the back, a table is covered with a white sheet. The men get down to business in a familiar rhythm. *Ciro* takes *Cerri's* coat; *Vincenzo* helps *Rocco* with his things.

"You'll have a massage, okay?" offers *Cerri* and tells the masseur, "Light, light."

"My left arm aches a little," complains *Rocco*.

"Eh, it's nothing."

Rocco takes his shirt off. Behind him, of course, posters for boxing matches are tacked to the wall.

We move to a bar, where a guy playing pool yells sarcastically, "Hey, *Simone*, where are our tickets for the fight?"

Someone else adds, jokingly, "You promised!"

In this room filled with young people smoking, chatting and laughing, *Simone* is a gloomy figure, out of shape and out of place.

"Do you have it in for me?" he asks. "I didn't promise you guys anything. I'm not even going to see the fight."

A bystander chimes in, "He's not going there but he's eating his heart out!" Everyone laughs, mocking him.

A has-been, a loser, *Simone* is an easy target. The teasing continues until a loud voice from off-screen says harshly, "Hey, guys, what's happening?"

It's *Ivo*, wearing his leopard print jacket, one of the few distinctive costumes in this film. He strides in, greeting people.

He offers *Simone* a cigarette and lights it for him.

Then he says, "Listen, guys, me and a few others, we saw it with our own eyes, this guy here, how he thrashed the champion."

Ivo goes over and sits on a pool table, saying, "And whoever was there has to remember it." At that moment, he seems more like a snake than a leopard. Around him, young men continue their games, apparently uninterested. A voice from off-screen responds, "I was there and I remember it."

Another adds, "Ancient history. I'd like to see the two Parondi brothers face off now!"
"And then you tell me who'd come out looking like garbage?"
"There can always be a rematch!"

Simone, unshaven, trembling like a junkie in withdrawal, says nothing.
A couple gets up to dance. They hold each other close, oblivious to the drama.

"But this time we'd have to move it over to the park by the seaplane base,* says Ivo, off-screen. "Know what they told me? Nadia's working with a woman who rents her a room and a car."
Simone has been slouching away but, as soon as he hears Nadia's name, he turns into the room to listen.
"Nadia drives clients to the seaplane base, in the area by the beverage stand."

** The seaplane base – "l'idroscalo" – is a lake constructed in 1930 for the landing of planes. No longer used for that purpose, the lake and the surrounding park is known today as Idroscalo Park.*

Simone seems suddenly animated. His face lights up. "Ivo, but are you sure?"
"Look how his ears perk up." Ivo comments, turning to the group. "If we want tonight, we could organize another beautiful evening like that one."

Simone laughs and turns toward the door.
"Is your brother still pining for the hooker who does it in cars? Or does he aim higher?"

But Simone isn't listening. He walks away, still laughing.
Ivo calls him, "But where are you going? Come here! Simone, what are you doing?" Simone has a mission now. He ignores Ivo and runs out of the bar.

We return to the place for Rocco's match. Vincenzo says, "Have you seen all the people? All the champions are here!"

Rocco is getting ready for a fight. He is wearing a robe with his name printed on the back, while assistants wrap his hands. One encourages him, "You can do it, Rocco!"
Rocco's opponent, also in a robe, is getting ready on the far side of the room. He stares at Rocco. The two boxers and their assistants seem almost to be mirror images.

A slow pan brings Cerri into the frame. He looks at the other boxer, then at Rocco. He looks worried.

An extreme close-up on the other guy. A close-up on Rocco and the camera pulls away as he looks down, lost in his own thoughts. There's a steady hum of conversation.

Rocco stands up and Cerri checks his hands. Cerri is dressed like a gangster: black shirt, jacket, tie, pork pie hat. "Give me a little mineral water," says Rocco, who's taken off his robe. "My mouth is dry."
"No, it bloats the stomach," replies Cerri.
"Then give me a little lemon."
He tips his head back and the assistant squeezes lemon juice into his mouth. In the moment, he seems naked and vulnerable, a child receiving the sacrament.

The assistant puts the silk robe back on him and gives him a towel. Glancing at his opponent, Rocco flexes his arms and hops a little, warming up, while another assistant rubs his back.

We see Simone at the seaplane base park, on a crumbling walkway. He walks, hands in his pockets, shivering a little, holding his coat closed against the cold. His footsteps are unsettling, in contrast with the gentle bucolic scene behind him.

Spotting something, he stops and then runs to get a better view: it's Nadia in a white coat walking with a customer, a car parked in the distance behind the bare trees.

Simone observes silently as Nadia walks with the man. The wintry trees cast strong diagonal shadows across the frame.

When she sees Simone, Nadia tells her companion to wait. Holding her coat closed, she approaches her ex-lover as he waits by the water.

"What do you want?" she asks.

He doesn't respond.

"Tell me," she insists, "What do you want?"

He stays silent.

She walks around him, holding up her purse, "Ah, you want money, maybe." She walks towards the water and then turns back, holding her purse open. "Look, I have none, look. It's empty. Not even one lira."

"No, I don't want money." He approaches her, the two silhouettes against the lake in the background.

"Stay away!"

"Nadia, don't say no. You can't say no. The two of us together again. Then it will be possible for me to start a new life, understand?"

"The two of us?" she asks ironically.

"Yes."

"Together, the two of us?" she repeats, disbelieving.

"Yes."

She laughs nervously and moves away from him. "It's not possible. Go away! Go away!" She gestures to him as if he were a small child or a dog.

"Nadia! Nadia!" he chases her and grabs her, but she slips away screaming and leaving him holding her coat. She's dressed all in black, a skirt and blouse.

But there is nowhere for her to run. The water stops her, she turns back and screams, terrified.

Dropping the coat on the ground, he goes up to her and grabs her shoulders. Struggling against him, she calls out desperately, "Help!" But her customer is running away.

The two grappling bodies look small in the long shot against the wide expanse of water.

"Help!" she screams.

"Nadia!" he begs. It seems he just wants to hold her, but she's afraid and runs away. In fact, he's ripped her blouse off and she's just wearing her slip now. In the water, his reflection chases hers, doubling the action and adding to the terror of the scene.

"Sir, don't leave me here!" she yells to her customer, but he is long gone. Simone runs to her, trying to put her coat on her shoulders to warm her. "Let me go!" she screams.

Simone, finally trying to show some concern for her, manages to get the coat over her shoulders. But she's not thinking. She's following her instinct to get away from him.

Finally he catches up to her, envelops her in the white coat, his arms imprisoning her.

"Cover yourself. Don't shout. Anyway, no one can hear you. Why are you shivering? Are you afraid? Look how I'm shivering too."

They stumble along as he tries to reassure her.

But she breaks away. "I'm not afraid! Leave me alone!"

He catches her in his arms again. "My love, no! Nadia, no!" He blocks her with his legs and he puts an arm around her neck.

In the arena, the fight has begun. The referee, dressed all in white, watches as the fighters size each other up. A long shot shows a hard punch land on Rocco, who falls back against the ropes. Ginetta and Franca jump up, concerned.

Rocco is dazed; he shakes his head.

Cerri asks the coach, "Why isn't he covering himself?"

The coach replies, "Here we go again. He's split his eyebrow."

Determined, Rocco heads back into the ring. The fighters trade blows.

"Cover yourself!" Cerri yells. "Cover yourself!"

"Cover yourself," says Simone to Nadia, as a match cut takes us back to the lake. "Cover yourself because it's cold."

Pushing her back against a tree, he kisses her face and neck and snuggles his face into her chest. It reminds us of the time in her bedroom when she was telling him to leave and he kept kissing and caressing her. Except that everything is different now. That was a time of hope.

Nadia looks first desperate and then empty. She gives up; she knows she cannot get away.

"I've hurt you," he goes on, sobbing. "My love." She stares silently, blankly, over his shoulder.

Finally she speaks, harshly, not looking at him. "You have no idea how I despise you. You're not a man, you're an animal. Everything you touch becomes filthy... repellent... vulgar. I don't ever want to see you again, never again, understand? I want nothing more to do with you." He takes a step back and looks at her as she speaks. "It's you who destroyed the only good thing in my life. You know that, you criminal? Now I can finally spit in your face all the disgust I feel for you. And now you can do what you want. None of it matters to me."

The music, slow and sad until now, becomes dark and ominous.

She walks away from him. He stands against the tree, gazing at her with a mixture of hurt and outrage.

His hand reaches slowly into his pocket, takes out a switchblade and opens it.

Nadia walks away along the shore in a long shot. She drags her white coat behind her. Simone is standing by the tree, the blade projecting from his silhouette.

He sets out to follow her. She turns around and leans against the pole of one of the lights along the lake; it's dusk.

He approaches her slowly, the blade glinting against his dark form. Behind him, the bright water reflects the trees. Nadia sees the knife and drops her coat. She waits for him, with her shoulders exposed to the cold, accepting her fate.

We cannot see her; Simone's body covers her. We see only her arms as she raises them and extends them at her sides, like Christ crucified.

She puts her hands on his head. The gesture recalls the praying hands we saw above her bed in the Parondis' apartment, the hands in Munch's *The Scream*.

And we return to the ring: we see the fighters in extreme close-up, throwing punches. The camera pulls back just in time to show Rocco land a solid punch on his opponent's face. The man goes down.

The crowd goes wild and Rocco dances to the other side of the ring. The referee counts over the fallen man, motioning Rocco to stay away.

And then suddenly we are back with Nadia. She leans against the pole, hands clenched around Simone's neck, screaming in pain as Simone stabs her. He pulls the knife out and she still clings to him, falling as he plunges the knife back into her.

He tosses her down to the ground. She protests, "I don't want to die!" as she collapses on the grass at the edge of the water. Simone stands above her with arm outstretched, holding the knife.

She drags herself forward, in a futile effort at escape. Simone sits over her and stabs her again and again.

But she refuses to die. She drags herself along the grass to the water, down the embankment. At last Simone embraces Nadia, as he stabs her with all his might. This final stab to her back finally kills her: she raises herself up and then falls for good.

Simone sits next to her, his hands covered with her blood. He drops the knife and tries desperately to clean his hand on his wool coat. He rinses it in the lake and then wipes it off on his coat again.

Coming back to reality now, he looks around to see if there are any witnesses. Then he climbs up the embankment, panting.

He starts to run away but turns to look back at Nadia. Then he takes off, as fast as he can.

The crowd jumps to its feet, cheering, as the announcer names the winner: "Rocco Parondi!" Rocco's small entourage – Cerri, the coach, and Vincenzo – join him in the ring, while their counterparts assist his opponent.

As the cheers resound through the vast hall, Rocco raises his arms in victory.