

Rocco and his Brothers, Parte VIII

Luchino Visconti, Director (1960)

LUCA

Gathered around a table that's laden with food, the Parondi family is celebrating Rocco's victory. He still has a small white bandage over one eyebrow; it's right after the fight.

Luca tells Rocco, "I was scared when he gave you that left! Did you feel it?"

"It seemed like fighting with a shadow! For a while, I couldn't even see him!"

Everyone laughs.

"You should have come too, Mama. It wouldn't have upset you at all."

The camera pulls back and we see that just about everyone is there, even Ginetta, with her new baby: she and Rosaria must have made their peace. But Simone is missing.

One of the boys asks Rosaria, "Are you happy?"

"I'm very happy," she replies.

Ciro stands and raises his glass, toasting Rocco: "He'll become the champion of Italy!"

Rosaria says, "Hurray for Rocco!" She adds, "The day I will be happy is when all my five boys will sit at this table, all united like the five fingers of my hand."

No one responds. Rosaria is probably the person least aware of Simone's actions, along with Luca. She stands and toasts, "Everyone drink to the health of my beautiful Rocco."

She leans over to kiss him and then tells Ciro to get the sparkling wine. "Tonight we all have to be happy. And you, Vincenzo, have to make a nice toast for us."

Everyone claps.

With a shift in framing, we see a neighbor looking in on the Parondis from the balcony. And, of course, the family portrait is there too, watching over them.

Going out onto the balcony, Rosaria calls the neighbors to join them.

In fact, as the camera reveals, Rosaria is inviting everyone on the common balcony to join the celebration. Neighbors gather outside the family's door, toasting Rocco. He pours sparkling wine for them and, before returning to the apartment, tosses the bottle up to the bystanders on a higher balcony saying "to your health!"

As neighbors pour in to the house, Ginetta opens the window to share the festivities with the group standing there.

Rocco tells everyone to be quiet because Vincenzo is going to make a toast.

Vincenzo stands and shyly says in dialect, "Before I lose this rhyme, let me drink a glass of wine." Everyone applauds.

Rosaria says, "*Bravo*, Vincenzo, you did really well!"

Now Ciro begins a toast, "This wine, so fine and wonderful ..." but can't finish. He shrugs and simply says, "To the health of everyone here!"

"Shame on you, Ciro," laughs his mother. "You forgot our old adage!"

Vincenzo says, "He forgot his language! He's become more of a city person than Ginetta!"

Urged by Vincenzo, Rocco reluctantly agrees to propose a toast: "All right, everybody outside. Let's go!" Rocco finally feels he is a part of the neighborhood: Milan is his place now.

Out on the balcony, he says to all the neighbors, "Thank you, thank you so much."

Then he makes his toast in the family's southern dialect: "This wine that I drink, I drink to your health."

Amid cheers, the camera pans around the common balcony, revealing figures leaning over the railings as light shines from out of the apartments behind them. Rocco concludes the rhyme, "I hope all of you, being happy, drink to our good health."

Rosaria stands, "Shh! Rocco, shut up a moment!" Rocco turns to her and listens. She says, "It seemed to me that someone rang the doorbell."

"No, Mama, no one rang the bell," replies Ciro.

“Go take a look. I’m sure. Go, go, go.”

Her face and her hand motions reveal the urgency.

Ciro goes to the front door and opens it. Ginetta says, “No, Mama, no one is there.”

“No one?”

“No.”

As the boys laugh, jubilant, a little tipsy, Rosaria sinks slowly into her chair, as if weighed down by sorrow. Her face is drawn. On the wall behind her, we see photos of Simone.

Standing in front of the family portrait, Rocco puts down his glass and says, pensively, “A day will come – but, of course, it is still far away – that I’ll go back to our hometown. And if it’s not possible for me, maybe another one of us will be able to return to our land.”

Rosaria wipes away a tear. Ginetta, cradling the baby, puts a hand on the back of her husband’s neck to comfort him.

“Maybe you, Luca,” Rocco says.

“It’s with you that I’d like to go back there,” replies the boy whose name reminds everyone of the place they come from, Lucania.

“Remember, Luca, that our town is the town of olive trees, of “moon sickness”.* The town of rainbows.”

* *For a poetic look at this phenomenon, see the “Mal di luna” (moon sickness) segment in the film “Kaos” (1984) by the Taviani Brothers. It’s based on Luigi Pirandello’s 1913 short story about a young Sicilian bride who discovers that her new husband, at the full moon, turns into a werewolf.*

“Do you remember, Vincè? Remember that a master builder, when he starts to build a house, he throws a stone at the shadow of the first person that passes by?”

“Why?” asks Luca.

“Because you have to make a sacrifice, to make the house solid.”

At Rocco's words, a silence falls on the room, filled with longing for home. The mood is broken by the doorbell. Rosaria rises slowly. "There it is, this time someone really is ringing the bell."

Ciro starts to get up but Rosaria stops him. "No, no, wait. I want to go."

She walks into the hallway, her hand covering her mouth. Some baskets hang on the wall behind her, like in her home village.

Rosaria opens the door to see Simone, head hung down, somber. It's not the happy greeting she might have expected.

She walks to him slowly, puts her hand on his chest. He looks up, but not at her; he looks into the distance like a blind man. In fact, although she waves her hand gently in front of his face, he doesn't seem to be aware of it.

Then, turning her head, she looks directly into the camera and says quietly, "He's come. I was sure. My heart told me he would."

Turning back to her son, she adds, "I'm so happy. Come inside. All your brothers are here." He hesitates. "Come," she encourages him.

"Have you eaten anything?" Rosaria asks him, entering the house as the family stands mute. "No? I'll heat something up. Tell me what you want."

The family stands in a silent tableau of grief. Simone comes to a halt in the doorway. Everyone looks at him.

Ciro finally breaks the silence. "Why have you come?"

"Ciro, no!" yells Rocco, walking quickly to Simone.

Rosaria tells the neighbors, "Leave, I'm sorry. Leave." But of course, with their common balcony and many windows, there's always the feeling that the neighbors are aware of what's going on.

Rocco goes to Simone, who is in shadow. "What is it, Simone?"

Rosaria yells across the room, “What’s happening, my son? I was so happy.”

“Make her shut up,” Simone tells Rocco, then yells, “Tell her!” In response, Rosaria claps her hands over her face in grief, sobbing.

Simone turns away, into the hallway. Rocco follows him, saying “I have to talk to you.”

“I have to talk to you, too” says Simone, “but I can do it in front of everyone!”

Rocco stops him, putting his hand over his mouth. “No. To me, only to me.” He puts his arms around Simone, walking him to the bedroom and murmuring again, “To me, only to me.”

Simone leans on the dresser with its shrine to San Rocco and the burning candles.

Rocco begs Simone, “Talk! For God’s sake, talk!”

“I’m not here to congratulate you. I don’t give a damn about it!” Turning suddenly toward Rocco, he says desperately, his voice wavering, “I need money. All the money you guys have, now!”

From off-screen, we hear *Ciro’s* angry voice: “If I’m not wrong, we had an agreement.”

Rocco pushes him out the door and slams it shut.

Simone sits on the bed crying, wrapped in his wool coat. Rocco goes to him and caresses his face with one hand, the other on his shoulder. “Simone, you have to tell me what you want. Me, understand? Only me.”

Suddenly Rocco notices something: there’s blood on his hand from Simone’s coat. “But are you wounded? But what is this?”

“It’s blood.”

“Blood?”

Simone collapses face down onto the bed, weeping, and explains, his voice loud and ragged, “She clung to me. I couldn’t shake her off, Rocco! She didn’t want to die!”

“No!” screams Rocco, turning his brother over on the bed to face him. “Simò...”

“I killed her.”

“No!” screams Rocco, falling onto the bed next to Simone and sobbing desperately.

“But there’s no reason to worry about me. No one saw me,” Simone assures him, staring blankly ahead. “It’s over.”

“No, no, no!” screams Rocco, sobbing, his back heaving.

“Are you happy, champion? Is this what you wanted?”

“It’s my fault, I know! It’s my fault!” screams Rocco.

Rosaria closes the door behind the neighbors. She looks at her hand – the hand she had placed on Simone’s chest – and screams, “This is blood... blood!”

She tries to go to Simone and Rocco, but her other sons hold her back, telling her, “Stay here!”

But she bursts into the room with Ciro and Vincenzo close behind. They find the two older brothers lying together on the bed sobbing.

“My Simone! My son!” she cries and collapses onto the bed.

“Rocco,” says Simone between sobs. “I left her there, by the water. It’s over Rocco, it’s over.”

Rocco seems to be comforting him, gently passing a hand over his face. Finally Rocco stands and embraces his weeping mother.

She cries out, “Jealousy! He did it out of jealousy! He lost his mind!”

Ciro orders his brother, “You have to turn yourself in immediately.”

But this goes against Rosaria’s code. “You’re a disgrace! He’s your brother!”

“Unfortunately I know!”

Despite all that has happened, despite all he has seen of his brother and the world, Rocco stays true to his value system: family first. He goes to Ciro and begs him, “Listen Ciro, I don’t believe in the justice of men. It’s not our job to judge him, we just have to help him! We have to help him!”

He turns to his mother. “Leave it to me. Let me do whatever I can to save him.”

As Rocco runs out of the room, Ciro yells after him, “We can’t help him!”

Vincenzo and Ginetta are getting ready to leave, gathering up their things and their children.

As Rocco puts on his sweater, Vincenzo asks, “Where are you going? It’s useless.”

In the bedroom, Rosaria says, “He got rid of his curse!” In the shot, she’s a hunched, dark presence. Ciro responds, “Have you gone crazy too?” “Shame! Shame! Enemy of your own mother!” She slaps him across the face twice, just as Rocco appears in the doorway.

“Jesus Christ will regret the suffering He put upon us,” she goes on. “Mama, don’t curse!” begs Rocco. Then he goes to her and embraces her. “To what purpose? Who do you think is listening to us? We’re all enemies. That’s what we’ve become! Enemies!” While he is talking, Ciro runs out of the room. “Why curse? We have done wrong and we have to pay.”

From the doorway, Luca says, “Ciro is leaving!” Rocco yells, “Ciro!” and runs out.

Ciro is running down the stairs, hat on his head, putting on his coat against the cold Milan winter. Rocco follows him, with Luca behind him, and then their mother.

But it seems it is too late. Ciro is taking off on his scooter to go to the police station. In the rush to get out, Rocco breaks through the glass door, which crashes loudly. He reaches Ciro, grabbing him to prevent him from going.

Rocco cries out, “For the love of our father, don’t do it!”

Ciro breaks away and rides off on his scooter. Rocco and Luca chase him briefly, but it’s no use.

The camera zooms in on Rocco. At last he has to agree with Ciro and Simone: “It’s all over now.”

Looking like a very modern Milan worker in his uniform from the Alfa Romeo plant, Ciro walks with Luca, his arm over his little brother's shoulder. They sit on broken slabs of cement in an empty lot. Ciro asks, “Go ahead, talk. What did you come for?”

“They came to get him this morning. They found him up on the roof. Hiding behind the water tanks. He had slept there for three nights. You should be happy since you wanted to turn him in. Now you can come home and be the boss, too.”

Gazing into the distance, *Ciro* says, “When you’re older, you’ll realize how unfair you’re being to me. How unfair you’re all being with me.” Then he turns to face *Luca*.

“No one loved *Simone* more than me,” he says tearfully, “When we arrived in *Milan*, I was a little bigger than you. And it was *Simone*, who explained to me that in our hometown people live like beasts who only know labor, struggle* and obedience. On the other hand, here, everyone should live without being servants of others and without forgetting their duties. But all that *Simone* disregarded. And so he ended up doing what he did, a terrible ending, he ruined himself and brought shame on us.”

**Note that we’ve used two words – “labor” and “struggle” – to translate “la fatica.” “Fatica” means “labor” in the Southern dialect that the Parondis speak; it means “struggle” in standard Italian.*

“He did wrong to *Rocco* and even to you. What did he teach you, *Luca*? You, who are the smallest of us all? *Simone* once had healthy roots, but he let the bad plants poison him. And even the goodness and generosity of *Rocco* are wrong. *Rocco* is a saint, but he doesn’t want to defend himself. What can someone like him do in this world? He always forgives everyone. But not everything should be forgiven.”

Luca goes to *Ciro* and snuggles up to him, saying, “If *Rocco* goes back to our town, I want to go with him.”

Ciro looks down at his little brother, “I don’t believe that *Rocco* will ever go back to our hometown. You, yes, maybe, just you one day. But what do you think you’ll find that’s different down there?”

Ciro continues, “Even our town will change. Because even there they understand that the world has to change. Many have little faith in a different world, but I do. And I know that tomorrow, your life, *Luca*, will be more fair, more honest.”

A siren sounds. "I have to go back to work." He caresses his brother's head and kisses him. "Go give Mama a kiss from me, eh?"

"Yes."

They say goodbye and the camera pulls back to show the brothers in their setting: the barren land, an industrial building with a grid of windows, and groups of workers making their way back to the factory.

Ciro gets up slowly, wipes his teary face with his handkerchief. The workers are going back to work, chatting among themselves. *Ciro* joins the crowd.

Here comes Franca. She is running, calling out his name, "*Ciro!*" She catches sight of him, waves and runs towards him.

He sees her, turns and goes to her, followed by his workmates.

"How are you?" he asks.

"Fine," she answers with a big smile and out of breath.

She greets the men, who excuse themselves, saying it's late. *Ciro* tells them, "I'll be right there."

"Why did you come?"

Franca says, "I came to tell you that I love you so much, you know?"

"Me too, so much, forever," he says, holding her chin. After a discreet glance each way, he gives her a kiss.

It's a beautiful day. At this moment, nothing – not the dramas and traumas of life since they left the South, not the excruciating reality of *Nadia's* murder, not his estrangement from his mother – nothing seems to cast a shadow over *Ciro's* the future in Milan.

The camera catches up to *Luca*, who has not gotten far. He's standing at a news kiosk, as the men from the plant stream past him. The kiosk reminds us of the scene at the street festival, where we first saw *Ciro* and Franca kiss.

Luca calls out to *Ciro*, interrupting the lovers' embrace.

"What do you want?" asks *Ciro*.

“Come back home tonight! We’ll expect you! Bye!”

“Yes, I’ll come there!”

We watch in a long shot as Ciro says goodbye to his girlfriend. We can barely make them out while they wave to each other, among the workers who are marching back to the plant, so that they can survive – or maybe even get ahead – in the unforgiving city of Milan.

We see Luca walking past the kiosk on his way home. In the street, men stroll slowly by, alone or in pairs, reading their newspapers.

Luca comes upon rows of newspapers displayed on a wall. The headline says: “Rocco Parondi will fight in Brussels, London, Melbourne.” The little boy walks along the wall, running his hand over the images of his big brother, the champion, who is still paying off Simone’s debt.

The camera follows him past a group of men looking at Rocco’s picture.

Then the camera stops and we watch as Luca, running towards home, fades gradually into the city.