

Rome, Open City, Part III

Director: Roberto Rossellini (1945)

At a bakery with monumental stone walls, we see two clusters of boisterous women and children. They're shouting angrily. The sun casts their long shadows on the sidewalk. A uniformed policeman stands at the bakery wall. "Calm down! Take it easy!" he calls out. But then he walks away, complaining, "I can't take it anymore."
He takes off his cap and wipes the sweat off his face. We see a man approach him.

The man is clean-shaven, wrapped tightly in a blanket, and wearing a brimless black hat. "What's going on?" he asks.

"Don't you see? They've stormed the bakery!" The hungry women are stealing bread.

"What about you?"

The officer gestures down at what he's wearing. "Unfortunately, I'm in uniform."

A voice calls from off-screen – "Sergeant!"* – and the officer looks over. It's the baker, who's standing safely behind a barred window, with his wife. Outside, the women shake their fists; one wields a stick. The Sergeant calls back, "I can't do anything! This is a riot!"

Then he turns back to the other man. "I'm powerless," he says.

The other man comments: "I know! I know! But just four ounces a day..."**

**A public safety officer during the time of Fascism. Today he would be a police officer.*

***During the war, the Italian government allotted a ration of 100 grams of bread – about three or four slices – per day per person.*

A woman approaches, holding her bag open. "Dirty rat! He even had pastries," she says. "Look here!" Unnoticed, the man in the blanket pulls a pastry out of the woman's bag and takes a bite out of it. He closes his eyes to savor the moment. "They are great!"

A second woman steps up, complaining, "And he said he didn't have flour!"

The first, seeing the man chewing on the roll, says sharply, "Agostino, why don't you go and get some for yourself!"

"I can't! I'm a sexton. I'd end up in hell."

"Fine! So you'll get to eat your pastries in heaven!" she says, snatching the roll out of his hand and leaving.

A new character – Pina (Anna Magnani) – pushes her way out of the bakery. Jostled on all sides by the crowd, she drops a loaf of bread. "Leave me alone!" she exclaims, as she stoops to pick it up. Upright again, she has to lean against the building, as if dizzy.

The police officer goes to her, concerned. "Signora Pina, this is crazy!" he says. "In your condition!"

"Should I starve to death?" she replies, still out of breath.

He takes her arm and they start to walk.

"Sergeant, help!" someone calls.

"Go get yourself killed!" yells Pina in response. She will have the police officer all to herself.

“I’ll see you home,” he says, still holding her arm.

The yelling continues: “Bread! Bread!”

The sexton looks up at the sky, makes the sign of the cross, and joins the crowd to get some for himself.

In front of Pina’s building, the Sergeant hands Pina her bag. “Here we are.”

“Thanks,” she says, looking exhausted. In the background, isolated apartment buildings rise up.

“Shall I carry it up?” he asks referring to the bag full of looted bread.

“No,” she replies.

“It’s heavy,” he insists.

With a resigned look, she hands him two small loaves of bread. “Here, this way it will be lighter.”

“Actually, I shouldn’t,” he says, a little bit ashamed. “But I’ve been starving for quite a while.”

She puts her hand over his to reassure him.

They walk closer to the building. “Signora Pina, what do you think? Do these Americans really exist?”

They have been expecting an army of liberation for quite a while.

She casts her eyes up at a bombed-out building across the street. “It looks that way.”

“True.”

As they walk, a man wearing a trenchcoat and a battered fedora inquires, “Signora Pina, how about eggs for sixteen lira?”

“Stop this,” Pina replies wearily.

“How dare you in my presence? That’s black market!” says the Sergeant.

Pina laughs. “Sergeant, save your breath, it will be better! See you!” She heads inside.

Climbing the stairs, still looking exhausted, Pina passes a few boys. Looking up, she sees a man standing at her door: it’s the engineer Manfredi, who fled from the SS in the opening scene.

“Who are you looking for?” she asks him.

“Excuse me, does Francesco the printer live here?”

“Yes, but he’s out now.”

“Do you have any idea where he went?”

Wearily, she climbs a few more stairs. “I have no idea, that’s his business” she replies.

“Excuse me, but who are you,” he asks.

“Excuse me, what the hell do you care?” she replies brusquely. She’s almost reached the landing where Manfredi stands. He casts two looming shadows on the wall: a wanted man.

“I see. You are signora Pina.” He smiles slightly.

“How do you know?” Her plaid scarf draped over her shoulder, Pina faces him directly, her head tilted, curious.

“Francesco always talks to me about you.”

“Oh, so you’re –”

He stops her with a motion of his hand. “A friend.”

“Oh, how stupid! I took you for a cop!”

He’s amused. “I realized that.”

“Tell me! What you’d like?” she asks.

“I need to get into Francesco’s apartment,” he says, with a gesture of his head.

“I’ll open it for you right away. I’ll get the key.” She goes inside. Waiting, Manfredi stands back to let some neighbors pass. The women are carrying a *damigiana*. That is a huge traditional container for wine. Though during wartime, who knows what could be in it...

Pina returns with the key and apologizes for the delay. She says, “This way!” and leads him to Francesco’s apartment, which is directly opposite.

They enter and Pina begins, “You see it’s a mess, everything is dirty but it’s impossible to manage...”

He cuts her off. “It doesn’t matter. Listen, do you know Don Pietro, the parish priest at San Clemente?” She nods. “I’d like to speak to him.”

“I’ll go get him.”

“No, not you.”

“I’ll send my little boy.”

“Yes, that way is better.”

“Wait for me there.” She gestures towards the other room.

“Yes, thank you.”

Pina goes to the stairway, leans on a bannister and looks up, calling, “Marcello!” After a pause she tries again, “Marcello! Marcello!” She knows exactly where he is.

Marcello (Vito Annicchiarico) enters the building from a rooftop doorway. He’s about ten. He runs to the top of the stairs, where he’s framed in a beautiful composition of abstract geometric shapes, darkness and light.

“What do you want?” he yells.

“Come down a minute!”

“I can’t.”

“You have to go to Don Pietro’s, quick!”

“I have things to do now!” the kid retorts with an air of importance.

“I said get down here now!”

He gives up. “What a bore!” he mutters and starts down the stairs.

Hands on hips, lips pressed tightly together, Pina waits angrily on the landing for Marcello to come down. When he arrives, she scolds him, “I’ve told you so many times not to go up to Romoletto’s. It’s dangerous.”

She gestures at the stairs and says, “Go get Don Pietro, get going!”

“What should I tell him?”

She straightens his hat. “You should tell him to come here right away. Move it!” She gives him a little push.

“And don't dawdle,” she adds as he hurries off, out into the occupied city.

He'd rather be at Romoletto's place, even if it's dangerous, doing the things that boys will do in wartime...