

Rome, Open City, Part IV

Director: Roberto Rossellini (1945)

Pina returns to Francesco's apartment, where Manfredi waits for her. At his request, she's sent her son to fetch the parish priest.

"He's gone. Don Pietro will be here shortly."

"Thanks."

On the window behind Manfredi, we see the crisscrossing white tape that's been applied to protect the glass during bombing raids. As she folds a pile of clothes, Pina tells Manfredi, "We stormed a bakery this morning."

"Oh, yes?"

She gives a little chuckle. "The second one this week."

"How are the women doing?" he asks.

She opens her arms wide, shrugging. "Some know why they're doing it, but most just grab all the bread they can." Hands on hips, she shakes her head. "This morning, someone filched a pair of shoes and a scale."

Throughout this scene, *la Magnani** uses her voice, her face and her whole body to express a wide range of emotion.

**This is Italians' way of referencing their great female movie stars and other celebrities. (There are regional uses as well: in the north, it's used for referring to any known female; for example, in Lombardy and Veneto, it's also used for males, with 'il.')*

From another room, we hear a loud voice: "I'd like to know who stole my stockings!" Both turn to look. Behind Manfredi, we see a map of Lazio, the region of which Rome is the principal city.

"I'm so sorry," Pina says, throwing her arms open yet again.

A young woman – Pina's sister, Lauretta (Carla Rovere) – enters, still talking. When she sees the visitor, she exclaims, "Oh, Engineer!"

"Hello!"

"Hello! What are you doing here? Did you come looking for me?"

Pina looks on, seeming confused.

"Yes," he says. "Actually..."

**As we've seen in this film, in Italy, people are often referred to by their professional titles (engineer and architect) and – as in this instance – even addressed directly that way.*

Pina explains, "I met the gentleman on the stairs and let him in here. I thought that –"

"You could have let me know right away!"

The sisters begin to bicker.

But when Manfredi starts to speak, they turn their attention to him. "It doesn't matter," he says. "I only wanted to ask a favor." Lauretta says that she'll go change – she has her hair tied up in rag curlers – but Manfredi cuts her off: "You're fine like that." Excusing himself to Pina, he takes Lauretta by the arm and leads her aside.

Pina looks on warily, her hands folded across her stomach. In the image, the rectangles of a folding screen hold her securely in place.

“Listen, Lauretta, you see Marina, right?” he asks.

“Yes, after lunch, at the theater.”

“Please tell her that I can’t see her for a few days. I’ll phone her if I can.”

“Okay. Anything else?”

“No, nothing else.”

“Goodbye, then, Engineer, and sorry!” They shake hands and she leaves the room.

“Does she live with you?” Manfredi asks Pina.

“She’s my sister.”

“Oh! Your sister!”

“Yes, surprised, huh? I wonder what lies she’s told you, that she lives who knows where... She’s ashamed of us because she says she’s an artist and we are ‘starving workers.’” While she talks, Pina gathers clothes, tidying the room.

“Uh-huh.”

“But I wouldn’t trade places with her,” Pina assures him.

“I get it.”

“Not at all because she’s bad. She’s stupid,” she says, raising her eyebrows.

She walks across the room to hang up some clothes. “But... how do you know Lauretta?” At first he doesn't answer, so she apologizes, “Please excuse me. I’m being nosy.”

“No! Lauretta is a good friend of a girl I know.”

“Who, Marina?”

“Ah, do you know her?”

“Oh... Since she was born!” Pina answers with a smile. “Her mother was a concierge on Tiburtina Road near my father’s tinsmith shop. She and Lauretta you could say they grew up together.”

“But,” she adds. “Please don’t say anything to Marina about what I said, I beg you!”

“Don’t worry about it. And anyway, I won’t be seeing her again.”

“Why is that?”

“I don’t know why, but I feel it’s time to end it.” Manfredi looks down, frowning. “It’s gone on too long, anyway.”

“Have you known her for long?”

“Yes, for four months. I’d just arrived in Rome. She used to eat in a little trattoria near piazza di Spagna. One day, the air-raid alarm went off and everyone ran. Just she and I were left. She just laughed. She wasn’t scared at all.”

“And you fell in love,” guesses Pina with a smile.

“Exactly. It happens.”

“Yes, it happens,” she agrees, nodding, as he lights a cigarette.

“But she’s not the woman for me,” he says. He stands and walks to the taped-up window. “Maybe if I’d met her before, when she was on Tiburtina Road,” he muses.

“Well, what does that have to do with it? A woman can change, especially when she’s in love.”

He turns back towards Pina. “Who says she’s in love?” he challenges her.

“Why shouldn’t she be?” Then she realizes something. “Heavens!” she exclaims, clasping her hands together, “I didn’t even offer you coffee! Would you like some?”

“No, don’t bother!”

“Oh, for goodness sake, it’ll only take a moment!” She walks to the door. “Mind you, it’s ‘coffee’ only in a manner of speaking.”

In the church courtyard, a very chaotic game of soccer is underway. As the children push and shove each other, they cast black shadows on the ground.

In his long robe, Don Pietro (Aldo Fabrizi) runs back and forth with the kids. Over their yelling and cheering, he shouts, “No yelling! What is all this ruckus?!”

Losing his patience at last, he blows hard on his whistle, and the boys gather around him. He addresses one of them. “I told you many times before that you shouldn’t play roughly!”

As he speaks to one of them, another kicks the ball, hard, up in the air. Another boy yells, “Look out, Don Pietro!” Sure enough, the ball hits the priest right in the head.

He winces, but there’s no damage done. The kids laugh and resume their game. That’s when Marcello, Pina’s son, comes running up, a scarf tied around his neck.

Politely, they both take off their hats. “Oh, it’s you,” says Don Pietro. “It’s a miracle to see you at the parish.”

“I came here because my mother sent me.”

“She did the right thing. It will do you good, too.”

But he has misunderstood. He puts his hand on the boy’s neck to lead him, but Marcello stops him. “Don Pietro, let me finish talking.”

They look at each other, amid the tumult of the soccer game. The boy looks up earnestly at the priest. “She says to come to our house quickly. It’s something important.”

Don Pietro observes him dubiously through his wire-rimmed glasses. “What?”

“I don’t know. My mom acted mysterious. But there must be someone in Francesco’s apartment.”

“All right. Let’s go.” He clasps the nape of the boy’s neck and they begin walking. But before he leaves, the priest blows his whistle again.

The boys gather around. Don Pietro calls one of the older boys, “Gilberto, listen. Agostino will be here soon.” He hands over the whistle. “You run the game.” He adds, pointing a finger, “Please, behave yourselves.”

He reaches out his hand to Marcello, but the boy takes off. “Come here!” the priest says firmly, but without hostility. “Why are you always running off?”

They leave the courtyard together and enter the church. Passing the altar, they genuflect and cross themselves – first the priest, then the little boy. Then they walk up the aisle, Marcello holding his hat in his hands.

Passing the font of holy water on their way out, they dip their fingers and bless themselves once more, each in turn. An elderly congregant enters and crosses their path, but Don Pietro does not stop to talk with her.

Marcello and Don Pietro leave the sanctuary of the church and venture out onto the streets of Rome, which is, by order of its government, an open city: it will not defend itself against foreign occupation, to prevent loss of life and injury to property. But, in fact, it is a city under siege. After they have gone, the camera lingers a moment on the somber calm and quiet of the ancient church.