

Rome, Open City, Part VI

Director: Roberto Rossellini (1945)

We see Don Pietro walking along a cobblestone sidewalk. He enters an antique store. Inside, seen in silhouette, two German soldiers stand talking.

A salesman greets the priest, tipping his fedora. "Hello, Father."

"Hello."

"What would you like?"

"Would you happen to have a statue of Saint Anthony the Abbot?"

"Sorry, we had some a while ago, but it doesn't sell much. But I happen to have a Saint Rocco."

"Thanks, I'm not interested."

"What? Not interested in a saint like Saint Rocco?"

"Step inside. Come and see." They walk to the back of the shop. "Come along. It's a beauty, too, you know."

For a moment, the priest's outline, with broad-brimmed hat and cassock, is framed by the window.

"Let's have a look."

Saint Rocco stands humbly with a dog next to him.

"I'll give you a good price," says the salesman. In the shot, the two men are separated by the statuette of a naked woman.

"I need to speak to Francesco. The man with the tight shoes sent me."

The man nods. "Wait a moment." He steps away.

The priest is left with the naked woman and the saint. He glances at one, then the other. Finally he turns the woman away. He stands in repose for a moment, hands crossed across his chest, eyes closed. Then, opening them, he realizes he hasn't done quite enough: he turns Saint Rocco so that the nakedness is no longer in his line of view.

The salesman guides Don Pietro to a door at the back of the store. "Down these stairs," he says.

On the shadowy stairway, the priest encounters Francesco, the printer, Pina's fiance, who asks, "It's you, Don Pietro! But what has happened?"

"Nothing serious, thank heavens, but it could have been." They walk down the stairs together. "The SS were at Manfredi's last night."

"We learned about it. Where is he?"

"At your place."

"My place?"

"Yes, Pina let him in. He'll stay there for a few days."

As they enter another room, Don Pietro hands a piece of paper to Francesco. "He gave me this note." Francesco opens it. "I wanted to send him to the Franciscan monks," the priest explains. "He'd be safer there. But he doesn't want that. He says he'd be too isolated."

"It's true," says a third man. In the background, we see printing presses.

"Right, but it is more dangerous for him to work now that he's been identified."

The man explains, "I know, Father, but there are few of us and if everyone went into monasteries..."

"I understand."

Making a belated introduction, Francesco says, "Excuse me. May I, Don Pietro? This is our editor."
"Very pleased to meet you," says the priest. They shake hands.
"Same here. I've heard a lot about you."
"That's bad for my modesty – and my health."
"You have done and do a lot for all of us. I thank you."

In spite of the differences between the Vatican and the communist resistance, Don Pietro, following his conscience, has been an active supporter of the partisans. He says simply, "It's my duty to help those in need."

Don Pietro follows the editor to his office and then waits patiently while the money is retrieved for the partisans.

The editor returns with three books, setting the stack down in front of the priest. "Here you are, Father."

"But Manfredi told me it would be money."

"They are books, but there's not much to read," the editor says, with a smile.

"What...?" He opens a book and begins to leaf through it. Every page is a banknote.

"Is it all like that?" Don Pietro seems amused by the ingenuity of this method.

"A thousand pages."

"One million lira."

"Precisely."

The priest picks up the books, lips compressed as if suppressing his anxiety.

The next scene opens on a young woman in a low-cut dress, looking worried: it's Marina, Manfredi's girlfriend. The last time we saw her, she was calling him and an SS officer answered.

She walks into her dressing room at the club where she works; we hear dance music playing. She closes the door behind her.

After a moment, she turns back and locks it.

Marina sits at her dressing table, which is littered with cosmetics and beauty products. She takes a medicine bottle out of her purse and shakes it out onto her hand: empty. She tries vainly to scrape out what she can with something sharp. In the close-up of the bottle we see: she is addicted to cocaine.

She tosses the bottle down and leans her head on her hand, frustrated. Looking at the mirror, she gazes briefly into the eye of the spectator. In the background, the song ends and there's some light applause.

There's a soft knock at the door.

She asks, "Who is it?"

A woman's voice replies, "Marina, it's me. Open up!"

Marina gets up and hides the medicine bottle.

When she opens the door, we see another woman, heavily made up, in an even lower-cut dress. It's Laretta, Pina's sister.

"Ciao!" she says gaily. "Guess who I saw this morning?" Marina has turned her back: Laretta has no idea what she's going through.

“What do you think I care?”

“Manfredi!” Laretta goes on, leaning happily on Marina’s chair. “He came to my place.”

“Your place? Where?”

“My house!” Laretta seems very satisfied. Marina looks at her friend and then at her own reflection in the mirror, disbelieving.

Watching her in the mirror, Marina says, “But why did he come? What did he want?”

“He asked me to tell you that he won’t be able to see you for a few days, and that, if anything comes up, he’ll call.” Laretta flops down in a chair.

“He didn’t tell you anything else?”

“No.”

“What? He didn’t explain?”

“No, I’m telling you! And I didn’t ask him anything either. Imagine, I was in my bathrobe and curlers!”

Marina is quiet, head in hand again, so Laretta chatters on. “Aren’t you going to change? You’re on soon.”

Marina stands up. “How did he know where you live?” she asks, looking over her shoulder at Laretta.

“Yeah, how did he know...? You must have told him.”

“I never told him.” Marina steps across the room to change.

“Well, what do you want me to say? I certainly wasn’t going to tell him. I’m not really excited about people knowing where I live.” In close-up, we see Laretta’s imploring look as she says, “Speaking of which, Marina, I can’t take it in that house much longer. If you don’t mind, I’ll come to stay with you until I find another room.”

“Of course!” Marina answers, looking at herself in the mirror as she changes her outfit. “Come when you want. I’ve told you many times.”

“You’re a sweetheart,” says Laretta and leans over to kiss Marina, who doesn’t respond. The two women stand side by side for a moment, gazing at themselves in the mirror.

Laretta walks over to the dressing table and starts to rummage through Marina’s purse. When Marina notices, she grabs her friend’s arm to stop her.

“What are you looking for?” she demands.

“A cigarette!”

“I’ll get you one.”

“Fine!” replies Laretta, a little shocked by her friend’s reaction.

Laretta takes the cigarette and lights it.

“When did he come by?” asks Marina.

“Who?”

“Giorgio.”

“Early this morning. I was about to get dressed.”

As Marina is adjusting a shawl around her waist, a knock comes at the door: “Miss Mari, you’re on!”

“I don’t get it,” says Laretta. “Yes, he’s nice, I don’t say he isn’t...”

“Would you kindly stay out of it?”

“It’s nothing to me, as long as you’re happy!”

Marina suddenly loses her strength, leaning over a chair and supporting her forehead with her hand. "Do you feel sick?" asks Laretta, placing her hand on Marina's head. "No, it's nothing."

But then Laretta understands: "Marina... again? You know it's bad for you!" "Nonsense," replies Marina, sitting at the dressing table again. "Lots of things are bad for us, but we do them anyway." Laretta runs her hand affectionately through Marina's hair.

Another knock sends Laretta to the door, as Marina says wearily, "I'm coming!" Laretta opens the door to an elegant woman in dark coat and hat. When she sees Marina, she breaks into a gracious smile. "Good evening. How are you?"

Marina rushes to embrace her. Her black glove rests on Marina's bare white arm. Marina replies, "Fine, and you? How beautiful you look tonight! But of course, you always look so chic!" Laretta says from off-screen, "Well, I'll be going." "Ah, Laretta," the woman murmurs, with little interest. "Try and hurry," Laretta tells Marina. "Or you will have to deal with the boss." She leaves.

"Excuse me. I have to go," Marina says. "Yes, dear," says the woman, her hand still on Marina's arm. "Did you find some?" Marina asks. "Yes." "You're a darling!" Marina embraces her again, smiling with relief.

Alone in the dressing room, the woman takes off a glove and proceeds to snoop around, stopping at a photograph of Manfredi and Marina. We saw the same portrait earlier in Bergmann's office. The camera lingers on her as she looks at it with intense interest.