

## Rome, Open City, Part VII

Director: Roberto Rossellini (1945)

The sexton is stirring a pot over a rudimentary heater while talking to someone. "He has no schedule anymore. He comes, he goes. He goes out, comes back... And at this time, when you shouldn't even stick your nose out the window, he's always out and about."

The camera reveals Pina, seated on a couch, a plaid scarf draped over her shoulder. She replies, "He must have a good reason."

"Let's hope it's good."

"Agostino! I'm surprised at you." She walks over to him.

"Give me a break! Do you think I don't know you were behind that hubbub at the bakery today?"

"Me?" A dark cross hangs on the wall between them.

"And I also know that if you keep up these antics, you're all in for trouble," he warns.

Sitting now, Pina shakes her head. "Let's hope not."

"Let's hope not."

"What time is it?" she asks. "Because the curfew is at five o'clock."

He checks his watch. "It's four-thirty."

She stands. "I had better be going."

"If you want to leave a message..."

"No. I wanted to talk to Don Pietro, but it doesn't matter. I'll see him tomorrow before I get married."

Don Pietro arrives just at that moment.

Pina greets him, and he replies, "Good evening, Pina, good evening."

He puts down his books on the desk. The sexton complains, "Always books! We have no money to buy food and you keep buying books!"

He starts to pick one up, but Don Pietro grabs his arm: "Leave it! I have to take them to the priest at San Lorenzo."

Gesturing impatiently, the sexton grumbles, "But you want to go out again? The curfew is in twenty minutes."

"It doesn't matter. Doctors and priests can still go out." Don Pietro takes some paper to wrap the books.

"But in the dark it's easy to get shot. With these thugs!"

Pina speaks up, "Don Pietro, I came... for confession."

"But how can we do it? I have to go out," he replies, wrapping the books. "Maybe tomorrow morning?"

"Fine. I'll come with you then. We'll walk a little way together."

Pina reaches to take the books, now wrapped. "Give them to me. I'll carry the package for you."

"No!" He seizes them, his eyes huge and startled behind his tiny lenses.

"But are you crazy? A priest with a package?!" She manages to get hold of them and with a smile pushes Don Pietro gently away.

With strange logic, she goes on, "Besides, it's not so heavy for me! I'm already carrying...!" He protests, but she won't listen. "Come on! Come with me! It's getting late!" At the door, she calls out, "Bye, Agostino."

The priest admonished his sexton, “Relax.”

When they're gone, Agostino opens his arms wide, looks up to the heavens and laments, “If this war isn't over soon, I'll go crazy!”

In the church, Pina and the priest kneel before the altar, echoing the motions of Don Pietro and Pina's son some hours before. As they rise to leave, suspenseful music begins to play. They start walking but then stop dead in their tracks, staring at something off-screen. Pina cradles the contraband books in her arms.

We see their troubled expressions and then, as the camera pulls back, a man in uniform blocking their path.

“Are you the priest? Don Pietro Pellegrini?”

“Right,” he replies, smiling agreeably, submissive.

“I'd like to speak with you.”

Pina says she must be going and holds out the package of books to Don Pietro. He starts to take them, but, thinking of the soldier, decides that they are safer in her hands. Flustered, he asks her to wait. She walks to the back of the church with a look of grave concern.

Don Pietro ushers the stranger into the office, and asks the sexton to step outside for a moment. The two men sit at the desk. To the priest's horror, the officer takes out his gun.

But the man simply takes the gun apart to retrieve something hidden inside the handle: a message from the priest in Minturno. Don Pietro reads it.

The officer exclaims, “You mustn't think I'm a coward. I can't take any more!” He bows his head, and clenches his fists.

Don Pietro walks around the desk. “Don't lose heart,” he says kindly. “I'll try to help you. Where have you come from?”

“From Cassino. It's a living hell!”\* The officer – an Austrian – has deserted.

*\*The Battle of Monte Cassino was actually a series of four assaults by the Allies, in the first half of 1944, as part of their advance toward Rome. Ultimately, the Allies won, but at the cost of 55,000 casualties.*

In the church, Pina prays, head bowed, hands locked, the white package in front of her. We see the connection between her passion for a free Rome and her strong faith in God.

At last, Don Pietro appears and they set out.

As they cross the bridge over the railroad tracks, Pina admits: “It's been such a long time since I confessed that I'm almost ashamed.”

“No...”

“No, let me say this, Don Pietro. I feel that I've lived badly, that I've done so many things that I shouldn't have. Do you think I'm not ashamed to be married in this condition? But you can't understand me, Don Pietro. There are things that one does without thinking, without having the impression that they are wrong. I was so in love... And he's so good, so decent. So many times I have thought that the truth is he could have found someone better than me.” She stops walking, gathering her thoughts.

“...yes, some younger woman, and not a penniless widow with a child, without any money because I had to sell everything to get by, to move forward...” She takes a few more steps. “And life keeps getting worse. How will we ever forget all this suffering, this anxiety and this fear?” She stops again and asks the priest, “Doesn’t Christ see us?”

He nods. “So many people ask me that question signora Pina: ‘Doesn’t Christ see us?’”

“Yes, the Lord will take pity on us,” the priest continues, walking again. “But we have so much to be forgiven for, and for that we must pray and forgive much.”

“You’re right, Don Pietro. But how can it be done when I see those guys there, and it makes me want to smash their faces in.” She indicates some soldiers who are questioning a wagon driver, while his horse waits.

“Of course, you’re right – What are you making me say... give me the package. It’s getting late. Good evening, signora Pina, good evening.” He takes the books, shakes her hand, and quickly walks away, not giving her a chance to protest. Left alone, she gazes forlornly after him.

Don Pietro is walking on a platform above the railway. He begins to whistle. A workman in a cap walks up the grassy hill toward the priest, carrying a toolbox and a lantern. He, too, is whistling.

He walks past Don Pietro at first, the two men whistling in unison now. Then he turns back and takes the package. Freight cars and factory chimneys are their only witnesses.