

## Rome, Open City, Part XIII

Director: Roberto Rossellini (1945)

Hartmann brings Marina into the Major's office, with one hand on her shoulder and a glass of liquor in the other. Laughing and flirting, they cross to the far side, to the torture room.

Cigarette in hand, Marina sees her lover, Manfredi, as Don Pietro prays over his dead body. At first, in her drugged state, she doesn't understand. She giggles. Then a look of horror comes over her face.

She screams, then falls unconscious to the floor. Enraged, Bergmann yells, "Out! Out! Take the priest back!"

Stepping over Marina's inert body, the Germans return to Bergmann's office.

"Stupid Italians!" he complains. "Dammit! We failed. That damned priest got me flustered."

Krammer comes in. "The report, sir?"

"Ah, yes... Cause of death: heart attack."

Ingrid laughs.

"And the young woman, sir?"

"That's up to the lady."

Ingrid says, "Lock her up a while and then..."

"Sir, what name shall I put down? Manfredi or Ferraris?" He has mentioned the resistance fighter's current alias, as well as his real name.

Bergmann opts for the name on the fake passport: "Neither. Giovanni Episcopo. Else we create another martyr, and they already have plenty."

Looking over at Marina, Ingrid says, "Just a moment!"

She walks over to Marina, and bends down to retrieve the coat. She shakes it slightly. "For next time," she explains.

Ingrid and Bergmann leave the office arm in arm. As they exit, Hartmann shakes his head and mutters ironically, "We are a master race..."

Under a sunny sky, in an open field bordered by trees, two men in light-colored trench coats and fedoras set up a plain wooden chair. Italian soldiers mill about, as drums sound ominously in the background.

Hartmann asks a soldier, "What time do you have?"

"Eight fourteen."

"Exactly. They're late."

He offers the soldier a cigarette, then asks for a match. But the soldier struggles with opening the package and Hartmann snatches it away and lights his cigarette himself.

"Assemble!" someone orders.

“Get ready!” yells an Italian, and the men get into formation. “Attention!” A truck pulls up behind them. The shot is carefully composed, a study in contrasts: light and shadow, the order of the soldiers and the loose beauty of clouds and leafy trees.

The driver hops out and runs to unlock the back door, which has a small barred window. Two soldiers climb out.

Next, a young priest appears and extends a hand toward the truck. Taking it, Don Pietro steps down. “Your hat, Don Pietro,” the priest says. “Oh, yes.” He removes it and gives it to an Italian soldier.

Hands folded over his chest, Don Pietro steps toward the chair where he will meet his death.

He pauses for a moment and the young priest takes his arm. “Come. Be brave.” With raised eyebrows, Don Pietro replies, “Oh, it’s not hard to die well. What’s hard is to live well.” He smiles.

As Hartmann watches, the two priests walk towards the chair. Don Pietro’s companion murmurs a prayer in Latin.

At the chair, Don Pietro sits down, resting his chin in a hollow at the top of the backrest. The men in trench coats tie him down so that he won’t fall after he’s hit.

Marching in formation, the Italian soldiers arrange themselves in a straight line, as the firing squad. Don Pietro sits calmly, his hands folded in prayer, as the men continue their preparations. At last, one signals to the standing priest that it’s time to leave.

At the chain-link fence by the side of the field, the boys in Romoletto’s group are gathering. They stand, fingers interlaced in the fence, and whistle. They will keep Don Pietro company as he dies.

The Italian soldiers look over at the children, with troubled expressions. Before he steps away, the priest runs his hand over Don Pietro’s head, comforting him. Don Pietro, tethered to the chair, bows his head in prayer.

The boys continue their whistling, unsettling the soldiers. At last, Don Pietro notices the whistling and lifts his head to look.

The firing squad takes aim, the front row kneeling, the back row standing. At the signal, they fire, but with their rifles pointed at the ground.

Don Pietro cringes. The boys look down. But the Italians – good Catholics – could not let themselves shoot a priest. He sits up, eyes closed, composed.

Hartmann is furious. His misgivings of the night before are far from his mind. “Fire!” he tells the head of the squad.

Don Pietro looks up at the heavens and murmurs, “God, forgive them.”

“Fire! End this now!” Hartmann orders again, in German.

Then he pulls out his pistol, strides briskly over to Don Pietro and shoots him in the head. With that shot, the boys turn their gaze downward in sorrow.

The priest approaches Don Pietro, who is slumped over the chair, arms limp at his sides. As the firing squad marches off the field, the men in trench coats come closer to examine the body.

In close-up, we see boys at the fence, grieving for the priest.

When the cord is untied, Don Pietro’s body leans heavily to one side. He is dead.

The boys start to leave. Marcello lingers, but another boy gently removes his hand from the fence. Supporting one another, the two children walk away, as stirring music begins to play.

Two by two, arms around each other’s shoulders, the boys walk back toward the city. Their skinny legs stick out of their short pants. Their socks sag around their ankles. They have already endured more than any child should have to and it’s clear to us, as it must be to them, that more trauma awaits them.

As they walk, we see the panorama of Rome: the opposite side from the view that opened the film. The urban landscape spreads out below the dome of Saint Peter’s Basilica.

Walking sadly but proudly, these weary, indomitable, brave boys, led by Romoletto, are the future of Rome.