

The Passionate Thief, Parte I

Mario Monicelli, Dir. (1960)

Please note: In writing our photo-stories, we aim for a fluid, standard Italian, albeit at a high intermediate level. Then we write an English translation – which is naturally at an intermediate level of English – to match it. This translation document is not a literary translation of the photo-story. It's a tool to assist intermediate-level Italian learners understand the text. At times, the English translation retains a little of the Italian syntax to give students a feel for the Italian language. For example in this film, we've translated: "Via!" as "Out of here!" where the more standard English might be "Let's get out of here!"

We write the dialogue verbatim from our films. This was a little tricky with *The Passionate Thief*, because, as in most Italian comedies, the players use a variety of dialects or dialect-influenced speech. Also, this film was released in 1960 – over fifty years ago – and, just as in English, the way of speaking has changed a little. We want to preserve a sense of the time, place and people, while presenting our language-learner readers with standard conversational Italian that they can actually use. Therefore, we have changed some vocabulary, updating to current usage. For example, we've used 'prima' for a movie opening, rather than 'salone,' a term no longer in use. As always, we translate from local dialect and lingo, to a more standard word. So, we've substituted 'rubare' for the Roman street word 'caranfare.'

As always, our translation document should be a good assist for those of you watching the movie without subtitles. However, for the first time, because of the length of the film and because it is so dialogue-rich, we've been forced to cut some scenes and some lines within scenes.

The English title is not a translation of the Italian title, and something has definitely been lost with this choice. The actual title *Risate di Gioia*, translates as "laughter of joy" and is a play on words because the name of the protagonist is 'Gioia,' which means 'joy.'

The images are an important part of the photo-story. Each paragraph refers to specific images. Even if you don't understand Italian, please read this translation alongside the Italian version on the blog with photos, so that you can have context for the words. Consider as well that these visuals help us to know the movie better: they not only enrich the story, but they also show camera movements, editing, the symbols chosen by the director and thematic ideas. You will also have access to the links to other references in the blog itself. Note that an underline in the translation document indicates a hyperlink in the cineracconto on the blog. Please see the blog for more information about our translation philosophy.

Photo-story summary: It's New Year's Eve, and Gioia, an extra at Cinecittà film studio, finds herself on her own. A chance encounter with Umberto, an old acting pal who lives by his wits now that his glory days are past, throws her together also with Lello, an unscrupulous pickpocket. Before the night is over, a series of events will have taken this mismatched trio all over Rome. How will things end up for our feisty heroine?

A great mass of balloons is released from the ceiling. The camera watches as they fall. We're in a dance hall. The camera pans crazily across the ballroom floor as dancers, playing around, bat at the balloons. The movie title appears on the screen: "Joyful Laughter."

The camera pans to the street. It's night time: neon signs and lights from distant windows puncture the darkness. Celebration is in the air. It's New Year's Eve! To the sound of lively orchestral music, the camera gives us more glimpses of the city as the names of the films' stars are displayed at the bottom of the screen, starting with La Magnani* and Totò. The bright white lettering – all capitals – matches the intensity of the neon lights in the street.

Finally the director's name – Mario Monicelli – appears against a backdrop of neon shooting stars and the vibrant vertical signs of nightspots.

*This is Italians' way of referencing their great female movie stars and other celebrities.

On another street, a man on a scooter yells up to a balcony, "Alfredo! Alfredo!"

In response, a woman steps out and yells down, "He's here! He's coming down now!" We see her dark form at the front of the shot.

Inside the apartment, we hear whooping children playing cowboys and Indians. A tall man in dark suit and tie is waiting. It's her husband Alfredo (Mac Ronay). She tells him, "Moretti's here."

She's preparing Alfredo's dinner, packing it carefully. It may be New Year's Eve, but some people have to work! She hands him a package, saying, "I prepared two or three little lentils for you. Don't eat them before midnight or they won't bring you much luck. And I've prepared some wine and a little orange for you, too."

Alfredo puts on his conductor's cap and coat. He works in the subway.

Behind Alfredo, a little girl is being tied up with rope. Her captor – her brother – is wearing a headband with a feather sticking out of it. So the Indians are winning. The night – and this film – have only just begun, but it's looking crazy already.

"How do you feel?" his wife asks him.

"How do you think I feel?" Alfredo answers. He has a peculiar manner of talking, high and warbling.

Feather in his hair, the little boy asks, "Daddy, shall we break the piggy bank?"

"You all break it at midnight when the year ends," Alfredo responds, in his strange high-pitched voice. As he's walking to the door, we see his mother-in-law (Elena Fabrizi), dressed in black and sitting by the table. "No," she says. "We're not going to stay awake waiting for midnight."

"Why not?" he protests. "Don't be stupid! Celebrate it without me."

As he gets to the door, his wife calls out, "Alfredo! Alfre'! Your bag!" He turns back. She tells him, "No, we're not celebrating anything without you. Imagine, while you are underground..." She gives a little chuckle and explains, "I mean 'in the subway.' We'll have a drop of hot broth, then everyone to bed!" She turns back to the room and asks for confirmation, "Right, children? Everyone to bed!"

"We'll celebrate tomorrow, when you're here." She hands him his bag and says good night.

"Ciao," he replies. Smiling, holding his bag, he offers a little wave.

“Ciao. E Buon Anno!” she says sadly, watching him leave. The cinematographer has divided the shot into vertical panels, each with its own structure and story. On the right, two black pans hang on the kitchen wall, like musical instruments.

The second the door closes, she turns her head and springs into action: “Mama, take the *zampone* off the stove!”

“Yes, yes!”

“Assuntina, go down to the bar and call Uncle Francesco, Uncle Pasquale and Aunt Cesira.” The little girl, still tied up in the rope, hops as best she can to follow instructions, as her mother takes a panettone and an armful of other stuff out of a cabinet.

*Zampone is one of the traditional Italian New Year’s Eve dishes: a pig’s trotter stuffed with ground pork. It’s usually served with a side dish of lentils.

She goes on briskly, “Tell them we’re expecting them and to bring the eel.” Then she tells her son, “You, break the piggy bank, so we can play bingo and cards.”

Her mother brings in the zampone, on a large white platter: “Smell that! Mmmm. It’s so good! Poor Alfredo!” A bottle of wine has appeared on the table. Plates are stacked for the feast.

“Well, what he doesn’t know won’t hurt him.”

In an exterior shot, outside the Brasil theater, we see a woman under a black umbrella. A great glare of light is reflected from the wet street.

A man wearing a fedora and trench coat (Alberto De Amicis) runs into a dry cleaners and confronts the man working there, asking accusingly, “Colombini, did you keep count?”

Colombini (Peppino De Martino), dignified and bald, responds, “What count?”

“I thought of it while I was waiting for the trolley: how many are we for dinner?”

“Well, easy,” answers Colombini and he begins to count, “Me, you...”

Between the two of them – counting on their fingers – they call out the names. In the background, employees are working. Colombini is getting to the end: “Giovanni, Pennellone and Neri.” That’s when he realizes: “Thirteen!”

“Exactly! New Year’s Eve dinner for thirteen!” Then the man accuses his friend by imitating him: “I’ll take care of it! I’ll organize it. An idiot like you can’t plan anything!”

Colombini defends himself, speaking eloquently with his hands. “Well, I made a mistake! Even priests make mistakes, don’t they?”

Impatiently, his friend says, “Then tell me what we do.”

Colombini says, “We’ll fix things up somehow. We’ll find a kind soul to be the fourteenth.”

With his own gestures, the man protests, “At this hour? It’s after eight o’clock, who do you expect to find?”

Desperate, they invite an employee, but he rebuffs them and takes off.

Then, with a look of triumph, Colombini says, “I’m getting an idea. How about calling Tortorella?”

“Who’s that?”

“What do you mean ‘who’s that’? Tortorella! Gioia, right? She’s always up for something to do, always available. I’ll go call Mimì because she sees her at Cinecittà.”

“But tell her she has to pay her own way! I won’t shell out a penny!”

Cut to Cinecittà studios, where a religious epic is being shot. The camera pans through a crowd of ancient Romans, some in chains.

They hold up their arms and chant: “It’s a miracle! A miracle!”

And there is Gioia (Anna Magnani) in front, wearing a dark tunic and an enormous black wig. Mouth wide open, she’s shouting for all she’s worth. She may just be an extra, but she’s giving it all she’s got.

The director yells, “Cut!”

As he calls out directions, Gioia mutters, “These damn shoes!”

The director orders, “Pediconi, take out the third from the left! Does it look to you like he’s seen a miracle [*literal translation: Does it seem to you that he has a miracle face?*]?”

“Me?” asks a bare-chested man in chains, disbelieving. He has the build of an out-of-shape boxer.

“The director [*literal translation: The doctor**] is right. This is a mystic scene,” comments Gioia to the extra beside her. Then she addresses the director directly, pointing to the man, “He even got warned by the police, sir!”

The man answers her indignantly, “Tortorella, I’m warning you! If you don’t mind your own business, one of these days I’ll slug you in the head!” She gestures dismissively to him, and he shoves her to make sure she got the point.

**“Doctor” may be used in Italy as a term of respect.*

Pediconi – who is the assistant director – tells the man, “Come on, come on, shut up! Tortorella is right.”

“Yeah, she’s always right!” the man protests, retreating.

As the director and the extras look on, Pediconi adds, “And you all, do like Tortorella does – she gives her all! Stand up! Ready!”

But Gioia is not finished giving her suggestions: “But that guy has to keep his hands in place!”

Pediconi ignores her; he walks away without even a glance in her direction.

In his high chair, the director claps his hands and calls out, “Let’s go, it’s late. After this shot, we’ll all go home to have some bubbly. Ready then? Look out for the wristwatches! Ready?” It wouldn’t do to have the odd 20th century timepiece show up in this Roman epic.

Looking at the camera operator, he orders, “Action! Clapperboard!” The man holding the clapperboard calls out “One hundred twenty seven, third!”*

**This is the third take – the third time they’re shooting the 127th scene.*

The director calls, “Action!” This is where we came in: the ancient Romans raise their hands and yell, “Miracle! Miracle!” We see the boom and the panning camera. Finally, the director says, “Stop! Okay. See you all tomorrow.”

Yelling, “Goodnight, everyone. Happy New Year!” Gioia tears off her wig and races off the set.

And she’s not the only one; it’s a mob scene as the extras rush to the dressing area to turn in their costumes and change their clothes.

“Take it easy! Stop!” yell the men in charge, waving their arms. But the crowd surges past them.

Gioia goes to hand in her costume. “That’s all,” she tells Mimì (Gina Rovere), the woman working in wardrobe. “I didn’t take the sandals. The tunic reached down to the bottom.” She can’t reach the zipper at the back of her skirt, so she turns around: “Give me a hand!”

“Are you in a hurry?” Mimì asks.

“I’ll miss my tram.”

“Damn it!” mutters Mimì. She’s having trouble with the zipper.

“I’ve gained weight,” Gioia explains.

“I think so...”

Finally, zipper zipped, Gioia steps over and reaches up for her comb.

“By the way, what are you doing tonight?” asks Mimì.

“What am I doing?” Gioia has to think for a minute. “I have plans with what’s-his-name,” she replies as she combs her hair.

“Who?”

“With... Then I have another half-plan...” She closes her eyes and holds her comb in her hand, trying to come up with the answer. We see her face in the mirror, as she struggles to come up with the answer. “I haven’t decided yet, you know?” she finishes.

“You’re still with the accountant?”

“With who? Capecchi? It’s over, he wasn’t really my type.” Buttoning her coat, Gioia turns and gives a more complete answer: “His wife caught him and beat him black and blue!” She laughs without restraint, mouth wide open.

Then, suddenly solemn, she asks, “Say, why did you ask me ‘What are you doing tonight?’”

“Well, just so...”

“Why? Say it!”

“I wanted to ask you to come with us.”

“Who’s ‘us’?”

“It’s a nice group of people.” Then, counting off on her fingers, Mimì rattles off the names, just as Colombini did in the prior scene.

“But, if you have other plans...” She doesn’t want to insult Gioia by implying that she might not have plans.

Gioia interrupts her. “But I can cancel! Excuse me,” she apologizes for cutting her off.

“But have you something nice to wear?”

“I have a beautiful evening gown that I bought for the opening of that film, what was it called...? *Night at the Grand Hotel*. Remember it? Beautiful, wasn’t it?” Her face is lit so as to emphasise her eyes, intense and expressive.

“What are you wearing on top?” Mimì asks.

“Oh, some fox furs that you can’t even dream of!” she says with a whoop.

“Okay, then. Let’s meet at ten o’clock at the Esedra Fountain, alright?”

Gioia reaches to take her fur coat down from a shelf; it lets loose a great cloud of dust. Is this a sign of how the evening will go...?

“Tell me they shouldn't be killed! Look what they've done to my new fur!” She shakes the dust off.
“What can you do?” Mimi helps Gioia on with her garment as they confirm the plans for the evening.
Then she adds a final detail: “Mind you, with one thing and another it's eight thousand lira each.” That seems to put Gioia into shock.

“Well, these are classy people,” Mimi explains.

Gioia goes and combs her hair all over again. She says, “I have half an idea for myself tonight.”

“Tell me. Go ahead!”

“I want to have my hair... no, I won't tell you anything!”

“New Year, new life!” Gioia exclaims. Again, the lighting picks up each quick expression in her face; she seems fully alive and utterly present in the moment.

“Good for you! Maybe tonight you'll find the right man!”

“If only my guardian angel would pass by and say, ‘amen’, my darling!”

She runs off, ducking under the prop chains that hang from the ceiling.