

The Passionate Thief, Parte VI

Mario Monicelli, Dir. (1960)

While Lello and Gioia dance, Umberto sits at the buffet table and helps himself. As he reaches for some cheese, he knocks over a glass that falls to the floor, shattering.

“*Kaputt!*” A waiter comes to pick the pieces.

“*Kaputt...?*” repeats Umberto. He asks politely, “Were you in Italy during the war?”

“No,” the waiter replies.

“No? And all these gentlemen who are in this house?”

“No, none of them made war in Italy!” the waiter assures him, genially.

Now Umberto changes to *tu*. “Will you tell me who in the hell made this crappy war?”

Lello interrupts their dance, and guides Gioia into another room.

“Why?” she asks. “Where are you taking me?”

“To a place where there are fewer people. I must talk to you.”

She pauses to adjust her hair in a mirror, her back to him. He turns her around so that they are facing each other.

“Here,” he says and sits her down. “I must ask you something. I’ve been holding it in all night. But I warn you, I don’t want you to answer right away, because I already know what you would say and you would make me suffer.”

“Well, then?”

“First I’ll go get the champagne. Meanwhile, you think about it. So when I’m back, you give me your answer. And if you say yes, we’ll toast to it. Okay?”

Gioia shrugs and asks, “But what could this question possibly be?”

He comes right out with it: “Will you come to bed with me?” She looks shocked. In the mirror, we see him put a finger to his lips. He walks away, leaving her to contemplate.

He takes a few steps, turns and puts his finger to his lips again. After a moment of reflection, Gioia begins to move her shoulders in time to the music.

Standing in front of the mirror, she does a little shimmy, stirring the spangles of her dress. Then she stops, puts her finger on her chin, and tries out some possible responses: “I say, young man! We’re going a little too fast, aren’t we? Um, young man, where will we end up if we do that?”

By the end, she convinces herself that going with Lello could be fun.

Still hard at work at the buffet table, Umberto cuts himself a slice of cake. When he extends his arm, we see that his cuffs are separate from the rest of his shirt. Gliding past, Lello grabs the back of Umberto’s chair and shakes it, startling him.

Umberto asks the waiter. Pointing in the direction Lello headed, he starts off in German, “*Bitte*, what’s over there?”

“The restroom.”

“Restroom?” He concludes in English: “Thank you!”

With a look of concern, Umberto takes off for the bathroom, attempting unsuccessfully to be unobtrusive. The camera follows him as he hurries past a Christmas tree.

At the bathroom door, instead of entering, he stoops and peers through the keyhole.

An older woman arrives and catches Umberto in the act. “Oh!” she exclaims. He stands at attention, with an innocent air, and then extends his arms, inviting her to enter. She looks at him with disdain and walks away. He shrugs.

When Lello opens the bathroom door, Umberto pushes him aside and rushes inside.

He frantically opens the cover of the toilet tank. An enormous sculptured head calmly watches him. He reaches into the water and grasps a cigarette case. The men struggle, and eventually the lid of the water tank drops to the floor down with a clang.

Lello grabs Umberto by the lapels and shoves him against the wall. He motions at him to be silent and walks to the door, with Umberto following and insulting him loudly: “Scoundrel, crook, that’s what you are! Want to send us all to jail?”

“Will you tell me what’s wrong with you?!” demands Lello gesturing. “Idiot! You should be helping me.”

“I’ll report you! I’ll sound the alarm!”

“So you’ll be involved too!” Umberto screams in pain as Lello twists his arm and warns, “If you don’t stop, I’ll break your head. I’m not kidding!” Lello furiously shakes his hand in Umberto’s face but a knock at the door stops them short.

In falsetto, Lello and Umberto call out: “*Verboten!*”

Lello takes Umberto by the arm. “Walk!”

“No!”

“Come on!”

“No! Don’t push me!”

It’s like a conversation between a parent and a disobedient child.

Gripping Umberto’s arm in an iron grip, Lello finally escorts him out, past the woman Umberto met earlier. She scrutinizes them suspiciously through eyeglasses.

“You know what?” Umberto says, finally breaking free. “Do what you want, but do it after I’ve left with the lady who honors me with her friendship, understand?”

“You leave the lady alone and go away,” Lello instructs him, with a push. Then he heads to the bathroom to collect his loot.

A waiter refills Gioia’s glass with champagne. As she sips, Umberto grabs her arm, throwing her off-balance. He says urgently, “Let’s get out of here right now.”

“But where?” she asks, calmly. She has no intention of leaving now. “Where’s Lello?”

“You don’t know him! Understand?” warns Umberto, jabbing his finger at her. “You never did. He’s a criminal.”

With a warning look, she says, “Oh, jealousy is such an ugly thing. I’ve known you for over twenty years. Every time I liked someone, there he is, the same story. The accountant, Capecchi, was schizophrenic. Di Pietro was gay/shifty. Servadio was a blackmailer. Tell me, what is this one?”
“This one is worse than the others! And if I may... I’d tell you that he could be...”
“My son. Boor! I’ll throw this glass in your face! You’re rude! A boor!”

She goes on, “Now, I’ll tell you something. Even if he’s younger than me, I don’t care at all! Because, actually, I don’t have to marry him. And since for me, he’s nice, and I like him – his looks, too...”
“Oh, yes? You like him?”
“Yes!”

“If that’s the way it is, come to the bathroom with me; I’ll show you something.”
“Look, calm down, or I’ll slap you in front of everyone and we’ll spoil the evening, you know? What have you got on your mind? Dirty old man!”
Umberto panics now, bringing his hands to his face in horror. “What did you think I meant? It’s a matter of life and death!”

He grabs her arm and starts to drag her to the restroom.
“Umberto, don't exaggerate! Tell me where Lello is!” she insists.
“I only can tell you where he’s from and where he will end up. He’s going to end up in jail!”

As he pulls her into the bathroom, Umberto persists with his accusation, “He’s a professional thief, I tell you!”
“Why do you hang out with him, then? You’re the one who introduced me to him!”
“I didn’t want to. But you were alone; I was nearly broke. Now I’ll show you that he’s a thief who hides the loot in bathrooms.”

“Hides what?!”
As they stand beside the toilet, Umberto says, “ I hope they don’t catch us or they’ll think it was us!”
Then, to get across the gravity of the situation, he uses a word that is actually way too formal:
“Ascertain! Ascertain!”
Between them the oversized marble head gazes impassively out at the camera.

Gioia stares down into the toilet tank, which is uncovered.
“Have you ascertained?” insists Umberto.
But it is empty.

“But the loot was there before! I swear!”
“I’m through with you this time!”
Gioia leaves the room and Umberto follows, wondering, “Where could he have hidden it?”
“Do me a favor, get yourself checked by a doctor!”
“That rascal!”

Outside the bathroom stands a tall man: the one watching Lello and Gioia earlier. Impassive, he gazes after them as they walk away.

Fed up, Gioia confronts Umberto: “Go away, disappear! I don’t want to see you again. You've done everything to ruin an evening that is a dream for me. But you didn’t succeed. In your face, I’ll keep on having fun with him because I like him to death.”

That’s when Lello appears, whistling, with Gioia’s purse in his hand.

“There he is!” says Umberto.

She calls him over.

“Lello, come. Do you know what this gentleman says about you? That you’re a thief and a scoundrel.”

“It’s true,” says Umberto. “He’s a thief and a scoundrel.” Then to Lello: “Where did you hide the loot?”

“What’s he saying?” asks Lello, incredulous.

“He’s crazy, crazy! Don’t pay attention to him,” she replies.

Behind them, the tall man steps into the doorway, still watching.

“Anyway, I told him that, even if you are a thief and a scoundrel, I couldn’t care less. In fact, as for your earlier question, it’s fine with me, you know what I mean, don’t you?” At that, Lello puts his arm around her. Umberto looks crestfallen. Tormenting him further, she adds, “If you want, we’ll tell you what we’ve agreed on.”

“I know,” retorts Umberto, wagging his finger at them. “Jail for both of you. And without parole!”

As Lello and Gioia laugh, Umberto gives a curt bow and walks away.

“Oh, what a character!” comments Gioia. “If he doesn’t spoil the cheer, he’s not happy.

In the other room, Umberto looks in the mirror and adjusts his bowtie. Lello covers Gioia’s shoulders with the fur.

Then he puts his arms around Gioia, holding her purse in front of her. Umberto comes bursting back in and grab the purse, saying, “Here’s where he hid the stuff. I knew it!”

Umberto lunges for the purse and Lello struggles with him, crying out, “Leave it alone! Do you want to ruin me? Bastard!”

“I’ll smash it on your face!” says Gioia. Is Umberto back yet again to ruin her evening?

Then the purse comes open and the contents spill out onto the floor. There, among all Gioia’s personal items is the stolen cigarette case.

Umberto says triumphantly, “Are you convinced now?”

Gioia looks down at the stolen cigarette case in disbelief.

At their side, the tall man yells in German, “Franz! Johann! Come here!”

Above her black-gloved hand, Gioia’s face is a mask of horror. Franz and Johann come running, and the tall man barks orders like a military commander in German (which the Italians don’t understand), “Put them against the wall – and do not let them escape! Quick!” The three broad-shouldered men tower over our hapless trio.

“Yes, sir!”

He leaves the room.

The two remaining Germans shove the Italians, who cannot understand the orders being shouted at them.

“What’s happening? What’s happening?” asks Umberto. It must be especially frightening for him after his experiences in the war.

The three are lined up against the wall by the side of the stairs that lead back to the entrance. Under the subdued lighting, each looks quite solemn.

As a door opens, light floods across their faces, as if in an interrogation room. The tall man comes in, with the host close by. He stoops to pick up the stolen item from the floor. It’s almost under the Christmas tree, like a misbegotten gift. He holds it out to the host to show him.

While the Germans confer among themselves, the Italians muster what composure they can. Umberto, humiliated, puts his face in his hands, then rubs his hands together from the tension, and then hides his face again.

When the host leaves, the tall man begins speaking in Italian. “His Excellency wants to begin this year with a very generous gesture that I don’t agree with. Arms up! Please!”

Another man frisks them one by one, tossing Gioia’s fur back at her after a careful inspection. “Nothing,” he says in German.

The tall man barks, “*Raus! Schnell!*” (Out! Fast!)

At first, the Italians don’t understand. But when someone throws Lello’s trench coat at him, they turn and walk up the stairs toward the exit, as the other guests watch from below. It’s a striking contrast with Gioia’s triumphant exit from the Milleluci dance hall earlier.

As they approach the front door, Gioia stops under the chandelier and looks back at the row of guests still bearing witness.

It’s no use. Gioia’s excursion to the mansion is at an end. For her, in any case, it was an impossible dream. The fairy tale is over.

The Germans stand watching until the intruders have been expelled and the door closes.