

## The Passionate Thief, Part VIII

Mario Monicelli, Dir. (1960)

Gioia gazes in disbelief at the necklace in her hands. In the church, worshippers are talking: “What is it?” “What’s happening?”

Their voices grow louder: “It’s the madonna’s necklace!” “Oh, my God!” “God!”

Behind Gioia, the priest goes to the glass cabinet that holds the Madonna.

He cries out, “They’ve stolen the necklace from the Madonna!”

The worshippers stare accusingly at Gioia. They’re still dressed in their formalwear from New Year’s Eve.

Umberto, hands folded on his chest, wakes up from his nap.

From offscreen, the priest cries, “Help!” and we see the worshippers stand and move toward Gioia, a few nuns in their midst.

“Close the doors! Thief! Close the doors!” yells the priest.

Gioia looks terrified, like a trapped animal.

Thinking quickly – or perhaps just panicking – she puts the ornate necklace around her neck.

Gioia has a plan: she gets down on her knees in front of the altar, and yells at the top of her lungs, “Miracolo!!!” Mouth wide open, eyes wild, arms spread, she seems possessed. But we notice her purse is stowed safely on her shoulder.

She closes her eyes as if in devotion and repeats, more softly, “Miracolo!” A crowd gathers around her.

“Miracolo! Miracolo!” she repeats. “Our Lady made a miracle for me!” Surrounded by the churchgoers, she is lit as if by a shaft of light from heaven.

Voices spring up in response: “But what miracle?” “She was running out!” “Shameless!”

Gioia insists, “I really saw her! She came down and put it on me.”

Two young priests seize her by the arms. A voice says, “She was with a young man.”

Gioia has fully committed to her role. “I saw her,” she says, as the priests take her away. “How beautiful she was! How beautiful!” Spellbound, staring skyward, she gives the performance of a lifetime.

The onlookers are skeptical: “She’s the thief!” “It’s a trick!”

But Umberto pops up in the crowd, yelling to defend his friend, as he has been doing all evening. “It’s not true! It’s not true! I saw it!” he says, in the voice he has spent years perfecting. “I am a witness! It was like a great light!”

At the center of attention, he goes on, with broad gestures, “A beautiful heavenly figure appeared, wrapped in a puff of cloud. I say it! Miracle! I saw her!” In his face, we see the contentment of an actor playing to his audience.

But the crowd turns on him. Someone accuses, “He’s the young man that was with her!”

“What young man?!” he responds, pointing to his head. “I’ve got white hair!”

But the crowd closes in on him and he's dragged away by two more priests, still yelling. "Leave me alone! This is mistreatment! I will take this to the Holy Throne!"  
The screen fades to black.

A group of little boys in swimming trunks runs along a roadway beside the Tiber river, yelling and fooling around. They're still wet from their swim. It's a sunny summer's day.

They descend on a watermelon stand like a flock of excited birds, grabbing at the fruit under a fringed sunshade. "Behave, kids, behave yourselves!" the vendor scolds. "Put the watermelons down! You want to ruin me? Hands off! Go away!"

Behind them, we see a figure in white pants and a jaunty straw hat: it's Umberto, leaning against a monumental stone wall.  
A heavy metal door opens and a uniformed guard emerges.

Behind him, Gioia appears, wearing the clothes from New Year's Eve: the spangly dress and high heels. She's carrying the fox fur and a small woven basket.  
One of the kids calls out, "Look at that madwoman!"

Umberto runs towards her, in his scurrying fashion, knees slightly bent. We see that he's carrying an umbrella – on this glorious Roman summer day.  
"Tortorella!" he yells out, in extreme delight.  
"Umbe'," she says quietly, with hesitation.  
"I heard from the lawyer and I came," he explains.  
"Good."  
"But how...?" he begins, indicating what she's wearing.

"But what?!" she snaps at him, walking away.  
He's brought her the umbrella as a gift. "Remember that gift certificate they gave us at the Milleluci party?" He explains, "Here, I bought it for you, with the discount." He hands it to her, asking, "Can you guess what it is?"  
"An umbrella – for men. Couldn't you get something else?" she asks, disappointed.  
"There was only this, a thermos and a polo bat."

The camera cuts away to two motorcycle riders, who are observing our pair. They're wearing helmets and dirty leather outfits, with grease on their faces. The woman leans over to her companion and says, in English, "Oh, Richard, look at the funny way these Italians dress!"

Keeping pace with Gioia, Umberto says, "I came also to tell you that I started a little job at Cinecittà. A mythological film. I've been working on it for days. I'm a slave on an ancient Roman ship." At this, Gioia lets out a hearty laugh with her mouth wide open. She's getting her spirit back.

"Yes!" he goes on. "I would have liked to be able to work with you again."  
"How handsome you must be! I don't know, Umberto, dear, because..." She stops and rests the basket on the stone wall, still carrying her fur. "Because who knows my commitments... I know they are looking for me. Loads of phone calls at home..."

“It’s so hot that I can’t stand it,” she says abruptly.

He asks her, “Why are you dressed like that?”

“Why? What day is it today?”

“Ferragosto, \* no?”

Gioia replies, “Who told you that? Today is January first! For me, the year begins today. Yes, indeed.”

*\*[Ferragosto](#) is a holiday celebrated in Italy every August 15. The whole country shuts down – businesses are closed, except for restaurants and bars – and everyone heads to the beach. If you missed it at the time, you’ll enjoy reading [our cineracconto about Il sorpasso](#) (Dino Risi, 1962), an iconic road movie that takes place over Ferragosto.*

She continues, “This is how I went in and this is how I go out!” and she gives a shimmy, setting her spangles in motion. Then she shakes her fur, which scatters a great cloud of white fluff into the air. Umberto dusts off his jacket.

“Damn them!” she says. “They let it get moth-eaten!”

Then she laughs. “Who gives a damn! Fly!” she yells, throwing her fur into the river.

“What are you doing?!”

I’ll buy a new one!”

“I sense that things are going to go well, Umbe’!” she tells him. “Look at those boys in the boat!” Down below, some young men are rowing on the river. “Have you seen those hunks?”

Looking him up and down, she adds, “Well, I’d say, I don’t know, they’re the ones who should be working on the ship, not you!”

Slightly offended, he pats himself on the chest, checking his form.

She laughs and hands him the basket. “Let’s go! Walk, slave! Let’s go! New year, new life! Damn, how hot it is!”

“Yes, you’re right!”

They walk on. “Enough with misery!” proclaims Umberto, raising the umbrella.

They hail an approaching taxi, calling out happily, “Taxi! Taxi!”

Gioia spreads wide her arms.

Umberto exclaims, “Let’s use the last of our reserves.”

Then, ever the gentleman, he opens the door for her. “Please, ma’am, have a seat!”

“Oh, thank you so much!” She gets in.

“I’m coming, too!” Umberto gets in too. He closes the door and we see the taxi turn around and take off.

But, after a moment, the taxi screeches to a halt. A door opens, and out comes Gioia, followed by Umberto. They stand in the road as the vehicle leaves.

“So,” she says, hands together at her waist in a gesture that means ‘this is hopeless.’ “You’re the same old bum, my dear. If you don’t have a lira, why say ‘Down with misery!’ ‘Let’s use our last reserves!’?”

“I thought you had some.”

“Me?” she counters, incredulous.

He shrugs. “I made a significant expenditure for the raincover,” he says, using a word too sophisticated for the occasion, as he often does.

He holds it out to show her and she grabs it and shakes it at him. “I’d beat you on the head with this raincover!” she says angrily.

She hands it back to him: “Open it, at least we’ll protect ourselves from the sun.”

As they set out on their walk, the exuberant music that began the film strikes up again.

“Damn it, Umberto!” she yells. They approach the steps that lead to a riverside walkway, which recedes diagonally across the frame, calling our characters on to the future.

Umberto opens the umbrella and, together, they begin Gioia’s New Year.