

## The Passionate Thief, Parte III

Mario Monicelli, Dir. (1960)

After paying for the taxi, Umberto joins Gioia in the ballroom, taking his position by the third column. One whole side of the column is covered with a mirror.

“Go find a table, Umberto,” she says.

“Tortorella, think whatever you want, but I can’t move from here!”

“Here, where?”

“From here, the column.”

“Are you stupid?”

“I may be stupid, but I can't move from here.”

“Listen to me, Umberto, go look for a table.” We see her incredulous expression in the mirror. “When your friend comes, you get up and get her, that’s it!”

“No!” he insists. “I can’t. The meeting is here.”

“We’re not going to stand here the whole night like two dummies, are we?”

Defeated, he sets off on his search for the table.

At that moment, Gioia and Lello seem to lock eyes. We see him in the mirror in a perfectly crafted composition that rhymes her bent elbow and its reflection.

Gioia fans herself flirtatiously with her fur. She turns toward the mirror, closing her eyes in a kind of romantic reverie. When she opens them – Lello has vanished!

Lello reappears at the side of the column, dapper in his bow tie. She is gazing in the opposite direction, looking startled and disoriented. A few strands have already come loose from her immaculate coiffure.

As a voice announces a lottery with the numbers from the entrance tickets, Lello notices something in the distance. He walks towards it, with quiet intensity.

Umberto returns. “Has anyone come for me?”

“No, not even the mail has arrived. But someone arrived for me.”

His search for a table was unsuccessful: “Everything is taken.”

“You want to see if I get going, I’ll find one?” Looking at Gioia, fierce and confident, it seems like a pretty safe bet.

“So you find one!”

“Listen, if you want to dump me, there’s no need to go on and on, you know! I can find plenty of escorts.” Gioia joins the fingers of her left hand in the Italian gesture for “plenty” and glares at him. “In fact, I already found one. There’s a guy who’s been staring at me for more than half an hour.” So this is who was distracting Gioia earlier, outside the ballroom. “He’s younger, and handsome too! You oaf!” She storms away.

As they begin preparations for the lottery, Umberto makes himself comfortable: he leans against the column, arms crossed, eyes closed. Suddenly a small object hits him in the chest. Lello has thrown it: he’s standing behind a group in ridiculous party hats.

Lello points down at the woman wearing the largest hat – a kind of cartoon sombrero – and the camera zooms in on a massive diamond brooch on her dress. When the woman gets up, Lello gestures to Umberto to join him.

As Umberto makes his way through the crowd, Lello follows the woman. Meanwhile, the lottery is beginning. We see the wheel containing the tickets.

In the crowd of onlookers, the woman in the hat has her back to the camera. Lello is close by, smiling vaguely. When she turns around, the brooch is gone! Umberto puts one hand to his open mouth, astounded.

Lello again gestures with his head at Umberto, whose task is to collect the brooch and stash it in the toilet tank. Across the room, Umberto nods back, with a look of weary acceptance.

The master of ceremonies calls the winning number: “Sixty one!”  
From among the throng, Gioia yells, “Here it is! Umberto, we have sixty one!” We see her jumping up and down, holding up the winning ticket.  
Lello is frozen in disbelief. He stares into the camera, with the great throng behind him.

Gioia grabs Umberto and drags him to the stage. She turns to look at the crowd, delighted. Then, with Umberto at her side, she approaches the MC (Gianni Bonagura), balding and wearing glasses. He announces, “The lucky winners are none other than Mr. and Mrs....?”

Gioia gives their names: “Umberto Pennazzuto and Gioia Fabbriotti.”  
“Business owners?”

“No, actors,” replies Gioia, head held high, resplendent in her white fur. Umberto looks on adoringly. Off to the side, Lello is biting his fist. He still has the diamond brooch on him. And he does have that nervous condition. This evening is not going as he’d planned.

“Actors?!” exclaims the MC. “Ooo-la-la! How could we not tell right away? Then you’re guests of honor! Cinema or theater actors?”

“Cinema, theater, operetta, variety,” Umberto assures him. They can do anything!  
The MC insists that they perform. Eyes wide, Lello puts his hand on his head in disbelief. Can this really be happening??

“All right,” says Gioia, arms outstretched to the audience. “Thank you! Thank you!”

The MC formally announces them, getting Umberto’s name wrong. Umberto doesn’t seem to care. But he announces Gioia as “Mrs.” and she makes sure to correct that: “Miss.”

As Gioia and Umberto discuss what to perform, the camera returns to the woman in the sombrero. Lello still stands close by, scratching his head in frustration.

While Umberto puts on a funny hat, making faces, Gioia prepares to sing, with a look of stern concentration. Just as the band begins to play, our friend in the sombrero throws her head far back and laughs, clapping her hands to her chest. Abruptly, her expression changes to shock and horror.

“My brooch! Oh, god, where’s my brooch?!” She shakes the man next to her.

Gioia and Umberto have begun to sing. But with all the commotion, Umberto stops the band.

The woman is fighting with everyone around her, pushing them and spilling out accusations. Meanwhile, Lello has stepped aside to set the brooch into a planter. Someone finds it there and hands it to the woman. “Ma’am, here it is!”

So, the show can go on!

“Ladies and gentlemen, a little silence please!” requests Gioia.

The crowd keeps chattering away. “We are artists, you know! It’s not polite!” From behind the singers, the camera shows us the audience. On the left, Lello, still behind the sombrero woman, is glaring at Umberto, wondering how the evening got away from him.

Gioia turns back to the band: “If you please, Maestro!”

When the music begins, Gioia shimmies, making the spangles on her dress move. Umberto, with the face of a stoical clown, holds up one finger, as if testing the air.

In this comedic film, the players – and their gestures and motions – are shown mostly in medium and long shots, but here we have a rare close-up of Gioia and her passionate expressions as she sings, alongside a deadpan Umberto.

As Gioia sings, Umberto moves back and forth behind her. It’s a very silly song, apparently one they have performed together in the past, and the audience is soon rapt and amused.

*Geppina, smoky girl,*

*Has a head with a turned up nose*

*Her love is called “Nobody”*

*And she floats around in a tutu.*

*At night, Geppina acts like the sun.*

*And she paints the day blue.*

Lello stands in front of them, arms crossed, completely disgusted.

His hands at his side, Umberto makes his hat move along with his eyebrows. Then he chimes in and they sing together:

*Geppina, the more she lives*

*and the more she dies,*

*You see her...*

*and she’s no longer there!*

*Geppina, Gepi, your voice*

*Geppina, Gepi, your light*

*You are so strange, but I like you!*

*I like you, I like you so much the way you are!*

Umberto is googly-eyed. The audience laughs uproariously at the combination of Gioia’s passion and Umberto’s zany antics.

The song comes to a close:

*I want you,*

*Only you, only you, only you!*

The audience cheers. Well, all except one: Lello, right at the front, looks very serious indeed.

The audience cheers on and on. Even the musicians seem impressed.

Gioia is thrilled: she wasn't expecting this kind of adulation on New Year's Eve. Umberto has returned to his deadpan expression, which he uses onstage to contrast with his crazy faces.

In the front row, Lello too is applauding! No, he's just using a fake clapping gesture to draw Umberto's attention. Finally noticing, Umberto murmurs, "Oh, God, he's here!"

Gioia turns to the MC and accepts a bottle of champagne as he tells her, "Here's to you with all our best wishes and compliments."

Meanwhile, as her back is turned, Umberto steps off the stage and Lello leads him away.

She asks the MC, "Since you are so kind, couldn't you get us a table?"

"We'll arrange it, right away!" He calls a waiter, "A table for the lady and gentleman and take care of them— and remember: top service!"

Although the audience has stopped clapping, Gioia spreads her arms and waves at them like a diva, curtsying. She wouldn't mind a little more admiration. "Thank you! Thank you, everyone!" she says, triggering another round of applause.

Back at the mirrored column, Lello is grasping Umberto's arm very firmly. "You're hurting me!" Umberto complains. We see his imploring expression in the reflection and the silly hat still on his head.

"What do you mean 'hurting?' If you don't do as I say, I'll hurt you for real!" Lello scolds Umberto as if he's a child, shaking a finger at him. Eyes downcast, Umberto's face shows a mixture of submission and reproach. "But, excuse me, I couldn't leave the lady alone!" he protests. "First of all, she's a distinguished colleague!"

Lello shakes his fist threateningly. "Do as you're told: go put it in the toilet tank right away."

"Yes, sir. But what?"

Grabbing Umberto by the lapel and, pulling him up close, he hisses, "What I put in your tux!"

Umberto finds the object – a cigarette case – right where Lello has deposited it, in his secret pocket. Astonished, he covers his mouth with his hand, emitting a low moan. Lello has already gone.

Gioia comes running up, still holding the bottle of champagne. She grabs Umberto's arm. Startled, he drops the cigarette case, which slides across the floor. A man stoops to pick it up.

"Oh, God!" says Umberto.

"What happened to you?" asks Gioia. In the mirror, we see her look of concern and puzzlement. All evening, she's been aware that Umberto has not been himself.

"I know what happened to me. Anyway, one of these days, you'll find out too."

Umberto tries to convince her to leave. "Are you crazy?" she asks him. "We've got a table now!"

"Listen to me: let's go!" His terror is real, but his expression is comical.

"Listen Umberto, don't be an oaf and don't spoil my evening! The waiter is coming, okay?"

The waiter approaches them, bows slightly, and asks, "Are you having dinner?"

"No!" answers Umberto.

"Yes!" says Gioia, at practically the same moment.

"We're dining, yes!" Gioia insists.

The waiter holds up his pad to take their order. "10,000 lira."

“What?!” asks Umberto in disbelief. In the mirror, Gioia’s look of innocent delight has disappeared. “5,000 lira cover charge, everything a la carte.”  
“It wasn’t an invitation? It wasn’t...” Gioia is disappointed. “Excuse us a minute.”  
The waiter backs away.

“Don’t you have the 10,000?” she asks Umberto.

“No. I paid for the taxi.”

“What a bum you are. You’ve ruined my evening. Jerk!”

She calls the waiter back. “I’m so sorry, but the gentleman reminded me just now that we had an invitation and we’d completely forgotten about it.”

“You know how it is,” says Umberto, eyebrows raised. He has the satisfied look of a little boy who’s just gotten away with something.

“Some other time,” says Gioia. “Please be so kind as to give our thanks to the organizers and – oh well!”

With a little bow, the waiter leaves.

The second the waiter has gone, their smiles vanish.

Gioia is furious. “You made me look so bad! Take off that hat!” She reaches up to grab it and throws it to the ground angrily.

“Let’s go!” she says cheerfully and loudly. Then she takes his arm and they head for the exit. They put on smiles for the crowd, which applauds again as they depart. But one person is not applauding: Lello, lighting a cigarette, is surprised to see his assistant leaving before their night’s work has even begun.

He throws his cigarette on the floor and rushes to the coat check. “The raincoat.”

When the attendant asks for his ticket, he’s so angry at Umberto that he yells at her, poor thing. He looks quite crazed.

Back out on the wet sidewalk, Umberto e Gioia walk and bicker. Gioia asks, “Even on New Year’s Eve you don’t have 10,000 damn lira?” She throws up a hand, her black glove seems to be a reproach for him. “Now tell me how we’ll spend midnight, you and I alone in the street. Tell me.”

“So in your opinion the lack of funds is a sin? You should blame society, not me!”

“The society of dogcatchers that hasn’t taken you away yet!”

“Come on,” he says. “Let’s make peace. I offer you a beautiful pizza!”

Then he asks with a little laugh, “Do you have the money?”

“What did you say!” They’ve stopped walking.

“Money, do you have some?”

“Listen, Umberto. I’ve got to tell you something.” She lowers her head, as if about to charge at him. “I am really fed up. For 20 years I’ve been paying for your pizza, maritozzi\*, cappuccinos...!”

As they’re about to set off again, Gioia glances in a restaurant window. Down below, she sees her friend Mimi with the group that she missed at the fountain!

“Umberto! Colombini! Look who’s here! Hey, you fools!” She greets them happily, in Roman dialect.

They look up at the window and wave back.

\*A kind of pastry

“Come on, Umberto!” she cries, grinning and urging him on. “Come on, Umberto!” she cries, grinning and urging him on. “At least we’ll end the year well!”