

The Passionate Thief, Parte VII

Mario Monicelli, Dir. (1960)

As Gioia and Umberto walk out of the mansion, side by side, the day is breaking. Umberto wraps himself in his tuxedo to keep the chill at bay. Gioia has the white fur wrapped around her shoulders.

As they descend the stairs, we see Lello on the sidewalk, hurrying away. A clock shows that it's almost six thirty. Pulling on his coat, Lello glances back at them, but he keeps walking.

The wet street is strewn with debris from the New Year's festivities. Eyes cast down, Lello gives a hard kick to a can, which clatters loudly. Behind him, Gioia and Umberto are pressed tightly together as they walk, to share the warmth.

Seeing what Lello has done, Gioia bends down and picks up a can. She throws it at him, yelling "Bastard!" It hits him square on the head and he doubles over in pain.

Bending over, he picks up something else to throw back at her, threatening, "I'll kill you!" But Umberto runs to shield Gioia, arms thrown in the air.

Gesturing once more with her black glove, Gioia taunts Lello: "Throw it! Why don't you throw it? You're even capable of hitting a woman. Throw it!" She and Umberto are moving closer to Lello. He finally tosses aside the object, which falls to the street with a clang. Hand pressed to his lips, he walks on.

Gioia is unrepentant: "I'm a wretch, but I've never been thrown out like this."

"Tortorella..." says Umberto, trying to comfort her.

"Leave me alone!" She pushes him aside and continues berating Lello. "You know what I say to you? If the Germans didn't go to the police station, I'll go myself!" Lello walks on, ignoring her. "Because it doesn't end here!" she harangues him.

In the shot, Lello looms in the foreground, a hard expression on his face. Behind him to the left, Gioia and Umberto are framed and confined within an urban canyon, formed by the walls of two buildings.

Suddenly, Lello he loses his temper. He turns and screams at her, "Go ahead! Go! Who's stopping you?"

Clasping his hands, Umberto says anxiously, "Tortorella, I don't think that would be a good idea."

Running ahead, she grabs Lello's arm to stop him, and then steps in front of him. "If you wanted to steal, go ahead and steal. But tell me why did you create that farce?" We see her indignant face over his shoulder.

"Why did you put feelings into the middle of this? Why are you such a coward?!" By now, she's screaming.

"Will you listen carefully?" he answers. "I meant what I said. And I say it again. But him, as your friend, should have told you: I'm with a thief, stay away. Because that's how it is! I am a thief. I'm a thief and I'm not ashamed of it!"

Umberto is at the edge of the shot, hand on his jaw, troubled.

Lello walks away and Gioia screams, “You’re even proud of it?!”

“That’s for sure!” Lello makes full use of the language of his hands. “Is his life better, living on accidents and health insurance? Huh?” He points over Gioia’s shoulder at Umberto, who raises a hand as if to fend off a blow.

Lello continues, with contempt: “I, at least, run some risks! When I was ten, I’d sneak into a camp and steal material from the Allies. That’s how it is! That’s how it is! In my family I was the only one who had a job!”

“A beautiful job you had!” Gioia screams, mouth wide open, black hand raised.

“What was I supposed to do? Starve to death like my father, who was a loser like him?” he retorts, pointing again at Umberto.

Lello goes on, his anger for years of injustice pouring out: “I started as a child and I’ll keep on doing it because I don’t want to end up like him!”

“Like your father?” asks Umberto hopefully.

“Like you!”

“Why should one man be born with millions and another in the middle of fleas?! Whose fault is that? Who gets the credit for that?!” demands Lello bitterly.

“You could have found a job,” comments Umberto.

“Oh, yeah, sure! ‘I should glue myself to a shovel!’ You old people always say the same thing!”

Gioia remains silent, but her expression changes: she looks at him with compassion.

“But who are you?” Lello continues his rant, counting on his fingers the things that Umberto is not.

“You’re nobody: neither a thief nor a respectable person. Well, I’m not like you and I say farewell!”

Lello turns abruptly and walks away, his heels clicking loudly on the wet sidewalk. As his figure shrinks into the back of the shot, Gioia turns very slowly to face Umberto. She gives him a hard stare for a moment, saying nothing.

Suddenly, she slaps him with all her force. The sound of the blow is startling.

Umberto brings his hand to his wounded face. “What is it?!”

“It’s that he’s right! It’s that it’s true!” She throws up a black glove in an impatient gesture. “That it’s our fault, too. It’s your generation’s fault, of people like you, if there are so many young people who are doing so poorly. You never thought about that, did you? You’re blessed!” she says sarcastically.

She turns and begins walking. He hurries after her. “Are you even defending him now?!” he asks, disbelieving.

“I’m not defending him, Umbe’, leave me alone. I understand him, I... something... *justify* him!” she builds up to a crescendo.

“He’s a criminal,” Umberto reminds her.

“Yes, he’s a criminal!” She stops and demands, “Tell me what you are! Tell me what you are!” Tugging on the sides of his tux, Umberto looks away, offended, as she continues to attack him. “With all the

tricks you do with the insurance... Tell me what I am: didn't we want to swindle those poor Germans? Didn't we?"

They walk past imposing stone buildings, old and imperturbable.

"Keep your voice down," he warns her.

She goes on, "But we don't have the courage to be criminals, he at least has the courage! He's a rebel!" Umberto tries to reason with her. "Tortore', let's call things by their names. He's a purse-snatcher, a chicken thief. That's what he is! Tell me you like him. That's why you're talking nonsense!"

Behind them, a man is sweeping the street of litter from the night before.

"No, no, no! I'm even reasoning too well! He wasn't born a criminal. They made him that way. How can you not understand, Umberto, that if there are so many unfortunate young people, it's the fault of society that is rotten?"

"Oh, really?" he answers, skeptically.

"One shouldn't abandon them. Sometimes a gesture, a word, can save one of them!" She raises her black glove again for emphasis.

"And you want to save him, huh?" he asks, grabbing her arm.

"You don't read the papers, Umberto, what can I do about it?"

"What do you mean, I don't read them?"

"You don't read them. Otherwise, you'd have read about all the scandals, all the swindles!"

She yells at him, "You are lucky that you don't understand anything!"

Umberto yells the same words at the same time as her as if it's not the first time he's heard that. But then he insists, "No! I understand way too much! I understand that you let him bewitch you." "Absolutely, I believe he was sincere. He'd be different if he'd been luckier."

Umberto looks up. "It's starting to rain."

"Trust me –" She seems to be unstoppable. But finally she notices, and tells Umberto, "Hey, it's raining!"

He says, "Let's go into the church. Run, run, run!" He lifts his tux up over his head revealing his bare back: his shirt and vest are just a facade, with nothing in the rear.

"At least you'll end the year well! With all the horrible sins you have on your conscience!" They rush into the church as the downpour begins.

An organ sounds in the dark church. Removing her gloves, Gioia dips her hand into the holy water, then she extends her wet hand to touch Umberto's so that he won't have to bother. With this water, they each make the sign of the cross.

They walk along the nave, where a service is in progress. Ominously, the chandeliers are reminiscent of the German mansion!

Umberto spots a chair and scurries over to it. It has been a long night – and it's not over yet.

By the time Gioia catches up to him, pulling on her black glove, his eyes are closed; he has had it.

In front of the altar, the priest is giving communion to the parishioners. Gioia's gaze travels around the church.

Something catches her eye and she gasps. She gives Umberto a nudge: "Umbe'!"

"What is it?"

She gives him another nudge. "Lello..."

Sure enough, Lello is standing beside the tall wrought iron gate that guards a side chapel.

"Oh," says Umberto, rolling his eyes, not too interested in having anything to do with the thief again.

But Gioia whispers, in awe, "I did say he was a good guy. Evidently, he had a bit of remorse."

Umberto cups his ear. Is he hearing correctly? "Remorse? That one there? Hah!"

"Then why did he come to church? He came by himself, not dragged, like you," she whispers. After all, they're in a sacred place. Then she notices that Lello has opened the gate and walked into the side chapel.

Another nudge: "Umbe', wait for me here, don't move."

"Who's moving?" All he'd like to do is take a nap.

Behind Gioia's head, a line of chandeliers runs into the distance. We really might be back at the German mansion.

She makes her way towards the gate, stopping briefly to genuflect: it's a motion not unlike a curtsy, but she pulls this one off like a pro.

Still wrapped in her fur, with a handkerchief on her head, Gioia walks through the ornate gate. She sees Lello in his white trench coat, apparently kneeling in prayer.

She reaches him just as he makes the sign of the cross and stands. He's shocked to see her. Her face, lit as if for a religious scene in a painting, is softened by forgiveness.

A statue of the Madonna watches from the chapel wall, just as the Roman sculptures were watching in the mansion.

"I wasn't expecting this," she says sweetly. "You in church!"

He looks over at the Madonna. We notice that several necklaces have been draped over her by parishioners. Turning back, he gazes not at Gioia, but past her, wondering perhaps how to make his escape.

"So?" he says.

"Why, are you ashamed? Maybe beginning the year like this brings good luck."

"Sure, sure, but if you want to continue our conversation, let's go outside."

"Where are you taking me? To clean out a bank?" But she regrets her harsh words immediately. "Oh, I am sorry, Lello..."

"Listen, Tortorella," he says without rancor, his eyes looking past her again. "Let's forget about it. Believe me, it's better for you."

As he looks directly at her, she says, "I'm sure of one thing: that you're not a scoundrel. No, maybe you're going through a difficult time. Isn't that it?"

"Yes, let's go."

He tries to leave, but she stops him. "If I could help you, I'd gladly do so, believe me. See, I was promised a job next week... and, if..." She looks at him with intense sincerity.

But then something catches her attention. The door of the case where the Madonna's statue stands is creakily closing.

"God, Lello! What have you done?"

"Shut up!" He says harshly in a quiet voice.

"Have you stolen from the Madonna?"

"Yes," he says curtly and walks out of the chapel. "Let me go. Get away!"

She follows him out, grabbing his arm. "You don't steal from the Madonna!" Hands in pockets, he tries to shake her off, but she won't let go.

"What do you have in your pocket?" she asks.

With great force, he snaps his arm away from her and keeps walking. But she hasn't given up. "Put back what you took, Lello!" she pleads.

Then she grabs him again, and he turns to face her. She warns him, "I won't let you get out of here."

By now, people are watching. "Oh, yeah? Here, then!" he says, and throws the stolen jewelry at her.

She catches the necklace, stunned, as he strides quickly towards the exit.