

Bicycle Thieves

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Scene 1

The public square in a working-class district on the outskirts of Rome. Crowds of unemployed people. On the steps of a public building, an official of the government employment agency appears to announce the few available jobs. A billposter is wanted. RICCI's name is called. But there is one condition: the applicant must supply his own bicycle. RICCI hesitates, but then assures the official that he has a bicycle.

Scene 2

Outside the tenement building, RICCI finds MARIA, his wife. She is in the queue at the outdoor pumps, where she collects heavy pails of water to carry up to their flat. He tells MARIA the news, and the problem: his bicycle has been pawned and they have no money to redeem it.

Scene 3

In their apartment, it is MARIA who is practical. She produces their most treasured possession, their wedding sheets. They can pawn these for money to redeem the bicycle so RICCI can get the job.

Scene 4

The pawn shop. At one window, MARIA pawns the sheets for 7500 lire. At another, RICCI redeems the bicycle for 6500.

Scene 5

The agency. Jealously guarding the precious bicycle, RICCI reports to his employers. He gets the job. With it goes a uniform and a cap, a symbol of status. RICCI is to start tomorrow.

Scene 6

Rejoining his wife, RICCI discusses his good fortune. There is even an allowance for new boots. On their way home, MARIA insists on paying a call on a friend. RICCI waits in the street outside the house. Growing curious, he follows her inside, discovers that she has joined a pathetic little crowd which has congregated in the waiting room of a FORTUNE TELLER. RICCI is exasperated, annoyed that his wife wastes the little money they have on such superstition. She insists that it was the FORTUNE TELLER who predicted that RICCI would at last find a job. Now that their luck has changed, the FORTUNE TELLER should be paid.

Scene 7

Next morning. The Ricci family consists of MARIA, her husband, their baby and BRUNO, a sturdy little boy of ten years old. MARIA fusses over the fit of RICCI's uniform. BRUNO proudly polishes the bicycle. BRUNO also has a job: he works at a gas station. RICCI accompanies his son to the station before he mounts the bicycle to ride off to his own employment.

Scene 8

At the government depot, a fellow worker instructs RICCI. Armed with ladders, brush and glue pots, the squad of billposters set off on their bicycles, in search of the billboards and city walls on which the posters have to be displayed. RICCI has a roll of advertisements for a current movie, a picture of Rita Hayworth in a bathing suit.

Scene 9

A city street in downtown Rome. To climb his ladder, RICCI has to leave his bicycle leaning against the wall. He is not yet expert at the work and preoccupied with the brush, the poster and the glue pot, does not notice the three men among the crowds of passersby. These are the thieves.

Scene 10

A police station. RICCI, in despair, reports the robbery. Can't the police do anything? An Inspector, on his way to a meeting, has no time for RICCI. He advises RICCI to look for his bike on his own.

Scene 11

RICCI is hours late at the gas station where he picks up his son. RICCI has come by bus. BRUNO notes the absence of the bike. Where is it? RICCI, walking off ahead of his son, will not explain or discuss the matter.

Scene 12

Sending BRUNO home, RICCI goes to the Working Man's Club, headquarters of the union. He is looking for a friend, a stout man who works as a city GARBAGE COLLECTOR who is also an activist in local labor movement politics. RICCI finds him in the middle of rehearsals for some amateur theatricals, and once more has to wait before his friend is free to discuss his dilemma. When the GARBAGE COLLECTOR finishes a heated debate over some political issue, RICCI tells him the story of the theft. His friend, who seems to know something of the local underworld, promises to help. MARIA, coming to look for her husband, finds the two men. Hearing the news, she begins to cry. The GARBAGE COLLECTOR agrees to meet RICCI the next day.

Scene 13

Next morning, RICCI and the friend, accompanied by BRUNO, explore the open-air marketplace from which the black marketeers and the thieves operate. There is a lively trade in dismantling, reassembling and repainting all kinds of bicycles. It seems to be a minor industry. At one point, RICCI finds a vendor repainting a bicycle frame which he is certain is his own. Accusing the man, he insists on summoning a policeman. On inspection, however, the serial number on the frame proves RICCI in the wrong.

Scene 14

Another marketplace. Now on their own, RICCI and BRUNO continue their hopeless searching. It begins to rain. The owners of the stalls close up their business and the marketplace empties. Suddenly, however, RICCI catches a glimpse of two figures. One of these he recognizes as the YOUNG THIEF, still mounted on the missing bicycle. RICCI runs towards them but once more the younger man is able to take off at high speed. With BRUNO, RICCI returns to capture the second figure, an OLD MAN who has also run off. Chasing him, they see him disappear into a church, a building adapted to a mission which offers free meals of bread and soup to those who attend Mass.

Scene 15

Mass. Obviously trying to evade them, the OLD MAN joins the worshippers on the benches. RICCI sticks close to him, trying to get his help in identifying the man with the bicycle. Where does he live? How can he be found? Prevaricating, the OLD MAN tries to deny all knowledge of his companion. To the embarrassment of the assembly, RICCI creates a scene, threatening the OLD MAN. In the ensuing confusion, the OLD MAN escapes from them, leaving the church.

Scene 16

Outside, RICCI and BRUNO can find no trace of him. BRUNO, frustrated at his father, makes a sarcastic comment, an implied criticism of his gullibility. Stung, RICCI slaps him. The son and the father confront each other. The son is unable to understand, the father is ashamed at himself but unable to apologize. As they continue their quest, both are angry and miserable. RICCI orders his son to wait for him on the bridge while he heads for the riverbank to look for the OLD MAN. After a little while, RICCI hears some shouting, an alarm because someone has fallen into the river. For an agonizing moment, RICCI fears that it could be Bruno. He is vastly relieved to discover the small boy still waiting for him.

Scene 17

In an effort to make amends, RICCI insists on taking BRUNO to a restaurant. This is obviously something that they can afford only on special occasions, and both are self-conscious in the presence of the other diners. The menu is, by RICCI's standards, expensive. BRUNO is hungry but also in awe, very aware of another boy at a nearby table who is better dressed, obviously a child of wealthy parents.

Scene 18

Later, as RICCI and BRUNO give up the search and start for home, RICCI passes the house of the FORTUNE TELLER. Depressed, he now makes BRUNO wait while he goes to visit the old woman. Can she give him any advice? The FORTUNE TELLER is unhelpful. Her only prediction is that if he doesn't find the bicycle today then it is lost forever.

Scene 19

As RICCI and BRUNO make for home, RICCI catches a glimpse of a young man whom he thinks is the thief. The YOUNG THIEF, seeing Ricci, breaks into a run.

Scene 20

Both RICCI and BRUNO pursue him into a house which proves to be a brothel. The MADAM and the girls are indignant at the disturbance, trying to defend the thief. But RICCI will not give him up, dragging the THIEF into the street.

Scene 21

In the street, a crowd collects. Roughly handled by RICCI, the YOUNG THIEF collapses. He appears to have an epileptic fit, falling to the ground. The crowd becomes hostile, siding with the sick youth against RICCI. As the crowd corners his father against a wall, BRUNO runs for help, returning with a POLICEMAN who breaks up the mob.

Scene 22

At RICCI's insistence, the POLICEMAN accompanies RICCI, BRUNO and the YOUNG THIEF to the thief's home. It is in a slum area.

Scene 23

The THIEF'S MOTHER protests as their miserable little room is searched. There is evidence of other pilfered material, but no sign of the bicycle. Privately, the POLICEMAN expresses sympathy with RICCI but warns him that there is very little that can be done. He might as well give up. As RICCI and BRUNO leave the slum street, they are followed by an angry crowd.

Scene 24

RICCI and his son return to the downtown thoroughfare to catch their bus home. The streets are very crowded. People are attending a sports event at a big stadium. RICCI is depressed and bitter. He studies the hundreds of bicycles parked outside the stadium. He also notes a single, unattended bicycle that has been left in a side street. BRUNO is squatting on the curb, waiting for his father. To BRUNO's surprise, his father gives him some money, telling him to make his own way home by bus. When the small boy hesitates, his father yells at him to hurry. BRUNO runs after the bus.

Scene 25

Left alone, RICCI returns to the unattended bicycle. His intention is obvious. He will himself turn thief.

Scene 26

Meanwhile, BRUNO fails to catch up with the bus. Just as RICCI finds courage to seize the bicycle, its OWNER appears, shouting, "Thief! Thief!" RICCI's escape is obstructed by the large crowds spilling out of the stadium. Some of them join the BICYCLE OWNER in his attempt to catch RICCI. As RICCI turns into the main thoroughfare, BRUNO sees his father chased by the crowd. They overtake him, pull him off the bicycle and begin to assault him. BRUNO in tears, tries to intervene. The OWNER of the bicycle, having recovered his property, sees the small boy's pitiful attempts on behalf of his father. Scathingly, the OWNER declares his contempt for a man who would let his own son be witness to such a situation, then tells the crowd that he will not make any charge against RICCI. The crowd lets RICCI go. As RICCI is released, BRUNO walks beside his father. BRUNO is weeping. Falling into step beside RICCI, the small boy takes his father's hand. RICCI is weeping now. The two continue walking.

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*The following is a “sequence outline” of Bicycle Thieves as written by
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1. At the government-built housing project, Antonio Ricci is informed he can have a job as a bill poster, but he must report with his bicycle.
2. Ricci talks with his wife Maria about their need for the bicycle he has pawned. She decides to pawn their linen to get the bicycle back.
3. In the municipal pawnshop, she pawns the linen for 7500 lire, and Ricci reclaims his bicycle for 6100.
4. Ricci reports to the poster office and is told to begin work the next morning.
5. Ricci shows Maria his new cap and talks of his prospects.
6. The apartment of the fortune-teller, Signora Santona. After telling two boys to watch his bicycle, Ricci follows Maria up and takes her away from the fortune-teller's room. Maria leaves 50 lire, because the fortune-teller had predicted Ricci's job. Ricci says the fortune-teller is a fraud.
7. Ricci's son, Bruno, polishes the bicycle early the next morning. Maria prepares Ricci's cap and packs lunch.
8. Ricci rides Bruno to Bruno's place of work.
9. A colleague shows Ricci how to paste up a poster. It is a poster for a Rita Hayworth movie.
10. On his own, Ricci struggles to put up a poster. Three men engineer

the stealing of his bicycle. A young man in a German WWII cap and jacket rides off on the bike, while an older accomplice plants himself in Ricci's way. A driver helps, but the accomplice gives the driver and Ricci false directions.

11. Police station. Ricci files his complaint. He gets no further help.
12. Ricci meets his son. Bruno asks about the bicycle. Ricci says it is broken. He won't go into his apartment with Bruno.
13. Workers' Party Headquarters in the basement of the housing project. The speaker wants a big public works program to furnish more jobs. Ricci is told to be quiet.
14. In another part of the basement, he finds his friend Biaocco rehearsing an amateur show. Biaocco suggests they search the market at Piazza Vittorio the next morning (Sunday). Maria comes to find Ricci.
15. The market at Piazza Vittorio on Sunday morning. Endless rows of bike frames in the stalls. Bruno is approached by a pederast. Biaocco and Ricci discover a man repainting a frame, but its registration number is not that of Ricci's bike.
16. The market at Porta Portese. Rain. Bruno falls down. Ricci sees the thief ride up to an old man and give him money. The thief escapes. Ricci and Bruno look for the old man.
17. The old man leads them to the Communion of the Poor. He tells them, eventually, that the thief lives on Via Campanelle. Then the old man slips away. Bruno chides his father, and Ricci slaps him.
18. Riverbank scene. Ricci tells Bruno to wait by the bridge while Ricci searches for the old man. Down the bank, Ricci hears cries from the bridge that someone is drowning. He rushes back and is relieved to find the victim is not Bruno.
19. Cafe. Ricci buys his son an expensive meal. They add up the salary and benefits Ricci would have had with the poster job.
20. The fortune-teller's apartment again. She tells Ricci, "Either you will find it immediately or you never will find it."
21. In the street, Ricci and Bruno spot the thief. (Perhaps they have gone to the Via Campanelle.) The thief ducks into a brothel.
22. Ricci goes into the brothel. "The young ladies" are having lunch. He drags the thief out into the street.
23. A crowd gathers in the street. The thief's mother shouts at Ricci from her window. The thief has an epileptic fit. The crowd grows angry. Bruno brings a policeman.

24. The thief's apartment is searched by the policeman and Ricci. The poverty of the family is evident. The policeman finds a hidden car tire, but no evidence of Ricci's bicycle. Ricci has to tell the policeman he has no witness other than himself. Ricci can make no charges.
25. The crowd in the street jeers at Ricci and Bruno.
26. Ricci and Bruno walk toward the soccer stadium. Bruno is nearly hit by a car. They sit on a curb. Ricci sees rows of bicycles outside the stadium. He sees also a single, old bicycle leaning against an apartment house wall. Before Ricci acts, the people come out of the stadium and claim their bikes. Ricci tells Bruno to take the trolley. Ricci steals the bike by the apartment house. He is seen by the owner.
27. The chase and capture of Ricci. He is shoved and threatened with arrest. Bruno comes up to his father crying. The owner lets Ricci go. "That's a nice trick to teach your son," says one of the crowd.
28. Ricci and Bruno walk toward home. Ricci fights back tears. Bruno takes his hand. They disappear into the crowd.

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