

STAZIONE TERMINI

C. 282.342

e) in inglese

pagine 61

TERMINI STATION

The Via Borgognona is a long, narrow street which starts in Piazza di Spagna. A well-dressed, beautiful woman, Maria, is walking down this narrow street while, behind her we can see street cars and automobiles speeding by in the Piazza di Spagna, or rather in that narrow part of it which we see framed by the walls of the Via Borgognona. On Maria's face we can discern anxiety and uncertainty, something which is coming to a head. She does not even notice a man who is walking by her side, most likely with the intention of starting a gallant conversation. Who knows for how long he has been following her? The man (turning towards her) mutters something unintelligible to her between closed lips. Maria abruptly turns the other way and faces the wall, while the man goes on his way, hesitating now and then to look round, as though he were going to wait for her again in another opening further down the semi-deserted street.

Maria, with a worried look, lifts her gaze to a window up there in that building over on the right. Today, as every other day, there is a man at that window, Antonio : he is waiting for her. From closer we can make out his face; between three scarcely - parted lace curtains - and from his eyeline we can see Maria approaching again looking up. Antonio draws away from the window, and lets the curtain fall, just as he always does.

Maria, arriving at the entrance slows up, and comes forward with an unusual effort: from the porter's glass lodge we can hear his repeated hammer blows as he busily mends a table. The porter sees her and, as usual, comes forward to open the elevator for her.

But this time Maria approaches with unusual hesitation: her face expresses suffering, almost anguish. She slips the porter her usual tip and then, struck by a sudden thought, she turns as though to go out again. She hears a door being opened up on the fourth floor, her door. Maria, almost at a run, hurries out into the street, whilst the astonished porter recloses the

elevator which at an unexpected buzz, goes rapidly on its way up. The porter looks up the well of the staircase; leaning over the bannisters on the fourth floor is Antonio, looking down. The empty elevator goes past the amazed and thunderstruck Antonio, to pick up a man waiting on the sixth floor. Where is Maria?

Maria almost runs down the Via Borgognona and, arriving in the Piazza di Spagna; boards on a trolley-car bound for Termini Station. The trolley-car is almost empty. Maria sees in the nearest seat and off goes the trolley-car. A man runs after it, bagging with his hands on the glass of the doors to stop it. No, it is not Antonio. The conductor also turns round, somewhat annoyed by the man running along beside the trolley-car, and shouting something which we cannot understand through the windows. He does not stop the car, however, and it now enters the Traforo tunnel, the noise of its passage amplified into vault each goings.

Suddenly the pole of our vehicle runs off the electric cable, and the jolt caused by the unexpected stop causes the passengers to bump against the seats

in front of them. The driver opens the automatic door, and both he and the conductor hasten down to set matters right, while five or six passengers watch operations through the windows. Maria gets up in a flurry and moves forward to sit in a seat near the exit door: the white arch of the tunnel is lit up by the brilliant flashes of other trolleys on street cars passing by.

We can hear the loud voices of the conductor on the ground, and of the driver, who has climbed onto the roof of the vehicle. All is now in order, and the conductor and the driver get back in again. Maria stares at the open doors with increasing anxiety. Perhaps she will get off the car. She gets up but, at that moment, the driver closes the automatic doors and the trolley cars continues on its way.

Maria sits with her hands in her lap, fiddling nervously with the clasp of her handbag. A man of about fifty sits down next to her and looks at her.

The car stops again and a cripple accompanied by an old woman get through the doors at the front end. The cripple is going to sit down, but the old woman says to

him "We'll soon be there now! " One can see that the man of about fifty would like to make conversation with Maria; but has not quite the nerve.

Now the trolley-car comes to a halt in front of the Station. Maria gets down and she is so worried that she does not even give way to the cripple. Maria realizes this when she has already alighted, turns as though to apologize, but changes her mind and starts to hurry towards the station, which dominates the large square with its imposing mass.

The man of fifty prepares to follow Maria, but seeing the hurry she is in, he stops and watches her go. Maria, weaving her way between trams and other vehicles arrives beneath the huge central projecting roof. Maria enters the crowded station. Evidently she does not know her way around Termini very well. She looks to right and left seeking to orientate herself and then goes over to the enormous panels with the times of arrivals and departures. In certain places the crowd is so dense that it forms actual columns, and Maria has to fight her way through these moving bar-

riers of people. In front of the enormous time-table are about fifteen or twenty priests, all with their noses in the air.

Maria has not found what she was looking for on the time-table, for she goes with hasty steps to the Information Bureau, which is located in the great hallway, shining with glass and light. The employe, in halting English is giving an itinerary to a party of foreigners. Maria is in a hurry and interrupts him to ask what train for Trieste is due to leave. The clerk gives her an impatient look and replies "Six o'clock". But Maria wants to know whether it is possible to leave earlier and again the clerk, between fragments of conversation with the English, who are plying him with long-winded questions, hurriedly explains that there is a train leaving for Bologna at five o'clock, but that it is no use to her, as she would have to wait there to connect with the train leaving Rome two hours later, at seven o'clock. Maria says that she will wait at Bologna instead of here.

Now Maria is in the vast hall of the main booking

office. There are long lines of people in front of almost all the ticket offices. Maria gets into the tight line, having checked the notice giving details of the class and route. In front of her is a woman with a baby, and at her feet are several large packages, on which another child is sitting. Maria's eyes catch those of the baby, and she looks at him a long time. A rather pretty girl slips indifferently into the line in front of the woman with the packages, who looks at the girl with hatred. Beyond the great plate-glass windows, behind the booking-clerks, a train pulls noisily into platform number one.

Maria gets a sudden idea. She leaves the line and runs to a telephone booth on the other side, opposite the ticket-office. It is a sort of glass cage standing side by side with another larger one; this is the writing room with a table in the middle, over which a number of persons are bending as they write; Maria has a counter in her handbag. She dials the number and waits a while. Perhaps there is nobody there. She is just about to replace the receiver, when she gets an

answer. She says that she is leaving in twenty five minutes; if possible to bring her suitcase to the station. We gather that there is nobody at home and that she is talking to the maid "Tell this to my sister; Maria has had to leave because... because the little girl is not very well... I will send a telegram from Trieste... I said I would telegraph... Send someone with the bag, if you can... I am catching the train for the Brenner... Brenner...Brenner..."

Maria comes out of the glass cabin and goes back to the ticket office. The line of people is now longer than ever, so Maria without wasting further time, goes over to the platform-ticket machine. She has no counter for the slot-machine, so she will have to over to the tobacconist to buy one. As she hesitates there a moment in doubt, a clean looking sergeant of the infantry, who has come up to the slo-machine a second later than her, offers her his counter. Maria accepts and would like to pay him for it. But the sergeant with polite and rather refined manners waves aside the offer. Maria gets the ticket from the machine, and tries

once more to be allowed to pay for the counter. The sergeant with the utmost ceremony, refuses the money, and as Maria leaves with a quick motion of thanks, he gets a ticket with another counter and follows Maria. The loud-speaker blares out "The Naples-Rome-Milan Express is just arriving at platform five! The Naples-Rome-Milan Express is just arriving at platform five!..."

Maria reaches the train for Bologna. Platform five. Many passengers go on and others lean out of the windows. Maria looks for someone, the ticket-collector of the train. She is standing by some porters, who are loading bicycles. She tells him that she wants to take a ticket to Bologna, and he tells her that she is still in time to get it at the booking-office if she wants. "No, I would prefer to take it on the train" says Maria. The man looks at her in some astonishment.

Maria gets into a second class carriage: a young man makes way for her, he wants to look at her legs. Maria is looking for a seat. She puts her head in to

two or three compartments in which all the passengers reply in unholy alliance, that it is already fully occupied. Finally, Maria takes off her hat and puts it on the little seat in the corridor. Looking at herself in the glass of the (mirror) window, she tidies her hair. There are children every where.

Then she looks out of the window, still very much worried, to see what the time is by the clock under the roof: there is still a quarter of an hour before they leave. Maria gets a thought: she hastily gets off the train and goes to a telephone which is attached to a pillar supporting the roof. She is very nearly run over by one of those very silent electric baggage-trucks driven by a porter standing on the front. For the second time she has no counter. She buys one from the newspaperman who stares at her, and she, almost instinctively, mutters a somewhat ugly word in her direction. Then he looks round quickly in alarm as though someone might have been able to overhear it.

Near the telephone, Maria meets the Sergeant, who salutes her and looks at her as if he were glad

to show he was looking at her. Maria dials the number and waits: she stops a moment absorbed in thought, and then, changing her mind, hangs up the receiver.

After all her haste and anxiety, she now shows an equally painful slowness. She removes the counter and wanders slowly back towards the train. The Sergeant now follows her more eagerly : he has the impression that this dawdling on the part of the unknown girl is all a maneuver for his benefit.

Maria gets back onto the train, now more crowded than ever, and with difficulty, regains her seat. There is a man sitting on it, but Maria's hand is in his hand. The man, in some confusion, relinquishes the seat. Maria sits down, and stares with a blank expression out of the window.

The sergeant has come to a stop on the platform near the train, and looks at her in the hope that she will look back. To give himself importance he stops two soldiers, who are passing by him with their haversacks on their shoulders, and says something to them, acknowledging the smart salute that they give him

with an air of nonchalance. At the salute, his eyes wander back to Maria's window to see whether she has noticed him. Maria does not see him and still stares fixedly in front of her. Meanwhile a man is moving steadily closer to her, walking very slowly sideways with little steps so that nobody will notice him.

Suddenly, who should appear under the roof of the platform but Antonio. Maria does not see him at once, but when she does a spasm passes over her face. Antonio is down there, his worried eyes searching down the train. At last he also sees her and stops; he would like to wave, to say something, but he just stands there looking at her and Maria looks at him. They do not speak for what seems an eternity. Behind Maria, people are performing acrobatic feats with luggage, pressing her against the window. On the platform in front of Antonio there are persons gesticulating wildly to the persons on the train, signalling with their hands in dumb - show to make themselves understood through the closed windows. Others are running about calling and searching. Things came to an almost desperate limit, when a man pulls Maria out of the