

STELLA

POLI

THE DISINVENTION *OF MILAN*

ENG

20 STRAF
ANNIVERSARY

July 27th, 2024.

34 degrees Celsius, sunny, 55% humidity. It's 11.40am.

Four fragmentation bombs exploded almost simultaneously: a planter in the Galleria, a flowerbed in Piazza Fontana and two waste bins at two corners of the square.

Seven seconds of almost dismay follow, like a held breath, then the sirens begin, and the screams.

The tentative toll is seven dead and fifty-two injured. Almost all foreigners, an emergency press conference is expected.

The area is blocked, new attacks are feared. For now, no one claimed responsibility.

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Ca' Granda Hospital. The emergency room is understaffed, the holiday season has begun, two weeks at a time. I'm waiting a lot, but, on the other hand, the wound is rather superficial. It bleeds, but less and less. I managed to dab by tearing the hem of my shirt. It was a linen poplin, tailored. Dark blue. The triage nurse compliments me on my promptness. I tell her that it doesn't hurt much, that the worst is definitely the shirt. The nurse smiles at me, her eyes far away.

She irrigates the area with saline solution. She says that someone will arrive soon to check for shrapnel residue. She doesn't make conversation, she doesn't ask me about my accent. She shakes her head every now and then. She says, maybe not even to me: it's absurd, it's absurd.

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To investigators the picture will appear complex. They sift through the surveillance cameras, there is an ocean of footage, no one placing or triggering the bombs can be seen. On the other hand, we are talking about two trash bins in Piazza Duomo: many people throw away not very small things.

The planter in the Gallery is the external barrier of a restaurant patio. You have to check the adjacent tables, of course. But then a funnel effect is created whereby it could be anyone, passing by, in the crowd, in the shuffle.

The strangest, it is clear, even in the logic of a plan that is not yet clear, is the one in Piazza Fontana. It affects very few people: a rider who was resting in the shade, glancingly, a passerby, a ticket controller who was going to the tram stop. Luckily, of course.

But taking the risk of arriving at the police station doesn't just seem like a joke: Piazza Fontana, well, Piazza Fontana seems like a signature.

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Someone thinks of Madrid, someone of the attacks in France. The anti terrorism squad raid the Segrate mosque, with rather a vague warrant. On the news, no one talks about tension strategy. It hasn't even been two years of Meloni's government, but imagine that: no one is mentioning Ordine Nuovo (an Italian extra parliamentary fascist organization involved in several terroristic attack in Italy in the 60s, ndt).

– After all, why should they (again).

The investigators are making the final checks, when agent Sarti tells the deputy commissioner that, however, it is strange, to choose that flowerbed, and not a bin under the trees or on the train platform. Moreover, they work better: they are louder, more impactful. But the deputy commissioner only begins to listen to him when he says that it is not clear how but of the two license plates, one is intact, as if the explosion was directed to save it from the impact, despite being so close.

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There was a fragment, in fact, very small: a resident extracts it before placing two stitches, the self-absorbing ones, they will fall out, he tells me, so I don't have to come back. It's six in the evening, who knows when his shift started.

He explains to me how to change the bandage. I ask him if my general practitioner can do the check-up, so that perhaps I will return home early. He says sure, just keep it disinfected, painkillers as needed, and that he's sorry. As it was even his fault.

*

A Telegram message says: Sorry, I don't know what happened, it must be a BOT.

I click on the link. A separate, timed chat opens. The messages last three minutes each. Some apps have made the option simple. For online sex, I would say.

However, my chat does not offer handcrafted shots. It says that they're all talking about Pinelli (Italian anarchist who died while being detained by the Polizia in 1969, ndt) and also, what the fuck was I thinking. I reply that I've earned myself a day, then we'll claim. The big boss is not convinced, it is clear even in less than three minutes. But he doesn't have many choices, after all. Will see, he writes. We will see. The chat closes.

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There are a series of checkpoints, armed. One blocks Piazza Fontana, on the corner of Via Larga. I keep walking. One blocks via Mazzini. I take the long detour. One blocks via Orefici. There I take out the hospital report. It's not enough. Not even a Swedish passport. They tell me they are very sorry I was hit, but I can't go in. I take out my hotel card. The Straf is on the perimeter.

They say they have orders not to let anyone in. I tell them that I have to get my suitcase, that I have a flight. A business trip. They tell me that unfortunately this does not change the arrangements.

I try again in front of the Scala. I wonder if there's any point in trying again.

At that moment someone puts a hand, outstretched, full, on my back. I turn around very slowly, because we are still very close to the cordon of those with machine guns. I breathe slowly, then instead it's Anna, beautiful behind dark '50s glasses.

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She starts walking, determined, I follow her at a distance. A few minutes later she enters a doorway, ringing, or pretending to ring, a golden bell. In the entrance hall, she finally starts talking, without looking at me.

She goes up the stairs, in the dim light. Old railing house, but renovated with finishes. What the fuck was I trying to do, she tells me, to get interviewed?

«I wanted to go back to the room. I didn't think it was a problem.»

«No, really?», while turning the keys.

«I am wounded. A respectable businessman leaving for Washington tomorrow.»

"You're not leaving for Washington," she says as she removes the hairpins from the bun and places them in a cardboard box. She also places her glasses, her clip-on earrings, her sandals which she unties.

"You're not even Swedish anymore." Then she turns and gestures towards the zipper.

I've wanted to undress Anna for years, but, well, not like this. She also puts the blue dress in the cardboard box, which she closes and then she attaches a pre-printed label.

I don't say anything, I just look at her. She seems nervous. She points to my cardboard box.

«Have we gone vintage?».

«They have slightly incorrect senders. They will continue to bounce for a while, they will end up lost. New provisions».

«But it's tailor-made, fresh linen», I try to joke, putting down the very creased jacket.

She is getting what appear to be temporary tattoos. I would also like to make a joke about those, but I don't have the time.

"Look," she says, "I don't give a shit about your past as protester. You already have enough leeway. Or you take it. You're arrogant, you feel like the only man in charge, you feel like a god, I still don't give a shit. But I won't let you screw everything up for carelessness. I won't let you screw us over one by one." She takes a breath. I started undoing my shirt.

She resumes, almost half-smiling: «Especially not now, when it's all just begun».

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There is a radio in the background in the apartment, which has all the shutters down, but then again, in this heat. A radio news report says about the mosque trail. A radio journalist interviews deputy commissioner Solteri who replies to him that yes, of course, it is strange that only one plaque was targeted, the one that says that Pinelli “died tragically”, but that it is still too early to express himself, on the contrary - Solteri interrupts himself – to me it even seems too tame, as a gesture: I would look elsewhere.

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We leave twenty minutes later. She was even more beautiful when she was angry, Anna, with her half-pout that makes her more naughty. I let her shave my hair and even let her make me a fake tribal already seen before. I only refused the piercings, she put them all in. We are a young raver couple, with a camper van, heading to a psy-trance festival. If there really is a problem, we have acids in a false bottom of the van. These are also new orders, I would contest these too. Better drug possession than international terrorism, the vanishing chat says. Nothing is better, I replied. The revolution is better. I enjoyed this last word which lasted three minutes.

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I don't know why Anna insists on driving.

They will undoubtedly have blocked the exit toll booths, so we avoid the highway. On the other hand, we are not really in a hurry to get to Holland.

She keeps asking me about the only variation to the plan that I allowed myself. I'm looking for something on the radio, I'm not passionate about the question.

“It didn't even cause any victims, I still don't understand why.”

«There was some priming fluid left over, I didn't want to throw it away. Environmental consciousness.”

«What did you use as a wrapper?».

«An empty soap holder, from the hotel».

She shakes her head. We are near Carugate. There is a big mess on the street.

«And why Pinelli?».

«I don't know, because my father was an anarchist. No,

actually because it always seemed hypocritical to me: “died tragically”, what the fuck, did he have a stroke?, come on.”

She snorts. “In my opinion it only takes away the strength of the claim, it’s something that has nothing to do with it, people won’t understand.”

“Our claim of responsibility will be clear enough, you’ll see.”

A cell phone notification gets me out of trouble. I open the breaking news knowing, anticipating, what it will say.

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Neutral background, a face generated by AI. A male voice in voice-over.

«Milan is under attack. Not from now, for years. It has been invaded by masses of people and subjugated to the stupidest conformist consumer trends. It risks to lose herself, succumbing to gentrification and overtourism. Milan is not, and cannot be, for everyone: we will not let it become unlivable. Today the counterattack began. We will defend Milan with every means and with every dissident force...”.

The boss’s voice, well set.

She says, “A little too early, maybe?”

“They must have thought about it,” I say, with the feeling of truly being part of history for once.

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Half police station is watching the CCTV footage. The ones in the tunnel are useless, they are isolating the faces of those who throw bulky packaging into the two bins. However, there are too many. In the footage in Piazza Fontana, however, almost nothing can be found. Maybe a runner bending down to tie a shoe very close to the grass? He has wrap-around sports glasses, then it’s dawn, there isn’t much light yet. “Let’s keep the body type, it’s better than nothing,” says Solteri, “white, athletic, maybe six-foot-three, let’s keep him there.”

The only thing they have in their hands is a residue of perfume, a perfumed liquid not compatible with the primer. It was very little, too little to be identified. They tried to look for the other components, but no way they bought them clearly, in a shop, with the receipt. But that is only in one of the four.

“They made one in emergency, recycling something they had on hand.”

No fingerprints, a million suspects, a drool of liquid soap. Solteri thinks he could have listened to his wife and gone

on vacation not in August, not finding himself being the man everyone looks to for answers.

«Any news on the video?».

“I can’t track it, they’re good.”

Solteri put Sarti on answering the calls because he’s practical. Above all, he has to take the newspapers off him - fourteen hours have passed what answers can we get.

«Remote trigger, who knows where they are be by now».

But, in any case, someone in the area must have been there to check. Solteri goes out to smoke with Sarti - he would also like to have a beer, even if, as they say, perhaps it’s not the right evening.

They had tried to reconstruct the cell’s first steps, but it seemed like the first action. No flyers, protests, online calls for action. High bar, he thinks. Hope it doesn’t get even higher gradually. «What are we missing, Sarti? What aren’t we looking at?” In the end he sent Esposito to get beers for everyone, the heat won’t give up, the night will be long and desperate.

“Have we checked the victims?”

“But the triggers were very safe, they didn’t blown themselves up.”

«Not the dead, though, maybe someone got out of hand. The injured, the minor ones. It’s the dream alibi: staying in the group of the victims.”

The boy will go far, even if his shoulders are narrow, Solteri thinks. He puts out his cigarette on the wall and calls Miss Valenti. They have already had the lists sent to them by various structures. “You pass them through one by one: precedents, movements, things that don’t add up.”

«Are we looking for something specific?» she says.

“The bad guys,” he says.

*

I’m only worried about the things I left in the room. I had asked for that room on purpose -overlooking Via San Raffaele: inspections that passed for whimsy. A suite, full of shiny surfaces, without handles. I liked that slightly brutal side of the room. Finished in a bronze that looked like rust.

I can only hope that the supplier of Straf soap was also the supplier of many hotels in the area. The container was without logos, I checked. For the rest, I try to visualize, to remember what I left behind. Clothes, a used book, a Swedish driving licence. But anyway, I’m no longer Swedish.

I don't say anything to Anna, who now wants a change, and pulls up to a petrol station near Usmate.

She likes to think that our double emergency fund could be the woods, not the acids, in case we need it.

(There is a third double bottom, in reality: a Beretta with the serial number worn off and a machine gun I didn't ask questions about. But we're not butchers, in the end, we all prefer cleaner hypotheses).

She comes back with two focaccias and a Peroni. There is a breath of air, finally. I open the door and sit in the back of the van, there is a kind of mattress. I ask her if and when she plans to stop. She says no, further away.

I wonder how long it will take for them to notice my unorthodox checkout. Is a guy who leaves a suitcase a professional in a state of shock or that easily slips into a fugitive? I didn't pay. The saved card is from the big boss, if they find him, they find the room. (Besides, even if they find me, they find the card).

Anna is relaxing a bit, she's tired. She says sorry if she was a pain in the ass earlier. I tell her that no, in fact, she's right, maybe I was reckless. She rests her head on my shoulder.

I don't have time to enjoy this sweetness, something blue is approaching. I think about the machine gun, I have a second and a half to decide, all I say is: shit.

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