

Tram in Milan

It was an old tram, one of those with wooden seats and floor from the 1930s. The conductress walked down the narrow aisle selling tickets. Her dyed black hair, false eyelashes and bright lipstick accentuated her age. There was an air about her which was both flirtatious and officious.

She reached me as I was standing by the door, ready to get off. However, I had pressed the bell too late and the tram was already moving on. Now I would have to pay more.

'I pressed the bell for the last stop,' I told her, trying to charm her with a smile and my English accent.

'Too late now,' she said, pursing her lips. Perhaps she remembered me from the week before when I'd left the tram without paying.

'You should have a little more faith in people,' I said, dropping the coins carelessly into her hand.

She replied in a torrent of Milanese dialect. Everyone on the tram turned to stare. When the doors opened, I jumped out and tried to disappear in the passing crowd.

In the Pavilion

After wandering around all morning, I sat down on an iron bench and fell asleep. I was woken by a young waitress asking me for my order.

'I hadn't even realised this part of the pavilion was a café,' I said.

She smiled invitingly. 'Wouldn't you like to try our lunchtime roast pork with apple sauce?'

I couldn't refuse, although I knew my wife would be making a meal at home.

When I had eaten, a small, strangely-coloured bird appeared. It fluttered just above my forehead. I put the back of my hand out, partly to invite the bird to perch there, partly to ward it away from my face. But the bird just moved down and hovered near my lips as if it might find a crumb on them.

Only when the waitress arrived with the bill, did the bird fly away. I wondered if she could tell me what kind of bird it was, but she said she knew of no such thing in the pavilion.

Incident

I'm sitting with Scotch Dave in a bar in Milan. In a couple of hours we'll be on our way home, taking the midnight train to Paris, and from there to London. The bar's filling up with smartly-dressed Italians out on a Friday night. We must look odd with our battered rucksacks and unshaven faces.

Some girls sit at our table – there's nowhere else for them. To my surprise, one of the prettiest starts talking to Dave. She seems fascinated by the fact that he's from Scotland. But when a burly youth comes over, she quickly loses interest. In any case, it's time for us to head to the station.

Halfway down the street we realise we are being followed by a small crowd. The youth taps Dave on the shoulder. Dave's response is a punch so clumsy it doesn't even connect. I hear the crack of the youth's fist on Dave's jaw. Shouting that we have a train to catch, I rush into the melee to pull Dave away. Now the youth squares up to me, egged on by his companions.

I have the sense that we are all on a film set, that this whole scene is for the benefit of an audience as yet invisible.

Changes

The floor in my flat was starting to slope. Meanwhile, the block next to ours was being demolished to make way for a chain pub and restaurant. For several months, the air was full of dust. When the pub was ready, an opening party was organised for local residents. They asked me to judge a competition there, but I found it hard to concentrate because I was worried about my floor, which by this time was sloping so much it was impossible to stay in one place without sliding down.