

Audio drama – Giovanni Bertolini

NARRATOR

“Giovanni Bertolini is from Romallo, a small village in the Non Valley in Italian-speaking Tyrol, later known as Trentino, still at this time part of the Habsburg Monarchy. He has managed to work his way up from one building site to the next – in Tyrol, Switzerland and Vorarlberg. He is now a successful building contractor in the Bregenz Forest.

It was here that he met and fell in love with Anna Maria Nanning from Sibratsgfall. The couple married in 1888 and now live with their five children in their own house in the village of Egg. Every year Giovanni recruits between 150 and 200 Italian workers, many of whom he puts up in his own home. New faces from the Non Valley have now just arrived.”

GIOVANNI

“Hello boys, welcome! Come on in!”

MAN

“Hello there, Giovanni! We made it! How are you?”

GIOVANNI

“We’re fine.”

MAN

“Well, you haven’t wasted your time here – look, there’s even a medal!”

GIOVANNI

“So you saw it? They gave me this medal in 1884 for my work on the Arlberg tunnel when I was a foreman there. And look at this photo: “The Flexen road – built by Johann Bertolini”! ... And, out there, you see the bell tower? That too was built by Giovanni Bertolini.”

SERGIO

“Good work!”

MAN

“Amazing!”

GIOVANNI

“Come with me, I’ll show you where you’re staying, in the barn. Maria’s got everything ready; it’s all nice and cosy.

And then we’ll open a bottle of Teroldego! I’ve even got a licence to serve alcohol!

...

Sergio, you look nervous. Is everything alright?”

SERGIO

“Yes, sure... I was just thinking about... Have you heard about the deaths of the workers on the Albula tunnel in Switzerland? The youngest was fifteen – just like me.”

GIOVANNI

“Sergio, don’t worry. I was twelve when I started. I used to carry stones for my father who worked on laying the Puster Valley railway. Look at me now: I’m still here, healthy and happy. The secret is always to stay focused, always stay alert. You’ll see, Sergio, this is a great opportunity for you. Or would you rather work in a coal mine in Colorado, like your brother?”

SERGIO

“No, no way.”

GIOVANNI

“There you go. You’ll see, everything will be fine. Make yourselves at home, lads. And tomorrow we’ll get to work!”

MAN

“Thanks, Giovanni. See you later!”

Footsteps fade into the distance.

GIOVANNI

“Maria?!”

MARIA

“I’m in the kitchen!”

The door creaks. Clattering of pots and pans.

GIOVANNI

“They’ve arrived.”

MARIA

“Fine, I’ll go and say hello in a moment.”

A chair is pulled back and Giovanni sits down. Rustle of a newspaper.

GIOVANNI (*snarls*)

“Bastards...”

MARIA

What's the matter?"

GIOVANNI

"Read this: They say that local people should keep their distance from the Italian workers with their exaggerated friendliness, otherwise they might contaminate Vorarlberg with their foreign ways and bring about moral degeneration."

MARIA

"Come on, put it away – it's nonsense, I don't want to hear it! ... Johann, you know how proud I am of you". We're all proud of you."

Rapid footsteps: the door swings open.

MAN

"Giovanni! Come quick! There's trouble down at the inn! There's a bloke who won't pay the workers on his section of the Bregenz Forest railway!"

GIOVANNI

"What? But that's none of my business! My workers have already been paid!"

MAN

"I know, but they still want you to come. They're hoping you'll be able to calm down the workers from the Non Valley."

GIOVANNI

"OK, I'm on my way."

(to Maria) "See you later, darling. I'm needed. It seems nothing gets done around here without Johann Bertolini."

MARIA

"See you later my love, take care!"

NARRATOR

By 1925, Giovanni Bertolini has built countless structures in the Bregenz Forest, ranging from roads and railways to hotels, residential buildings and power stations. He then hands the business over to his son Isidor, from then on supervising his son's building sites from a folding chair. It is not until the retirement of his grandson, Johann Ferdinand Bertolini, in 1987 that the history of the successful construction firm of "Johann Bertolini" in Egg comes to an end.