

II Podcast

The first part

EPIZODE 5 - ANGELS IN UNIFORM

If the glittering lights of the European Capital of Culture 2025 had dazzled you too much, we might suggest resting your eyes with a trip into the bowels of subterranean Gorizia, the one hidden in the depths of Via Rastello. HERE, the city of the eternal past holds the memory of the siege that almost wiped it out a century ago, and the memory of two women who were angels of salvation for so many soldiers and civilians in those days. Between May 1915 and 9 August 1916, when the Italian army finally succeeded in occupying it, Gorizia was gripped in a devastating siege and the vast majority of its citizens were evacuated to the internment camp of Wagna in Austria for a comfortable holiday in which thousands died of hunger and disease. Those who remained took refuge in the dense network of underground passages and tunnels leading from via rastello towards the castle, seeking safety from bombs and sniper fire. Among them were two sisters, Virginia and Enrica Marinaz, volunteer nurses for the Austrian Red Cross. During the day they served in the city's military hospital, at night they returned to their precarious shelter in a basement on Via Rastello to assist trapped civilians. They were "terrible and great" years. as virginia wrote in her war diary, in which the two women spent themselves unsparingly in relieving the pain of the wounded, friends and enemies alike; they also cared for the great Italian painter Aristide Sartorio, wounded and fallen prisoner in the city suburbs. For them, under the blood-covered uniforms there were only men who were suffering and had to be helped.



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So when you come to visit us for the European Capital of Culture, pass by via Rastello, perhaps in the evening when all the shop windows are turned off and silence descends. Close your eyes and try to listen. If you get a chance, you will hear a breath of angels' wings and a faint scent of tincture of hatred. For over there angels fly in their uniforms.

They never married, they always lived together in dignified poverty, continuing to do good by habit of a lifetime. During the cold war years, when Gorizia was filled with barracks, they taught young conscripts (many of whom at the time had no qualifications, if not illiterate) free of charge to enable them to graduate from compulsory school. Virginia and Enrica Marinaz died within weeks of each other in the mid-1970s. They did not even have the money to pay for a dignified funeral but the money was easily found among the many people they had helped in life.