

## 500 Word creative non-fiction

### A little slice of Italy

The restaurant is empty and quiet. Six pm and he arrives for his shift. Performing the perfunctory salutations to Luigi, the owner, and the kitchen boys. Out the back he has his usual espresso, and a cigarette. He joins the rest of the wait staff. Typical of Italian restaurants they are all dressed in black, with satin shirts. Sol, Luigi's wife and manager of the restaurant, flits around arranging the staff in the pre-service set up performance. Napkins are diligently folded. Cutlery polishing becomes a biblical affair, conducted with reverence and in silence. The air stirs. The front door beckons and opens.

A couple, both smiling, drift in through the doors. They are young, beautiful and obviously quite hungry. They hesitate at the entrance, noting the "please wait to be seated" sign. "Table for two?" enquires Mark, a waiter who has seized this opportunity to cross the Italian Terracotta tiled floor. The couple stands mesmerized for a moment. Taking in this cunningly well-dressed Italian dining experience. Grandiose tables, fashioned from ancient Jarrah rail sleepers, sit quietly in the center of the restaurant. To the left several two-seater tables form a lover's alley. This alley is separated from the central dining area by a waist high stonewall. Surmounted by an oversized tropical fish tank. The beauty and simplicity of the mural of moonlit Vasto, Luigi's place of birth and a small Italian town, dominates the rear dining area. To the right, abounding with pastry and confectionary works of art, the oversized cake fridge. Finally, the front counter with an archetypal angel fashioned of white marble, looking to the heavens. Perhaps the angel sniffs the glorious aromas that emanate

from the kitchen. A Heavenly infusion of aromas the strongest garlic, pasta sauce and coffee, subtly wafting through the restaurant.

“Would you like a table for two?” Mark enquires again. Mark has dark hair and eyes, which match his slick black satin shirt. The shirt is open, revealing a hirsute chest offset by the sparkle of a gold crucifix and chain. “Yes please,” states the man. “Follow me please”, motions Mark and leads them, down lovers alley, past the fish tank, to their table. Sitting on wooden seats. At the small wooden table the couple take in the view of a quite suburban Mt Lawley Street. “Bottle of water and two glasses of the Chenin Blanc” repeats Mark, the waiter, to the couple. The young man nods. “Would you like some bread to start off, maybe a Grissini, Italian piazza bread sticks cooked with garlic, herbs and rock salt and served with a balsamic, olive oil dip?” enquires Mark. “Definitely”, remarks the woman. Mark hurries off to collect the drinks and give the order to the kitchen. The young couple turns their attention eagerly to the menu.

The restaurant’s delicacies leap off the page of the menu. The assortment is astounding: pasta, pizza, soup, salad and grills. Authentic Italian peasant food served at up-market prices in a modern Perth, Western Australia. Several moments pass. “Here you go” states a blonde waitress with a huge smile to the seated couple. The bread and dip served on an Italian terracotta plate is reverently placed between the couple on the table. “Are you ready to order”, Mark intones, placing the glasses of white wine on the couple’s table.

The restaurant hums with voices. The pace of the waiters and kitchen staff increasing to match the steady increase of customers entering and sitting, ordering and eating, dining and drinking. Snatches of conversations, “Certainly Sir”, “your medium rare Bisteca”, ”no worries mate”, “table for six”, fly around the air, mingling together with the sound of busy staff and the cacophony of crashing, sizzling and shouting that is a bustling kitchen.

The couple’s meal is over and they are extremely content. They pay their bill and are bid farewell with a customary,” Thank you for coming.” Nine-thirty finally the kitchen closes down. The staff must clean and polish the cutlery, fold napkins and prepare for the next days trading. The entire performance, from start to finish, lasted only three and a half hours. The performance happens for six days a week. Closed on Mondays. Luigi ,a conductor, with his team, the orchestra, of dedicated staff. It takes effort to be the best and Lucafe is by far the best there is in Mt Lawley, Tuart Hill and Western Australia.