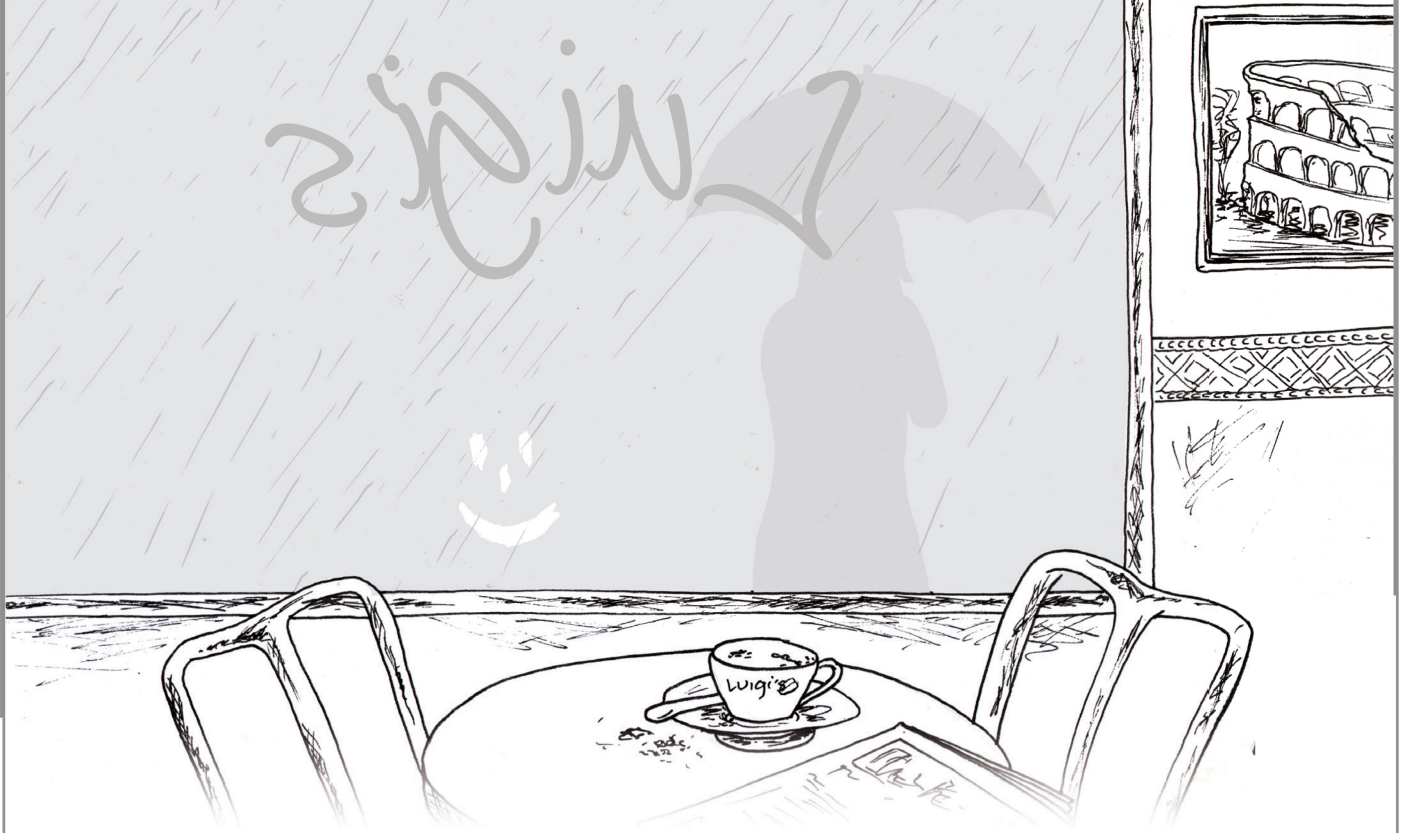


# A Penny for your Thoughts



Penny sat down and watched rain drops race each other down the window pane.

Luigi's was her favourite place to sit and dream of summer suns and winter moons, of days long gone and nights to come. It was a shabby place really; one that time had forgotten to visit for many years. But despite its cracked floor tiles and dusty mirrors, Luigi's had a charm all of its own.

Black and white photographs of Venice and Rome littered the walls and helped customers travel to a far away land without the need of a passport. The owner, a bespectacled man with a kind, round face and an even kinder, rounder smile kept this place alive with home-made cakes, strong black coffee and hot buttered crumpets.

Penny held her cappuccino between her hands to warm them from the November chill and wrestled with the idea of dunking her biscotti: to crunch or not to crunch?

A ting-a-ling of the door announced visitors and the old man looked up from cleaning the lonely table. 'Benvenuto, benvenuto', he said, his words floating in the air as if they were looking for someone to dance with. A couple came out from under a large black umbrella. They were both happy, despite being soaked to their bones. The young girl kept staring at the ring

that had been put on the fourth finger of her left hand. Two were about to become one. Penny smiled.

Another ting-a-ling, another visitor! Luigi's door was always open and his guests were always welcome. A large man came running in, his coat over his head. Under his arm he clutched a brown leather case; his other hand clutched his side. Penny watched as the gentleman sat down and ignored the old man as he tried to talk to him. He took out his mobile phone and started talking business. How lonely you must be, Penny thought, and her smile faded like the morning dew.

Ting-a-ling. A handsome young man now walked in and the old man flung open his arms: 'Dove sei stato?' The young man kissed him on both cheeks, hung up his jacket behind the counter and started putting on an apron. Penny took one last sip of her coffee.

People come and go through life in much the same way as people come and go through Luigi's, she thought. She drew a smiley face on the misty window in front of her and walked towards the door.

'Ciao', the old man called to her.

'Ciao', Penny replied.

And with one final ting-a-ling, she was gone.