

CREATIVE WRITING – “THE ANSWER IS YES”

Maria inherited the bistro Mazzinis just off the Clerkenwell Road, in London's little Italy, from her father, Roberto. He'd inherited it from his father before him who had first opened it as a delicatessen in 1898. Both men had run Mazzinis for more than fifty years each.

Maria was so proud of her heritage and always put her heart and soul into the bistro. With Little Italy being a warren of streets around the Hatton Garden area she had plenty of customers. They appreciated her Italian pasta and sauces; the charcuterie from Negroni, and of course the range of Italian wines and gelatos.

Daily specials were chalked up on the blackboard, and were reasonably priced. Maria had a great team – Luigi her assistant who could turn his hand to anything, and Ronnie, Teresa, Madge and Annie who cooked and waited as needed. Her little team worked hard, they were open from 9am until 9pm every day except Sundays. The hospitality trade was tough going and margins were becoming slimmer, and Maria how things would go in the new year.

Maria was not one to rest on her laurels, she wanted to introduce something new to the menu. She spent weeks thinking and researching what might be a hit – and then it dawned on her – she was surrounded by jewellers who sold a lot of engagement rings – and the perfect fit would be the Tuscan-style sauce known as Marry Me sauce.

This is made from a rich blend of sun-dried tomatoes, double cream, parmesan cheese, garlic and fresh basil. Maria knew it had earned its famous name because it is supposedly so delicious that it inspires marriage proposals – usually from the eater to the cook but Maria was sure it could generate some welcome publicity and keep her business flourishing.

On Sunday, her day off, and after she had returned from Mass nearby with her parents, Maria was back in her bistro kitchen trying and perfecting the Marry Me recipe. Luigi gave up his Sunday to come in and help her. It was cold and frosty outside but inside the bistro the sun-dried tomatoes provided a sweet and tangy flavour and the double cream created a smooth velvety base. In addition the parmesan added a savoury, nutty depth, and the garlic and herbs infused the sauce with a classic Italian aroma.

Maria spooned her sauce over a pan seared chicken breast and set it on a bed of pasta; it looked and tasted delicious. We're ready they decided, we'll order in the ingredients and make flyers to publicise this.

On Monday Maria announced it to the rest of the team, and they excitedly tasted the dish and helped to distribute the flyers around the area. On Thursday with the new dish chalked up on the blackboard outside for the first time, people started queuing down the street to taste this dish. Over the next few weeks the local jewellers and their customers constantly flocked to the bistro. Marry me chicken pasta was the most popular item on the bistro menu. The success of Mazzinis seemed assured.

Valentine's Day came upon them and Maria and her team wondered if there might be a proposal in the bistro. There was none over lunch but sure enough, in the evening one of the guests got down on one knee by the side of his table with a small velvet box in his hand and his companion said yes. Everyone in the bistro cheered and the man ordered Italian sparkling wine for everyone present.

As Maria and Luigi were clearing up later, Luigi commented that the name was inspiring, to which Maria said Marry Me you mean?

“The answer is yes!” said Roberto. And he took her in his arms and kissed her. Maria had often thought of Luigi as her work husband and suddenly realised she would be very happy to be married to him.

The end.
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