

**'If only I could hold you in my hand,  
land of Luni, like an Etruscan vase!'**

—Gabriele D'Annunzio, *Dreams of Distant Lands*, 1902

# 'POTESSE'IO SOSTENERTI NELLA MANO, TERRA DI LUNI, COME UN VASO ETRUSCO!'

## *Arrival*

**This story begins, as everything does, with a meal. You could eat a meal like this anytime you happened to be passing through a village called Bocca di Magra (which means the mouth of the Magra River) on the north-west coast of Italy, if you went to a restaurant called Capannina Ciccio (which means 'Chubby's hut'). This particular meal was consumed in the spring of 2002 by Lucio Galletto.**

To eat the dinner, Lucio had to travel for 28 hours – or 26 years, depending on how you look at it. He boarded a plane in Sydney, Australia, landed in Rome 24 hours later, spent a moment changing his currency and lamenting the replacement of the lira with the euro, then took a half-hour flight to Pisa, where he hired a car, ignored the Leaning Tower, and got on the autostrada going north.

Driving towards the town of his birth, with the sea on his left and the white-topped Apuan Alps on his right, past the quarries where Michelangelo sourced the marble for most of his sculptures, Lucio has a lot on his mind, which is why his left leg won't stop jiggling up and down.

He is about to turn 50, and has been diagnosed with diabetes, an occupational hazard for restaurateurs with erratic eating habits. He's thinking that if he hasn't had a midlife crisis yet, he's entitled to one now.

He's wondering what he would have been doing if he'd stayed in Italy, instead of moving to Sydney when he fell in love with an Australian girl 26 years ago. Probably, he reflects, he'd be working as an architect instead of a

restaurateur. He doubts if designing buildings would be as satisfying as feeding people, but then again, he would not have been subject to the whims of food critics.

His restaurant, Lucio's, has just been downgraded from two-hat status ('Kitchen alchemy') to one-hat status ('Consistently very good') in the latest edition of Sydney's *Good Food Guide* (wherein the maximum score, three hats, is defined as 'world class'). Lucio is wondering what he did wrong. Has he drifted too far from the traditions of his homeland in an effort to modernise, or should he have changed even more to meet twenty-first-century tastes? Has he been distracted from the main game by opening a second eating house, *Arte e Cucina*, designed to be a trattoria with simpler food and service than the ristorante, Lucio's? Should he close number two in order to bring number one back to its former glory?

Issues of identity are plaguing him. He recently became an Australian citizen, swearing allegiance to a new flag after deciding that the country in which a person has spent more than half his life really should be defined as his home.

In what Lucio now thinks was a misguided attempt to behave like a typical Australian, he voted for the conservative prime minister, John Howard, in the first election after his naturalisation ceremony. That decision would have horrified his father, who was always a passionate supporter of the Left in Italian politics. If he could have discussed it with his father, Lucio would have said that John Howard is not the same as Silvio Berlusconi, and that when you own a business, you value a stable economy. But Mauro Galletto died last year, and his expatriate son couldn't get back in time for the funeral.

Lucio now holds two passports, and for the sake of speed he leaves Sydney's border control as an Australian and enters Rome's border control as an Italian. But what does being an Italian mean? As a nation, Italy is younger even than Australia. It was stitched together from a diverse bunch of territories only in the 1860s. Italians are notorious for what they call *campanilismo*, which translates literally as 'belltower-ism' and means they are loyal only to the neighbourhood they can see from the top of the local church.

Lucio has been crossing borders all his life. During his teenage years he woke up each morning in the region called Liguria but spent the day in Tuscany, at a high school where lessons were conducted in a national language with only a passing resemblance to the dialect he spoke at home.

His family felt neither Tuscan nor Ligurian. They thought of themselves as citizens of a land called Lunigiana, a territory based on the ancient Roman colony of Luna but not recognised in modern Italian geography. Lunigiana stretches along the Magra River from the mountains to the sea, overlapping the bottom right of what is now Liguria, the top left of Tuscany and the bottom left of Emilia-Romagna. Lucio thinks of it as a land of *pastori* (shepherds), *contadini* (farmers) and *pescatori* (fishermen).

He's recently become Treasurer of an organisation called CIRA (pronounced 'cheeruh'), the Council of Italian Restaurants in Australia, which is dedicated to preserving regional recipes and cooking techniques before they are lost in the rush towards Mod Med (con) fusion. As part of CIRA's community education program, Lucio wants to present a Lunigiana dinner in his restaurant, and he hopes, during this trip, to find inspiration in the homes and trattorias of his neighbourhood.

**The view of Tuscany  
from Liguria, Punta  
Bianca from the sea and  
Ciccio's from the river.**



*Driving towards the town of his birth, with the white-topped Apuan Alps  
on his right, past the quarries where Michelangelo sourced his marble*

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