

Laura Stephens

Italian Cookies

I hang up the phone. A sheet of scribble lies on the table. My boyfriend enters and reads it. “You’ve got to be kidding me. One pound of ricotta cheese, one and a half pounds of butter, *and* two pounds of sugar? Is this some joke?” I only smile and think of my grandmother and the secret family recipe treasured for so many generations. I reply, “The key to being Italian is to eat like an Italian.” He retorts, “Yes, but not to weigh like one.”

This is my rite to passage. Neil has the honor of sharing this moment with me as I mix the ingredients by hand, as is the tradition. These cookies have never left the family, but today I will introduce them to my boyfriend’s parents. Neil stands there with his arms crossed, watching me.

Ever since I was little, I’d receive my grandmother’s “Italian Cookies” each Easter. My grandmother used to make them pink and yellow to celebrate the occasion, and this time, I carry on her tradition. I feel a great pride, today, knowing I have begun my own shot at baking *my* Italian Cookies, and like my great grandmothers before me, I will one day pass it on to my children.

The cookies are finished. I ask Neil if he’d like to try a taste, but he declines. “No offense to your grandma or anything,” he smirks, “but I like my figure the way it is.”

Later, I see his family and offer them my gift. They smile and thank me as they take a bite. “The icing isn’t right,” they state. “It’s too buttery. Maybe you’ll get it right next time.”

I can feel my anger flare. I realize why the recipe has never left the family. There is a bond that is passed down, a cultural heritage that can only be appreciated by one whom opens his or her heart to tradition. I hold my head high and growl, “Maybe next time, you’d prefer *French* pastries?”

They nod in response; stupid grins plastered on their faces.