

Sometimes I Dream in Italian

by Rita Ciresi



About the Book

In her acclaimed novels **Blue Italian** and **Pink Slip**, Rita Ciresi dazzled both readers and critics with her graceful storytelling and wise, witty insight into the lives of women. Now Ciresi goes home: in a resonant, lovingly written story of two sisters, one family, and the memories of childhood that slip away--only to hold us forever.

The plastic Pietà on top of the TV. The condiment dish shaped like a Venetian gondola. The crucifix studded with seashells... Years later, Angel and Lina Lupo would debate: What really was the most hideous thing in their parents' cramped and quintessentially Catholic house? And why couldn't they just forget about being Italian and have a "normal" American childhood? As the sisters argue, memories of their shared past come flooding back: a flirtation with the butcher's cousin, a mysterious photograph of a beautiful woman they once found in their father's drawer, a church-sponsored trip to the Statue of Liberty that detoured into the dark side of human sexuality.

Angel and Lina long to flee their parents' heavy accents and dowdy clothes for the glamour of New York and Hollywood. But once they have grown from ragazze to donne--girls to women--they will look back on the time that they billed themselves as the stage sensation called Two Italian Hits! with wistfulness and sorrow. One sister is about to marry a man she met by answering a personal ad. The other is on the verge of divorce. Both have come to crossroads in their lives--as they grapple with a past that seems too present, and a future that seems too far away.

Lyrical and bittersweet, rich with nostalgia, *Sometimes I Dream in Italian* is a story of family and love, of the bonds we are born with and those we struggle to create. A book for anyone who has ever longed both to escape and recapture the past, who can still remember a sister spinning in a new skirt, or the roughness of a kiss delivered by an unshaven father, *Sometimes I Dream in Italian* is a work of artistry by a writer at the peak of her storytelling powers.

Discussion Guide

1. Why is Mama so money-conscious? How does this fear of extravagance shape her daughters' personalities and expectations for the future?
2. Mama and Babbo are distrustful of anything that is too different from their everyday experience, and seem fearful of taking risks. Why is this? What could they have done to make their lives richer?
3. Catholicism has a strong influence on the family as a whole. How does it influence Lina and Angel as adults? How does it affect the choices they make and the lives they now lead?
4. Why does Babbo seem mysterious and remote to Angel and Lina when they are children? What changes that?
5. What was the turning point in Lina's life? Why is she so unhappy today? What could she do to change that?
6. What is Angel seeking out of life that she doesn't have? What could she do to change things? Why do you think she stays at a job she doesn't like?
7. Do you think Mama and Babbo had a happy marriage? Overall, were they happy or unhappy with their life?
8. What kind of lives did they envision for their daughters?
9. Why does Mama remember her trip through Ellis Island differently every time she tells it? What does that say of her feelings about these memories?
10. When Lina realizes that the picture of the young woman in Babbo's things is their mother, she becomes unhappy. Why? What does the transformation of this young woman into Mama mean to Lina's vision of her adulthood?
11. Why do Lina and Angel have fantasies of being blond and pale-skinned?
12. What kinds of things could have happened to make Uncle Gigi and Aunt Pat different -- and less traditional -- than Mama and Babbo?
13. As adults, why do Lina and Angel imitate their parents' dialogue? Is it only to make fun of them -- or does it fill another role?
14. What keeps Dirk and Angel together? What do you think finally prods Angel to break up with him?
15. Why is Dirk so scared by the idea that family affects the way you behave in a relationship? What does this say about his feelings toward Angel's family?
16. How does the story end? Is it on a hopeful note? Do you think Angel and Lina will be able to find the happiness they are searching for?

Don't miss the previous two hilarious -- and poignant -- novels from Rita Ciresi:

Blue Italian

Rosa comes from a working-class Italian family. Gary grew up with swimming pools and overdone bar mitzvahs. So begins the funny, heartrending romance between two people who don't quite add up to the ideal couple...

1. What makes Gary want to believe in God -- even though it's hard for him? Why does Rosa believe in God without really trying?
2. Although Rosa and Gary are rarely romantic in the traditional sense, there's a lot of love in their relationship. Why is humor their main form of communication?
3. Why do you think Gary decided to die in the hospital instead of at home?

Pink Slip

Lisa Diodetto's mother wants her to get married so badly that anything in pants will do. But when she falls for her boss, the ensuing affair makes Lisa wonder if this crazy, confusing thing called love is really worth it...

1. Why does Strauss retreat into boardroom speech when talking to Lisa about their relationship?
2. Lisa is usually a very direct person. Why isn't she able to tell Strauss that she stumbled upon his piece about his father in the story collection she picked up?
3. What was the main reason for the disintegration of Lisa and Strauss's relationship?

Author Bio

Rita Ciresi is the author of *Mother Rocket*, which won the Flannery O'Connor Award for Short Fiction, and the novels *Pink Slip* and *Blue Italian*. She lives with her husband and daughter in Florida.

Critical Praise

"Characters and situations rendered with such skill and honesty, such depth of understanding and feeling, ...instantly and universally recognizable."

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