Back home, my mother is sort of like my best friend, and I knew that leaving her was going to be hard. The last time I saw her, I was walking through airport security while she waved from the invisible airport line she couldn't cross, both of us choking back tears. Before coming here, I couldn't imagine someone replacing my mother. At least, not until I met my host mother, Ada Macchiarini.

Every morning she pulls me into a kiss on both cheeks - first left, then right, like I've learned to do. She always seems so excited to see me, no matter what morning it is. Then again, she gets excited about a lot of things. Recently, the breakfast *biscotti* we usually keep in the pantry have started to come in heart and star shapes, and she was so happy when I showed them to her. Ada always brightens my day, no matter how gloomy it is outside. And when it *is* rainy and cold, she frets over my roommate and I, making sure we are warm enough and have our umbrellas before we go to school. I've stayed very dry in Italy, thanks to Ada.

Ada also volunteers at a children's hospital, and sometimes I see her baking cookies for the children as I make breakfast for myself. While there's a language barrier, we both try to communicate - she brings over pots of flowers that are in bloom for me to smell, and notes that the cookies I'm eating are her favorite. When I come home shivering from the rain, she asks very seriously, "*Vuoi un te caldo?*" and switches to English, "Do you want tea?" when I struggle to understand. She doesn't speak much English herself, but we both try to talk in each other's native language. After spring break, when my roommate and I were exhausted after travelling for so long, our Italian rusty from disuse, she huffed during dinner, "*In la mattina, parlate italiano!*" We tried to communicate more after that. She always asks what we did today, every day, and we use what Italian we know to tell her.

At dinner, we speak a mix of English and Italian, with our host sisters, Teresa and Despina, translating for us. Sometimes dinners are quiet, and sometimes they're filled with chatter. Once, Ada told us a story about how she "really saw a UFO!" that left us in tears of laughter, and she always asks us if we want seconds, cheering when we say yes. Her cooking is amazing - all her meals have been so rich and fresh and I couldn't ask for a better Italian chef. While she cooks, she puts *Coldplay* on and dances around the kitchen for us. Sometimes for dessert, she'll bring home treats like gelato and once, for *Carnevale*, she brought home cenci and hummed around the kitchen with every bite. She also brings us presents - a few days ago, I found a giant chocolate egg with a little stuffed duck on my bed for *Pasqua*. I was completely overcome with how much I have grown to love this host family in such a short time.

One day, I noticed we both share a love of knitting. When I explained this to her, she started speaking very quickly in Italian, showing me her work and what she's done. I looked at Despina to translate, and she shrugged helplessly, saying, "I don't know how to translate knitting terms, sorry." Even though I couldn't understand what she was saying, I knew that she was knitting a baby blanket for her friend's newborn using soft blue yarn and gentle hands to knit, then purl. When I creep up the stairs at night, I'll see my host family, sitting on the couch, watching TV. Giancarlo, my host father, will usually be reading, and Ada's always at the end of the couch, knitting with either the cat, Mushu, or Despina sleeping on her legs. I always feel like I'm interrupting a private moment, but the scene makes me smile.

While the transition to Italy hasn't been the easiest thing, it has lead to some wonderful discoveries, whether they be a new place to get gelato and panini, or finding the right words for Italian class or a restaurant. Most importantly, though, it has meant finding a home, here in Florence. I found it in my host mother, Ada.