

Katie Devine

The Extraction

Somewhere below the examination room painted with yellow sunbursts, near the bottom of the mountain but not as far down as the sandy beach and seaside restaurants, the bells of the tile-domed cathedral are ringing, the sound reverberating against the dramatic cliffs of this town filled with tourists like us. The bells begin ringing every morning at seven, the number of tolls signaling the hour. It's the first thing I hear when the anesthesia begins to wear off. I count to eleven; I missed the bells at ten. My 9:00 appointment began at 9:25, which my mother said was on time for Italians.

The dentist, also the town's mayor, had promised I would be able to keep the cracked tooth he extracted, but as I look into his too-close-together brown eyes, he tells me it broke into tiny pieces and could not be saved. His accent makes it sound like he is singing.

Please stop crying, my mother says from somewhere beyond my focus, though it doesn't feel like I am crying so how can I stop tears I can't feel?

This is a prescription for the antibiotics so she does not get an infection and this is the one to stop the pain, he tells my mother. I wonder if they will be white and divided by a line like the pills my father takes now before he falls asleep on the couch, sometimes still sitting up, his head drooped forward onto his chest, where a little wet circle forms on the neckline of his shirt from the drool that sneaks out of his open lips. Maybe we can take our pills at the same time and he can put his remaining arm around me and my mother will stop yelling about money and I won't have any nightmares about his accident when we sleep sitting up together.

No pain medication, grazie, my mother says to the mayor-dentist, or the dentist-mayor. She tells him we are very grateful he could see us on a Saturday morning even though no one has asked me if I'm grateful.

We hike the hot, steep stairs that will bring us back to the peach-colored house—261 steps, my sister counted yesterday. The cotton gauze in my mouth is already soaked and I want to pull it out to see if it's wet with my spit or my blood, but I know my mother would find this unacceptable. She holds onto my arm as though she is steadying me but really is pulling me forward faster than my body wants to move. The edges of the stairs blur and trick my foot, which

lands hard and earns me her narrowed eyes. My selfishness has ruined the day she was most looking forward to on this trip, she says, and also, I have no willpower. The church bells below belt out a single BONG! It echoes forever, but the sound is muted, like I have cotton in my ears too. 11:15: the time we were supposed to leave for Pompeii.

Grace wants to see the tooth when we arrive at Villa Pesca, but I don't have anything to show her and the dentist told me not to open my mouth too much today so I pretend I cannot speak and have to write notes instead on a little spiral notepad I find in the kitchen and show only to her. *He had ugly black hairs covering the top of his hands that tickled my face. His office smelled like mint toothpaste, but his breath smelled like Dad's espresso.* The words grow fuzzy, and I lie down on the unforgiving bed in our dark room. Grace lies down next to me and drapes one arm and one leg over mine as she faces me, and I wonder if this is how we slept together before we were born.

We have the same face, and the same hair and the same body except everything is smaller on her. I can't remember if this still qualifies us as identical. I always get to be the older one—when Grace turns ten next month on the first day of fifth grade, I will already be ten plus eight minutes. Grace thinks our mother began to hate me after our dad's accident at Disney over Christmas break, but I am certain she hated me right from the beginning: the moment she named me Enid. I watch my own face in the mirror when I say it, how my lips stretch into something ugly when they form the E. In the hospital pictures I found buried in the kitchen junk drawer, our dad is the one cradling me, his palm bigger than my newborn head. I am red and bald that day, already wailing. My mother is not in any of the photographs.

At night in our bed in Villa Pesca—the bells still pealing long after we are meant to be sleeping—Grace across from me, exhaling soft puffs through barely parted lips, I return to the alligator: how mesmerized I was when I first saw its narrow-set amber eyes, because I had never seen anything so still move so quickly; how I thought I could hear it blowing bubbles in the water and smell its brackish, swampy breath; how our mother had only that morning warned us to never go down to the water alone (the way she always advised of the dangers on our vacations, like when we arrived here and she forbid climbing the patio railings); how the air was thick and sticky against my skin and mosquitoes and gnats buzzed around my head and I didn't think I would be able to breathe if I didn't go closer to the water, even though I knew I was not allowed; how even as the gator opened its mouth to reveal rows of pointed yellow teeth that would sink into the muscles near our father's shoulder when he jumped in its path to save me, I was remembering that our second grade teacher,

in the lesson about the predators of central Florida, assured us that alligators do not eat people.

Tonight, as the bells get all the way to eleven, I pull the blood-soaked gauze from my mouth and leave it on the bedside table, knowing it will stain the wood, risking my mother's anger. My father told me sometimes she is short with me because she's scared, like this morning when she had to pace in the waiting room while I was under anesthesia. He said she was worried about me and didn't want to make me worried by telling me that, but it always just feels like she hates me. I maneuver my tongue until the tip fits inside the crater the tooth once lived in. It's stringy and also gummy, like something left behind that hasn't yet died. I wonder if the holes the alligator left in my father were the same, if they contained those long pink strands and tasted like pennies. They were hidden underneath the bandages my mother could not bring herself to touch, so he had to have the doctor change them in the beginning. I only saw them weeks later when angry black stitches pulled the swollen pink puckered skin before it started to look like regular skin again.

My mother planned this trip, the first time leaving Florida for all of us, when my father was still going to physical therapy every day learning how to maneuver his new prosthetic arm that for weeks he could only move straight in front of him like my Barbies' rigid arms. He still couldn't wash his own hair or dress himself or drive, so our mother went from wife to indentured servant, I overheard her tell my aunt. My father said maybe they shouldn't be spending the money now that he couldn't work and she had to take off to help him, and the restaurant always lost money in the summer anyway, but she said this was what the insurance money was for. She said she wanted him to have something to look forward to at the end of this long road, to which he responded that this was the beginning of the road and he didn't need a break from it but it sure sounded like she did. His voice had started sounding a little like hers, with some consonants coming out like a slap. She said didn't she deserve something nice after all she had been through and he didn't say anything for a long time.

Seven months after the accident, we were at the airport, my father getting wanded when his new arm set off the metal detector and my mother had to roll up his sleeve all the way and the man with the wand looked embarrassed. We took a flight to Atlanta, then rode a train through the airport and got on another flight that traveled overnight to Rome. My mother read out loud to me from her book about Pompeii, and told me she'd wanted to see the ruins since she learned about them in school when she was my age, and she'd never thought she would actually be able to travel to Italy. It was the most she had smiled at me since the accident, and when I smiled back at

her, she touched my cheek with her palm. When she removed her hand, I could still feel the ghost of it on my face.

I helped my father get the tinfoil off the top of his lasagna dinner, though he took only one bite before declaring it inedible and washing his pill down with the cup of water on his tray and giving me his wrapped brownie when my mother wasn't looking. Outside the rounded window turned navy and then black so I could see the rainbow stripes of my sweatshirt in the reflection, and next to me, the crooked part in my father's black hair as his head nodded forward and he breathed out a little groan. On my other side, my mother, who would stay awake the entire flight, tucked Post-Its in her book and copied notes in the calendar of her Day-Timer in perfect, evenly-spaced handwriting. I nudged my nose against my father's good shoulder and he shifted in his sleep, raised his arm and let me snuggle underneath it, and I closed my eyes.

I write my morning lists while Grace is still sleeping, the only secret I keep from her. I have to wake up before the bells begin at seven and since I can't set an alarm because that would wake Grace even faster than the bells do, I have to will myself awake by doing my intentions—focused thoughts I repeat over and over the way I learned to do from the therapist our parents insisted I go to after the accident—each night before I fall asleep, and sometimes if I forget, like I did the night prior, I wake up in a panic, like I did this morning, my thoughts rushing ahead, waiting for my body to catch up, my anxiety soothed only when I concentrate on Grace's undisturbed, peaceful sleep and try to match my breathing to hers. Grace usually sleeps with her hands in prayer position in front of her heart.

I used to try to make creative variations to the lists, like on Mondays I would use bullet points and Tuesdays I would use little stars and Wednesdays I would use nothing but would write in the cornflower blue crayon. I devised a scoring system so I could keep track of how bad I was each day and assign specific punishments. I count the number of offenses, then add bonus points for any that went beyond my thoughts and into action. I flip to the end of the lists (yesterday's score: 10) and number a blank page so I can begin. My journal has a picture of sunflowers in a meadow on the front, like everything inside the notebook will be the food that allowed them to grow.

August 3

1. I bit down, just a little, on the dentist-mayor's hand when it was stuffed into my mouth. (+1)
2. I pictured him naked, with that curly black hair covering his whole body like he was a poodle, and not just the normal parts that usually have hair but everything, even his palms and his belly button and his penis and his toenails.
3. I hated my mother for saying grazie to the dentist-mayor.
4. I thought how easy it would be to push my mother backwards and watch her tumble down the 261 steps.
5. My actions ruined the day for the family. (+1)
6. I skipped my intentions. (+1)

Daily Score: **9**

The punishments changed based on my scores.

0-5:	1 nice thought
5-10:	1 nice thought and 1 good deed
10-15:	2 nice thoughts and 1 good deed
15+:	2 nice thoughts and 2 good deeds

The church bells begin their long journey to noon. It is Sunday, and bent Italian ladies limp out of the church doors, holding their pocketbooks with two hands. Grace and I are out back at the peach house on the cliff, on what we would call the patio at home but here there is a word for it we forget how to say. When we look over the railing, we can see boats that are all different sizes and colors, though they all look small against the ocean whose end we cannot see. On the patios of the houses below us are sheets blowing from their clotheslines, tabby cats sniffing in corners and men smoking cigarettes as they fixed a hotel swimming pool while ladies in big hats sunbathed. Lemon trees grow tall along the curving path to the water, some high enough to touch the trellis overhead. I stand on my toes and lean over the railing to reach for a purple flower, forgetting our mother's warning until my left foot slips and my chest lands hard against the metal. I rub it and look back to make sure no one has seen me, and mentally add it to tomorrow's list.

There is a small jar of strawberry yogurt and pieces of now soft cheese on a plate at my feet. We bake on flat chairs in the sun, on our backs, and our fronts, then our backs and later on our fronts again. My glass of mango juice drips wet beads on the ground. Our

parents are in the house; the shades are drawn. When I brought our mother a glass of the mango juice that morning and told her I loved her and really meant it for my good deed and good thought, she said grazie and she loved me too, but she also looked confused.

My nose smells bad, I tell Grace.

Grace leans, sniffs at my face.

No, not there, inside my nose, I tell her.

What does it smell like, she asks.

Like a dead thing, I say. Like that rotting plum that was smooshed at the bottom of the fruit bowl.

Ew, she says and feels her own nose. That's gross.

I'm scared to blow it, at what might come out, I say. Grace does not say that's dumb or weird. She nods like she knows and feels scared for me, and for her too. We do that, feel what we each feel at the same time. We are almost the same but she is always the good one.

I eat all of the strawberry yogurt and leave just one piece of sweating cheese for Grace. I am the hungry one of us, always, but even more so since I can only eat soft foods. All I want are things I can really chew and all of the yogurt and cheese and chocolate gelato in the world can't fill up what feel like holes in my stomach matching the one in my mouth. I can't get rid of the hunger. Grace ignores the piece of cheese I've left for her, so I eat that too, licking off the beads of water first and then nibbling it with my front teeth like a mouse until it's gone.

I run my tongue around the pulpy hole in my mouth. The tip fits nicely in the crater, still sore with a hint of pressure. The dentist-mayor said soon another tooth, a bigger, stronger tooth, would grow in to replace the one he pulled, but I miss the old one. If I smile widely, I can see where it's missing, this piece of me that once existed and now doesn't. Grace offered to bite down as hard as she could on a lemon candy to try to break her tooth too, so our mother could be mad at her for messing up our plans and costing a ton of money, but I told her I was used to our mother being mad at me and it didn't make sense for her to hate us both.

Now it is one o'clock, the bells say. The skin on my arms and legs is tight, a deepening pink, and I know I'll have to also add *did not reapply sunscreen* to my list tomorrow. Inside the villa, our mother's voice wails. *I can't keep doing this and it's not enough* pass through closed windows. I can't remember if they fought this much before I ruined everyone's lives but now all they do is fight about money and how my mother has too much to do and my father takes too many pills and doesn't do enough.

Grace and I flip onto our fronts again and wipe our sweaty

foreheads on arms crossed above us. I start singing our favorite song that's our song for each other, and Grace joins in the harmony above me, louder and louder until we can't hear our mother anymore. *You are my sunshine, my only sunshine.*

I have a surprise for you, my mother says to my father in the evening. The sun is beginning to set behind one of the cliffs, but from here, midway up this mountain in the middle of all these other mountains, we can only see the bands of salmon and tangerine that fan out toward the constellation of tiny islands in the distance. Grace is napping in the bedroom; my hair is still wet against my burned back after showering. When I show my purpling skin to my mother, she says she doesn't have any aloe but she soaks a towel in cold milk and holds it gently against my back in her bedroom. Without detangling it first, she pulls my hair into a loose bun so it won't scratch my sunburn, then applies lotion so lightly that I can barely feel her fingers. For a moment I close my eyes and breathe in her gardenia and tuberose perfume that at home I sometimes sneak into her bathroom to spritz on myself, and the scent is so sweet I forget that she is always mad at me and at my father now and I lean back into her strong hands, which seem to be holding me up without pushing me away for once, until she asks when am I going to learn to be more careful and then my hot skin chills the rest of me and I am back to being the girl who does everything wrong.

What kind of surprise, my father asks.

We're going to have dinner together, just the two of us, on the terrazzo, to celebrate your birthday, she says.

Oh really? That's nice, he says, smiling at her.

That's not even the best part, she says. The best part is we don't have to do anything. I found a chef who will come here, make us *linguine vongole*—

My favorite, he interrupts her.

Yes, she agrees, smiling like he is, then says, Stefano will clean everything up so we can finally relax for one evening, no pressure, no emergency dental visits, no fighting. And no Vicodin, okay? I don't want to hear that you're not hungry after I planned this perfect night.

My father looks over at me, then back at my mother. I know, Helen, he says. Will he make something special for our girl? He reminds her without saying that I hate clams.

Already taken care of, she says.

The chef arrives at 7:00, the bells confirm, and his arrival is serenaded by music coming from the church speakers that soars up

the hillside, a choir singing in harmony. He unpacks large bags in the kitchen—pasta, olive oil, tomatoes, those big balls of cheese that ooze when you slice them open—while my parents get dressed in their bedroom. He is like a cartoon chef, tossing ingredients in the air and cutting them against a wooden board while smiling at me. The smell of garlic and onions and something fresh I've only smelled here in Italy fills the small kitchen.

Signorina, he says, your mama says you like pasta but no clams, yes?

I nod. I hate clams, I tell him. They are too slimy and there's always sand in them that crunches between my teeth.

He smiles at me. Yes, sometimes that happens, he says. It is how you know they are fresh from the sea, but it is not fun for your teeth.

I had to go to the dentist yesterday, I tell him, to get a tooth pulled because I broke it on a lemon candy.

Ah, *caramelle di limone*, he says. Imagine that.

My mother was very angry because she told me it was going to happen and told me to stop eating the candy but I didn't listen to her. She said I never listen. She said look what happened after Christmas when I didn't listen to her.

What happened after Christmas, signorina, the chef asks. It could not have been so terrible.

We were at Disney World for vacation, I tell him, and my mother said I could not walk down to the water by myself because an alligator had grabbed a little boy and made him drown a few weeks earlier and the alligator was still out there. But I was mad at her for not letting us go see the fireworks, and it was really, really hot, and I wanted to see if the alligator was as big as the ones we saw at the zoo so I went down into the water when she went back inside the condo to get iced tea and my father was resting his eyes, and the alligator came and it was bigger than the ones from the zoo and I stayed really still with my legs in the water as it got closer and—

And what, the chef says. He is shaking the pasta in the pan so the sauce gets on all of it.

And before it got to me, my father came running down to the water and pushed me out of the way but the alligator bit him under the shoulder and hurt his arm so badly it had to be amputated.

Oh, signorina, that is a very bad accident. But I am sure your mother is not so mad at you, it is just an accident. She ask me to make very special pasta for her very special girl. And she say you are a very brave girl with *Dottore Castellanti*. I also had a tooth extracted so I know this is very scary. The chef shows me the spot in the back of his mouth, and it's just a plump pink space, no stringy

things hanging out of it, no blood and I am relieved that one day my mouth might look like that too if the tooth forgets to grow in.

Okay, bellissima, linguine aglio e olio for you, with some parmigiano on top. Saluti, he says. It will not break any teeth.

May I have more, I ask him.

You have not even tried it yet, signorina, he laughs.

I need to bring some to my sister too, I tell him. Grace. She's napping.

Grace is the name of your sister, not you? he asks, and I nod.

Ah, okay, bellissima, your mama only tell me about one girl, but a bowl for Grace the sister, coming up, he says.

You can just add it to mine, I say. We like to share.

Here you go, he says. You will let me know if Signorina Grazia likes it. I already can tell that you will love it. He winks and I take the steaming bowl into the bedroom and shut the door behind me.

I have finished my pasta and even stopped burping from the garlic by the time my parents begin fighting again. I've lost track of the bells—it could be 9:00 or 10:30. It is dark and I am tired of Italy; I want to go home but I want to go to the home before we went to Disney and before the alligator ate my father's arm and before all of the fighting all of the time.

It's not normal that she does this, my mother is saying to my father, her consonants softer like they are after she drinks wine but not as soft as my father's after he takes his pills. The edge to her voice when she's talking about me remains.

She's not hurting anyone, my father argues.

Tim, Stefano said she told him she has a sister. Named Grace. Who she is apparently now giving food. You tried to convince me that she's getting better and she's not, she challenges my father, who doesn't respond. I picture him wiping his good hand over his eyes the way he does when he doesn't know what to say to my mother.

We need to get her more help, my mother says, and now she sounds the way she does before she cries—wobbly and already full of her tears. This is too much for us to deal with. I'm starting to worry she can't tell the difference between what's real and what isn't anymore. First it's telling her teachers she killed her twin in the womb—how does a fourth-grader even know what that means—and now the sister is alive and has a name and shares her dinner. I don't know what to do anymore and I have enough on my plate—

Dealing with me, my father interrupts, just say it.

Why do I always have to be the bad guy because I don't pretend things are fine, she asks.

Oh, I am very clear that things are not fine, Helen, my father says and his voice sounds like it's someone else's, not the dad who

calls me sweet peach when he tucks me in at night and his Grace Face when he sees me in the morning. I didn't want to come on this trip in the first place, remember, he barks at her. Maybe if we had stayed home the way I wanted to, saving the money for her therapy appointments, she would be fine. That's the last thing I hear before they must move into their bedroom to continue fighting in private.

I look at my sister, sitting next to me on the bed. They think I made you up, I tell her.

I know, she says.

Sometimes I can't remember what's real, I say.

It's not your fault, she tells me.

But the accident was my fault, I say. She is silent, like she agrees. She always agrees with everything I think but this one time, I wish she didn't.

Maybe is the accident not real, I ask. The alligator?

I hate when I have to tell you, she says. It makes you cry. Try to remember better next time.

I want you to be real, I say.

I do too, she tells me.

Outside, another bell tolls, a single quarter-hour one. The other sounds from beyond our open window are different here than they are at home. There are no crickets chirping or frogs ribbiting, no sprinklers turning on or wind making the trees whistle. There aren't so many trees here. Instead it's the bells and people laughing and dance music playing somewhere nearby and the waves of the sea crashing somewhere below.

I lie down on the bed, she is opposite me again, holding out a hand. I cup my hand around hers and she squeezes, tightly, like she would never let me go.

Am I not real too then, I ask. I think maybe this is what I am hoping for, that we're both a dream and in this dream, we always have each other.

You are real, my beautiful Grace, she tells me.

But I'm Enid, I say.

Sometimes your brain tricks you, she says. Her voice is even softer than before, and her face is squinched up like something hurts. I look down at our entwined hands and none of it makes sense. How can she not be real when I can see our hands, can feel the callus on the knuckle of her thumb from when she used to suck it and can see the matching one on my thumb? I squeeze again and she squeezes too so I look up at her, hopeful, but she still looks sad and when I look back at our hands again, I see that it's just my hands, my callused thumbs, clasping each other.

Will you be here when I wake up, I ask.

Do you trust me, she asks. I nod and she says, then try to have sweet dreams tonight, my sweet Grace. Her voice is the final thing I hear before I dream again of the alligator, only it's all different this time: how all morning, we had been waiting for him to appear, and the water had been still, no waves, no boats, no dolphins and no swimmers, just water as far as we could see; how even though I knew it was not cold, even though I knew it was dangerous, the heat was so oppressive I wanted to run towards it and completely submerge myself, blowing air bubbles toward the surface; how my father stayed outside with me the whole time, swinging me around in his arms so I could feel something like a breeze, even though the effort made him sweat more; how my mother opened the patio door, smiling, and carried out a tray of iced tea that was more ice than tea, and how after we drank all of the tea, we rubbed the ice cubes on our arms even though they left us sticky, until goosebumps appeared; how the alligator arrived in near stillness, how we almost missed him entirely but my father pointed, look, and the three of us stared from our patio until we could see his eyes, the only part of him that cleared the water line, and those eyes locked on ours, all six of our eyes at the same time, circling once, twice, three times before sinking under again and disappearing.

I wake up with the first of the day's bells, alone on the hard bed. I ignore my morning list because I am too excited to stay here. I am eager to see my father but I know I can't wake him this early so I tiptoe through the main room and out onto the terrazzo, whose name I finally learned, where there are puddles clinging to the grout between tiles from rain that must have come overnight.

I splash around the puddles in my bare feet, find a snail and pick him up. He crawls out onto my palm and feels a little sticky. I wonder what it would be like to extract him from his shell, his home, if it would hurt like a limb being torn off or a tooth being pulled or if he would just let it go with no resistance, leaving me to hold what had once held him. I am still contemplating that when my father pops his head out the patio door.

Grace Face, what are you doing, my father says and I look up, smiling, ready to run and hurl myself into his arms where he could pick me up and spin me around in the air like he always did, calling me his big girl, and we would look out at the sea together and talk about the places we want to go next but when he steps fully into the doorway, there is still the blank space where his arm once was and my dream from the night before fades to nothingness as I run my tongue across the fleshy crater in my mouth where the tooth once was. Why is it that only my nightmares are real?

Come in for breakfast, Gracie, my father says as he walks back inside.

I put the snail back on the ground, making sure he's on a dry tile so he doesn't drown in a puddle, though I don't know if snails can drown. I'm not ready to go in yet.

After the accident, we were famous for a little while. My parents stood in front of news cameras, my father with a hoodie draped over his shoulders, showing the puffy bandages and missing arm, my mother with her most concerned expression that the reporters called *grave* in their broadcasts. I wasn't allowed to be on camera with them because they said I was too young and they were protecting me, but we taped all of the reports we could find and watched them together and it felt like we were almost a normal family again during those weeks, like when we used to watch TV on Friday nights and my parents would let me pick the show and my mother would let us eat ice cream on the couch and no one yelled. During those weeks, when people sent us cards—some with money inside that my mother collected in a white envelope—and everyone was so nice to us and my parents weren't yet fighting, a little part of me that I can't let anyone else see was happy that it happened, that I caused it. If it had just stayed like that, this whole trip, everything, would have been different.

I imagine it: me, our parents, here. The Tooth Fairy bringing me Italian money even though I had no tooth to leave, my mother buying me lemon chocolate instead of lemon hard candies so I wouldn't break another one. My father taking me down to the church to see the bell tower that keeps time for the town, swinging my hand in his good one. Driving those winding roads to the ancient ruins my mother wanted to see in Pompeii, traveling forward and back in time, then forward and back in distance, just the three of us as we always had been and would always be. My parents strolling amidst that centuries-old stone, holding hands, smiling at me.

I step onto the small ledge and lean back holding the metal railing. I allow the top half of me to swing side to side while my feet remain planted and my fingers grip the railing. The momentum makes me dizzy, so I stop and lean my head upside down in front of the bar to let the blood rush back in. I can make out the people below, starting their days, looking small, and my mother's voice echoes in my head. *Do not lean over the railing.* I lift my head back up. The tips of my fingers flutter as I prepare to let go, as I ready myself for the rush I know would come if I were to hang with my arms outstretched, facing the water with my eyes closed for even just a second and maybe it would be as exciting as stepping into that water at Disney. But I think of my mother's face after the accident, and when she realized

we wouldn't be going to Pompeii, and I step back instead, off the ledge, and walk back to the patio table and sit in a creaky chair.

I open my sunflower notebook, flip through the pages filled with lists and scores and punishments. On the opening page is the drawing I did days after the accident: the alligator—scaly, rigid, menacing teeth bared—but now I notice that I had drawn the gator with sad, downcast eyes, as though I had seen something then that I was only beginning to understand now. Beneath sharp claws I had printed in bold block letters the name I had seen park rangers refer to the alligator as in newspaper articles after the accident: Enid.

I look toward the villa, where I can smell bacon frying and hear the sound of pans clanking, but no raised voices yet. I imagine my mother at the stove and my father pouring juice and I know that very soon they will ask me to come in and set the table. We will have breakfast together and maybe they will be angry like they were last night, or maybe they'll say surprise, we get to go to Pompeii today and it's even better weather than the day we were supposed to go, and everyone will be happy for once, especially me, that this time, I didn't ruin it. The only movement on the patio is from the snails inching across the tiles. Sunlight paints diamonds on the water far below the terrazzo. I turn back to my notebook, open to a blank page toward the back, take out my favorite aqua pen and begin writing.