

Am I?

My mother tells me that I'm a little bit Irish and a lotta-bit Italian.

She talks about her parents-

my grandparents

- growing up in New York City, with their own Italian families.

She talks about *Mommom*, her grandmother, who made the best *polpette*,

and who would get up early to go to the shrine to pray the rosary

every Tuesday morning.

She talks about *Poppy*, her grandfather, who would gather up all the grandkids on his knee

and around his chair to tell stories,

and who would wear a pinky ring, "like the stylish man he was."

Her grandmother

was the one with whom I share a name-

Lucille

-her first name, my middle one.

But I've never tasted a *polpette* or lived in New York with a big Italian family.

My father has told me I'm a whole mix of things.

(A mutt, if you will.)

A bit of German here, a bit of French there.

A great woman who immigrated from England,

and a wine merchant from Spain are just a few who make up

my bloodline.

But more than that, he talks about Key West.

Key West-

the place where he was born and his father was born.

The place where there are plots in graveyards with our last name,

but it's not creepy, it's comforting.

The place where we can be surrounded by our family and their history and their lives.

He gets a certain look when he talks about Key West.

A *glimmer* in his eye,

and warm smile that flits across his face

as he remembers his childhood haunts.

The snorkel shop where he got his first job, but instead of money, they paid him in diving trips.

The driveway with a boat on a trailer that he crashed his brother's moped into.

And the lake with a crocodile that tried to eat his dog.

But I've never gone diving on a warm, salty day, and I wasn't born in Key West.

My friends have told me I look Italian with my dark, curly hair.
People assume I'm French because my name rolls off the tongue in lilting swoops-
Madelyn Lucille.

And when substitute teachers read my last name on the list-
Piodela

-they want to break out their rusty accent-from-when-I took-Spanish-in-high-school,
assuming my predecessors must be from Spain.
None of them are *wrong*.
But none of them feel *right* either.

Maybe I'm more my own.

Maybe I'm the daughter who grew up in the South - North Carolina, Texas, Virginia - and can't
imagine living anywhere else.

I'm the daughter who picked up a pen and piece of paper at the age of 1 and hasn't stopped
creating since.

The daughter who's desperately loyal to her friends because she knows what it's like to be the
one left behind.

The daughter with all the health issues who insisted on being a dancer.

The woman who's determined to make her own mark on the world,
beyond her name or her appearance,
beyond her identity or home-
simply as the artist, Madelyn Lucille Piodela.