

**Your main commentary should be focused on -ing forms. Other topics may also be addressed.**

It was the anniversary of the disaster. Walter Hobbes was on his way up town to pick up his daughter, Louise, at Trinity. She had the dentist at four. Then the two of them were going for a hilariously early dinner at the place Louise liked - Papa Andre's - out on the Chef Highway, a roadhouse on stilts that the flood had missed. Then they were going back to his condo for her homework and a Bill Murray movie. This was New Orleans.

It was their day. Betsy, Louise's mother, was driving out to appraise some subdivision plats in Mississippi, then was staying at Mitch Daigle's, across the lake. Which meant double whiskey sours and maybe a joint and some boiled shrimp. Walter and Betsy had been divorced for a year. Betsy had fallen in love with Mitch while she was showing him a house - a present he had planned for his wife for their twentieth anniversary. An anniversary that didn't quite come off. Now and then Walter saw Mitch's ex-wife, Hasty, at the Whole Foods. Hasty was once a great, auburn-haired stunner, from someplace in north Alabama - a former Miss Something at U.A.B. Now she'd grown a little sturdy in the middle. In the Whole Foods she always glared at Walter, as if he'd dispatched Betsy into her life to commit espionage on her perfect marriage. Once he'd caught her staring at him down the aisle of lettuces and artichokes. He'd just turned, and there she was. Instantly he'd smiled at her. And a silly implicating smile had begun on her face, too. Only her shoulders had dropped then. She'd shaken her head in frustration, and her mouth had turned down. She'd put both palms out toward him, as if to drive him away. Then she'd pushed her basket out of sight, leaving Walter looking at where she'd been, and on out the front window onto Magazine Street.

Louise said, "We observed a moment of silence today for the poor flood victims." They were driving up Prytania, past the French consul's residence, with the faded French flag out front and a big Citroën in the circular drive. Outside it was ninety-eight, but the A.C. was going in the car. Kids with their uniform shirttails out and carrying book satchels were walking along the sidewalk from another private school in the neighborhood. The dentist was close by.

"Did any of your classmates lose someone?" Walter asked.

"I suppose so," Louise said. Louise was in the seventh grade and knew everything about everything now. "Ginny Baxter, who's black and has a scholarship. She and I both opened our eyes at the same time and almost laughed. It was like everybody was praying, but they weren't, of course. It wasn't cool."

"Did you remember your device?" Louise's "device" was her night guard, which she was having adjusted at Dr. De Patria's office. She'd begun grinding her teeth at night and sometimes in the daytime, when night guards weren't thinkable. Dr. De Patria said this was a consequence of her parents' divorcing when she was twelve years and two months old. To Walter the fact that his daughter ground her teeth seemed a small, bitter tragedy.

"I've got it," Louise said and sighed a profound sigh, placing her two small hands in her lap and twiddling all her fingers at the same time on her knee. "I have two requests," she said, riding along.

"The court'll entertain two requests," Walter said. He was of course a lawyer. "As long as one of them's not skipping the dentist."

"It's not." Louise liked the dentist, who was a joke-meister who went on Catholic retreats in the woods, where he sat alone and thought for days on end. Louise considered this bizarre but interesting. He always complimented her on her beautiful teeth, which she liked to hear. "Ginny's family's taking her out of school - after one week - and moving away. It's today. I want to take her a sympathy card or whatever, and say goodbye. She'll be gone tomorrow."

"That's very considerate of you," Walter said. School had, in fact, been going for only a week, and already this was happening. Louise said nothing about his saying her being considerate. She had her hands deep in her knapsack, digging out the green plastic case that held her night guard. They were on the dentist's street. Aline Street, off St. Charles. "Why're they leaving now?" Walter said, angling the big Tahoe to the curb. He intended to wait in the waiting room, read *Time*.