

DS Levy
SLOTS

IN THE BASEMENT, Ava sits on a bar stool, one hand plunged into an old Chase and Sanborn coffee can filled with dimes, her other hand resting on the bulbous lever. Upstairs, her mom and Hal Evans drink Jack Daniels and laugh. Tomorrow, they're getting married. Hal Evans has a greasy mouth and shifty eyes, and a black mole on his cheek that reminds Ava of an engorged tick. But her mom says he's a good man, honest and hard-working. The reels spin—cherries, oranges, lemons blur white-hot before her eyes. She hits two of a kind; three dimes spit into the tray. Hal Evans says this machine is a real 'beaut, not like the blingy video slots they have nowadays. And it's legal, he adds, since the dimes go back to the can.

Like Hal Evans, the slot machine moved in with them. It wasn't long afterwards that her brother Finn got sent to the Sol Wood Youth Detention Center for setting school trash cans on fire and sending threatening emails to Mrs. Gull, a teacher who'd tried reaching out to him after their dad died. A couple of weeks ago, Ava saw him at the gas station, standing beside a car she didn't recognize, filling up the gas tank. She'd heard he was out. She waved, then watched him yank the hose out and let it drop to the ground. He turned and looked at her before jumping into the back seat of the car. She hasn't seen him since, nobody has. But her mom hopes the wedding might be the thing that brings him back home. Ava yanks the lever hard, hot tears filling her eyes. The machine shimmies hard, tugging at the bolts holding it to her dad's old workbench, trying to work itself free.