We stopped at a restaurant that advertised steak dinners for $3.99. My father was excited—he loved red meat. We were on vacation. My sister, my mother, my father and I were all going to splurge. My father double-checked his billfold and said, “Let’s go!” The waitress asked if we wanted the special. Yes indeed. Would we like potatoes? Sure, why not? And creamed spinach? And bread? You bet. When the bill came, my father blanched. He whispered to my mother he didn’t have enough in his wallet. He called the waitress to our table and reminded her of the sign outside. She explained that each steak was indeed $3.99, but that all the sides we ordered were another dollar each. My father said she should have been more forthcoming. She brought us a menu. My father asked to see the manager, who pointed to the phrase à la carte. My mother dug in her purse, but my father told her to stop. He stood up and put sixteen dollars (a ten, a five, and a one) on the table—not even covering the tax and certainly no tip. “I’m not being swindled for a baked potato,” he said to the manager and walked out. “I’m sorry,” my mother sulked, pulling my sister and me out of the booth. I looked to the floor, the swirly carpet. “Sir, you can’t do that,” said the waitress. “Ma’am, I’m serious. You can’t do that,” echoed the manager. “Hey, come back, we’ll take a personal check.” All the way to the Cape, I thought the police would pull us over, the unpaid-for potatoes and spinach making me full and groggy. My mother and father fought—“I’ve never been so embarrassed . . .” and “Too bad. I’m no chump.”—before all went silent. My sister and I dug out the steak from between our teeth with our tongues. After a day or so, the shame turned to laughter. My mother said, “I guess you showed them.” And my father said, “I sure did.” By the end of the week we were proud, our story about standing up to touristy rip-offs, about snobs only pretending to be French, about how we were living le rêve américain.