

ALL THE FUN OF THE FAIR

Me, Mum and my best friend Aliyah trudge across the muddy field towards the funfair: Red, orange and purple fireworks blaze through the sky. We queue for candy floss, watching the hand-painted sign above the ghost train flap. 'Scouts Halloween Fair 2020'.

The rollercoaster is mesmerising, but too fast. The shiny electrical python coils and twists, clattering over metal rails. Shouts and squeals echo.

A kaleidoscope of neon whizzes through the air: I nudge Aliyah and point to the waltzer ride. Twenty-One Pilots blasts from black speakers fixed to the entrance. Aliyah nods enthusiastically. We hand Mum our candy floss.

Waltzer is painted in faded, peeling calligraphy across the back of each car: We run up the rickety steps and squeeze in behind the rusted safety bar, giggling nervously as the ride starts to move; slowly at first, but soon the floor undulates hypnotically.

I glance anxiously at Mum, but she's fiddling with her phone, getting ready to take photos.

With a jolt, our car spins. I squeeze Aliyah's hand, closing my eyes. We laugh, bunched together, as a man jumps between cars, spinning us faster and faster the louder we scream. The cars orbit the central point, revolving like the earth around the sun. The G-force is so strong I can't even lift my head.

Suddenly, the music fades and the ride slows. I open my eyes; everything a blur of colour. The man spinning us has changed! He's younger now and a cigarette hangs out of his mouth. My hands are sweaty on the shiny chrome safety bar. The cars that pass by look brand new, the paint bright and clear. The air feels... strange. The fair looks the same, but somehow different too. The stars above glitter like tiny jewels, winking at us.

Breathless with adrenaline, Aliyah and I climb off. The song playing now is one Mum would call a 'classic' - All Saints: 'Never Ever'. I squint into the darkness. Where Mum stood there's a girl about my age, holding two sticks of candy floss so big that I can hardly see her face.

Aliyah taps her on the shoulder: "Did you see the woman who was standing here?"

The girl shakes her head.

Aliyah nudges me wide-eyed, her mouth open. I follow her pointing finger to see a sign hanging down, flapping, from the corner of the ghost train.

I tilt my head to read it. 'Scouts Halloween Fair 1996'.