

At the Fair

by Keri Korteling

You're on the Ferris wheel, and the wind is blowing just a little bit, and the sky is invisible behind a wash of white clouds, and your little yellow box tips when you look down, down to the fairway swinging. In the boxes below grandmothers are shrieking self-consciously beside their embarrassed grandsons, who are dreaming of bumper cars. You smell rust. It rains on the fair most of the year.

The safety bar presses into your legs; you worry your thighs are fat, spreading like melting ice cream on the seat. There's a boy beside you -- a placid boy with frizzy walnut-coloured hair. One arm is draped around the lavender unicorn he won for you earlier. The other lies stiffly in the lack of space between you. You're trying hard not to let your knees touch.

The boy who's on your mind is down below, running this ride. You know he doesn't care about you. You know because he told you. He said, 'Stop calling. I'm not into you.' You were cool when you slid into the seat, when he reached across, and locked the bar over your two sets of legs: Dark denim, red ballerina flats. Faded Levis with ripped knees, red Converse low-riders. His drugstore cologne lingers with you above the fair.

When the little yellow car floats not to the top, but almost as high as you will go, there's a shudder, and you think for a moment you're about to collapse and fall into the earth, grandmothers and all. Swinging, stopping, you have to look at Levis. He says, crushingly, 'I hear you'll go down for a beer.' He's been quiet all this time, and you thought you only had to count the roll of green tickets spilling out of his back pocket. Seventeen tickets and you're home free. Four rides. A shooting game. He says, 'Everyone knows it's true.'

You lean and look past your red shoes, as if you could see his face, remembering that Hi-test. It was last fall, after a basketball game. He said, 'Yeah, baby. Like that.' Everything damp, the smell of fog and dead wet leaves. He was tangy and rose-petals all at once. Your lip gloss. Afterward, you wanted to erase the taste of it, but he was

shaking himself back into his jeans, relishing the last swallow, tossing the bottle onto the road.

There's a can of Canadian on the bench between you now. His belt's loose, and you can see Mr. Nice Guy wears blue y-fronts with red trim. Just like the beer, which you're not going to touch. And bending over you can see him taut, expectant.

You smell bearing grease and mini doughnuts and the horse barns at the racetrack. The clouds change shape. It rains in the summer too. The drops are so sharp they chip holes in the dusty track of the fairway.

