

Carousel – Evie, Year 6, NSW

Florence had always loathed cleaning. The dust got into her face, making her sneeze constantly. Her father knew her hatred for disinfecting their family house, so he made her clean more often than her mother.

Florence's father, in her opinion, was a lazy slob. She didn't understand why her kind-hearted mother had stayed with him for this long. He was not beneficial for their family. He did not clean, he did not cook and he did not help care for Florence's baby sister, Eleanor. When he was around the house, you could not cut any slack. The only time her father let her stop polishing the marbled wood table was when it was lunch or dinnertime.

Her mother, however, was much more generous. Whenever Florence looked upset or drained, her mother would take her and her sister by the hand and lead them off to the local carnival.

Florence had been fascinated by the carnival ever since she was young. The spinning rides and colourful roller coasters always caught her eye. The thoughts that flashed through her mind, although, were not 'Oh my, that's rather pretty!' or 'They should change that orange on that teacup ride, it looks rather vulgar'. They were more like, 'How do they make that spin?' or 'Why would anybody want to ride something like that ferris wheel?'

Florence had been to the carnival many times, as much as to remember how many rides there were, and which the best ones were. Florence enjoyed the carousel over most things. The small ponies were elegantly carved and coloured, and the slow spinning motion was perfect for her, as she didn't like to be frightened too badly.

Her biggest surprise was when the carnival had put in a new, smaller carousel. It was not painted in flashy colours. (She was happy about this because she had always thought the carnival used too much orange). It was just grey, black and white.

"Florence, I'm taking Eleanor to the apple bobbing," Florence's mother informed her.

"Yes, mother. I'll know where you are," Florence mumbled back, still staring at the new carousel.

"Now Florence, don't get into too much trouble," her mother shot at her, sticking one arm out to stop her from wandering away.

"No, mother I won't, now let me go on that new carousel ride!" she said in a louder, more impatient voice.

Just as Florence and her mother took separate paths, her mother said something that made her heart jolt out of her chest for a second.

"Oh darling, there is no new carousel ride!"

"Pardon?" she said, nonplussed, but her mother was already gone.

Florence continued in a brisk walk as she grew nearer to the abnormal carousel. One thing she noticed was that it had no ticket booth, nor people riding it. Florence brushed off those thoughts as she climbed the stairs to enter the carousel. Yet, those thoughts came tumbling back as she noticed how many horses there were on the carousel.

One.

One single, loner horse was awaiting someone to ride it. Florence, excited at this opportunity, almost sprinted to the horse. She ripped her frilled dress as she clambered onto the horse but was too frenzied to notice.

Florence rarely got this excited about a carnival ride, but something was different that day. Her father was away on a business trip, and Florence had never been happier, so she blamed it on that. When she was fully on the horse, the carousel started moving. First, at a normal pace. Then it began to speed up, making her hair fly behind her. Soon, it felt like she was flying. The world was blurred and spinning, making Florence's usually tidy brain all muddled. Then, just as she thought it was slowing down, Florence fell off the carousel, and into darkness.

When she awoke, her head was foggy and mixed up. A tall woman with short, bobbed blonde hair and cats-eye glasses was bent over her, surveying Florence carefully.

“Go and fetch me a glass of water,” she said to a tall shadowy figure over her shoulder. When she had claimed the glass, she threw its contents all over Florence's face and torso. Jolting up into a sitting position, she glared at the woman.

“Now there! Whatever was that for!” she half-shouted.

“Just to make sure you're not dead, of course! And it seems you aren't.” She giggled gleefully. “We had one yesterday, and he died as soon as he hit the ground!”

Florence's eyes widened, and she climbed into the nearest seat to avoid the floor. The woman moved back to a small table, and slammed a glassy judge's hammer so hard into the desk that it shattered into a billion pieces.

“The test may begin!” she shouted at Florence and several other children. “Whoops,” she muttered a little quieter, surveying the shattered hammer.

Florence took a pen lying on her desk and looked at the piece of paper. It was blank except for a space for her name. Once she entered her full name, she flipped to a new page, and all her personal information was on there. Born in 1901, 12 years old, female, and so on. Then she read ‘What's your greatest fear?’. To that unsettling question, she answered, *My father*.

On the next page, it said *What is your greatest desire?* Before she got to answer that, the tall woman interrupted.

“I sense you all want to know how this is related to a carousel, correct? Well, your answer is that it's not.”

Florence, feeling surprised, scared, and majorly confused, continued listening.

“See, us future people need to gather your information since the kids in our future seem to be... lacking happiness.”

A small girl in the third row raised her hand.

“Yes, Annabelle?” the woman enquired.

“How did you get back here, to our time?” Annabelle said.

“Time travel,” The woman replied sharply.

“Ah. I see,” Annabelle muttered.

“Anyways, we know you kids like carousels, so we set one up for you. Now that’s all you need to know, get back to your exam. We also have a little surprise for you at the end.”

Slightly confused, Florence put her pen back to the paper, and answered the question. *Me and my family, happy, together. My whole family.*

Then, she flipped to a new page again. This time, all it said was *Thank you.*

Florence, confused, looked around the room. Then, Annabelle disappeared. Soon after, a small boy in the first row. Then a teenager a desk away from herself. Then, she felt herself growing fainter, and for the second time that day, she fell into darkness.

When she awoke, the first thing she noticed was that her head had a blistering pain. The second, was that she was not in her house, or back at the carnival. She was in a dark room with ugly, peeling wallpaper. When she looked ahead, it never ended. Then, an ominous creaking sound was heard in the dark void. Scared and shaking, she recoiled, holding her head in her arms. Then, before she could take another breath, a beige, hulking figure appeared. It was wearing a tweed suit and an ugly grey tie. A bushy goatee was growing from his chin, making Florence realise who it was.

Her father.

He advanced on her, clenching his fists, and an angry look on his face. Florence, triggered and terrified to tears, backed against a wall. She expected a punch, maybe a spank. That didn't happen.

“Florence,” he boomed.

“Y-yes, father?” she stuttered.

“I'm very disappointed in you.”

Heaving air, tears pouring down her face, she tried to say something. All she could muster were sounds of utter shame and fear. *Fear.* Then, the faint feeling came again, and she fell into the blissful arms of darkness.

When she awoke, she again was in darkness. But not a room. Instead, she was floating. Floating in the abyss. Soon after she realised this, something fell and hit her head, dropping into her hands. It was a picture of a family. Florence's family. Eleanor, with a look of blissful content on her face, was in their mothers' soft arms. She herself was standing in the middle of her mother and her...father. He father's hands were on her shoulders, a massive smile on his face. And not a fake smile, a real, happy one.

Tears springing into her eyes, she realised something. *My desire. This must be the 'little' surprise*, she thought. Then, the picture slipped from her arms, and she dropped into the gloom.

When she woke, she was standing outside the carousel. She spotted her mother and ran over to her. She hugged her mother, laughing and crying, in shock, staring through hazy eyes.

“Oh, dear. What happened?” she questioned.

“The carousel frightened me,” Florence replied.

Walking home from the carnival, the only thing Florence was thinking about was the picture. Happy and despairing, she strolled home, wishing for that future.