

So many feelings...

Standing in the funfair at night, it felt like you were in the centre of the universe. Stuff was happening everywhere. Laughing crowds surged by. Ear-splitting music thumped out of a thousand speakers. The cold air was rich with the smells of fried food and candyfloss, and rang with excited screams and laughter.

'Drink, Darren.' Joel held out the clear glass bottle.

It was more like an order than an offer. Darren took a half-hearted swig. The vodka stung the back of his throat, burned all the way down to his guts. For a long, panicked

moment he thought he might puke. He would be dead if he

puked. Joel and Rob would never let him live it down.

But after a few seconds the fiery sensation at the back of his mouth seemed almost good. He grinned, and passed the bottle on to Rob who swigged from it easily, like he was necking lemonade.

Joel's mates were all cool. Darren wished he fitted in better. Wished his mum and dad hadn't made him take along his little sister, Jasmine, to the fair. What a drag. How was it they treated him like a kid most of the time and yet thought he was old enough to babysit?

'Let's have some,' said Jasmine, reaching for the

bottle.

'Forget it.' Darren shook his head. 'You're only 13.'

Joel gave Darren a fed-up look. 'Is your fat little sister tagging on all night?'

Jasmine flushed bright red. 'Like you're anything special,' she shot back. 'I'm not fat and I don't need looking after.' She snatched the cigarette Rob had just lit up and took a puff. 'See?'

'Mum keeps telling her she's big boned,' Darren said, grabbing the cig back off her. 'She'll believe it one day.' The boys laughed and Darren took an extra-big drag. His head spun a little.

Jasmine turned away. Darren guessed she was upset but told himself he didn't care. He couldn't look soft in front of Joel. He took another swig of vodka, and found it wasn't so bad. The glare of the neon lights made the world seem almost too bright, like nothing was quite real. He felt brilliantly reckless, out drinking and smoking where anyone could see him.

'Not more little girls,' he heard Rob sigh. Three of Jasmine's mates were coming over to see her. They were tarted up. One of them was eyeing Joel.

'Hey, Jasmine,' Darren said, pulling 10 quid from his pocket. 'Dad gave me some money for rides.'

Meet you at the roller-coaster in an hour?'

Jasmine took the cash and went off with her mates without a word. Darren felt a twinge of guilt - his dad had said not to let her out of his sight. 'She'll be all right,' he told himself. Then the bottle of vodka was pushed back into his hand. Almost without thinking now, he raised it to his lips.

'Joel is so lush,' said Charlotte, hugging herself. 'God, Jasmine! You were talking to him!'

Jasmine shrugged. 'So? He's just a dork who hangs out with my brother.'

'He's lush!' Charlotte insisted. Her mate Jayne nodded firmly in agreement.

Katie smiled at Jasmine. 'He is quite cute, Jas.'

Jasmine felt hot. Yeah, she thought angrily. Yeah, OK, he's cute. But he thinks I'm a fat, disgusting pig, like every other boy. Why did Katie have to bring Charlotte and Jayne along? All the boys fancied them. But Jasmine felt that no boy would ever look twice at someone chunky like her. In her daydreams and fantasies

it was different of course. She did loads of sexy things in her head. Weird things sometimes...

She screwed up her eyes. Why did everything have to feel so confusing? She knew a girl in class who cut herself when she felt bad, in places where it wouldn't show. Said it felt sweet, let out the pressure. But Jasmine thought it sounded dangerous.

Anyway, other people said that talking about stuff is the best way to cope. Talking? A mean little voice in her head insisted that if anyone found out how dirty she was inside, they would never speak to her again.

Katie nudged Jasmine lightly and rolled her eyes. Charlotte was still gassing on about Joel to Jayne.

'They'll go on like this for hours,' Katie hissed in her ear. 'Let's ditch them for a while and go on the ghost train by ourselves.'

Jasmine grinned and nodded. Maybe she *would* try talking to Katie about some of that secret stuff. Sometime soon.

But right now, it was time to have fun.

Darren and his mates eventually showed up at the roller-coaster. They laughed and swung about wildly like they were already strapped into their own private ride.

'Let's coast to the coaster!' Darren bellowed, and led the way unsteadily to the queue.

The boys got in one carriage, the girls in another, much to Charlotte's disgust. The ride started slowly as the carriage clanked steadily up the almost vertical track.

Jasmine felt different

blackness. Calmer.

up here facing the night's

It was good to be taken out of the glaring, neon world for a while. Then the carriage reached the top of the rise and teetered over into a steep descent. Jasmine whooped and gave herself up to the drop.

The rushing wind cleared Darren's head a little. It was a brilliant ride, but scary too. Once you were on board there was no getting off - you were helpless, rushing through all these hoops and twists. Even when you'd had enough there was no way of stopping the ride, no

matter how hard you yelled. Even your mates couldn't help much. Not when they were going through exactly the same thing.

But at least you were all in it together.

The roller-coaster finally cranked down to a jarring halt. Darren staggered off dizzily. 'I feel sick,' he moaned.

'Hey, Jas,' said Katie suddenly. 'Isn't that your mum and dad?'

Jasmine swore. 'Come to check up on us. Darren was supposed to have us back by nine-thirty.' She stuck a mint in her mouth in case her breath was still smoky. Joel and Rob slapped Darren on the shoulder and cleared the area, anxious to avoid an awkward scene.

'Hi Mum, hi Dad,' Darren muttered. Then he threw up over his shoes and the wet grass.

'He's OK,' Jasmine assured her parents. 'It's just this last ride's made him queasy.'

'Poor little sod,' said Darren's dad heartily. 'Had a cast iron stomach when he was little. The lad must be getting old...'

Darren looked up blearily at Jasmine. 'Thanks,' he mouthed.

She just shrugged. 'You owe me,' she mouthed back. But deep down she hoped he was all right. She'd heard about other kids who ended up all messed up from alcohol. Looking at the state of Darren right now, maybe it was a good thing he'd stopped her drinking tonight.

Darren felt rough as hell in the car on the way home, but a part of him still tingled with the pounding thrum of the fair. His thoughts whirled round and round like one of the rides, leaving him guilty, proud, scared all at once. He wondered if life would always be this way from now on, his head busy and dizzy with all these feelings. Just so many feelings.