

Again
Ashley Loe
First Place-High School

The water slide loomed, hot pink and menacing, before me as I peered down the dark tube. “Is this even safe?” I asked, glancing around as other kids eagerly rushed to get in line for the ride.

“If the eight year olds are allowed to go down the slide, you shouldn’t have a problem,” Tee pointed out. “You aren’t scared, are you?”

“Me? Nope. Just had some...questionable experiences with amusement parks and their guarantee of a fun time.”

In my defense, I wasn’t to blame for an irrational fear of amusement parks. Previous experiences, including a terrifying meeting with Mickey at Disneyland at age two and a death-defying roller coaster at age seven, had taught me that amusement parks were not to be trusted. This ride, with the five or six flights of stairs, and the birds-eye view of the whole park, just about screamed “dangerous,” but none of my friends seemed to share this view. They had been planning this entire trip for over a month now; step one included convincing me to come along. I guess step five was to cajole me into letting gravity pull me down a plastic tube fifty feet above the ground.

“Almost there!” Tee practically sang. On the bus ride over, she had pulled out her iPod, offered me an earphone, selected her High School Musical playlist, and practically forced me to relive all the movies while she gleefully sang along. I knew she had been warming up her vocal cords for a devious reason. In front of her, a young girl and her friend had rushed ahead of us in order to secure their spot at the head of the line.

We were almost at the front of the line. I glanced behind me, trying to gauge the amount of time it would take me to shake off Tee's vice-like grip, slip away from my friends, and hurtle down the stairs, far away from this plastic place of doom. Lost in my brainstorming, I failed to notice Tee's grip tighten, yanking my arm forward. Too late.

"It's our turn!" Tee, with her almost infectious enthusiasm, grinned at me. "Are you ready?"

"No. In fact, I don't think I'll ever be ready. Maybe I'll be ready if I turn around, run down the stairs, and wait for you guys at the bottom. That should do it."

"Very funny, Ashley. Don't worry, it's really fun." Tee turned, her face lighting up as she found the front of the line. She turned back to me, gesturing wildly. "Ashley! Get over here, Ross and Daniel are about to get their turn."

A preview? That was Tee, always looking out for others. I inched closer to the railing, careful to place my bare feet on certain wooden boards, giving the edge of the platform plenty of allowance. I didn't need to let my fear of heights come crawling out of the woodwork. Hands secured on the railing, I watched as my friends hurtled down the slide, slowing only when they reached the bottom, spiraling into the bowl and down yet another tunnel. I was now completely terrified.

"Oh my god, it's finally our turn. Here, grab onto the inner tube. It'll be fun, I swear," Tee promised. I took a deep breath, situating myself onto the inner tube. My hands slipped into the handles, and I clenched my fingers into a fist. This was really happening.

The ride operator glanced over the side, casting a perfunctory look to check to see that they boys had safely gotten out of the way, then turned and gestured. Tee pushed off, and that momentum propelled us down the slide. The tube intensified the sound of the water, almost to a

roar, that surrounded me. I could feel my heart moving up my chest, as we flew down the tube. Tee's indistinct screams surrounded me, along with someone else's, and I didn't realize until later that the other person screaming had been me. The adrenaline rushed through my blood, and I felt like I was flying. I welcomed every twist and turn. All too soon, the tube ended and we landed in a deep pool of water.

Slicking my hair back with one hand, and tugging the inner tube with another, I grinned. I could still feel the staccato heartbeats in my chest. "That was just about the best adrenaline rush. Ever. We have to go again. We have to go on all the rides."