

Just Hanging Around

Beth Walker

The clouds sliding under—or was it above—Sally’s feet made her dizzy. She had been stuck on this rollercoaster in the middle of the big loop-de-loop for two hours. Dazed with disbelief, she tried to keep her tongue from falling out and her lunch from coming up—or was it down? She tried to keep silent, too, but after the first hour she finally gasped, “My arms! I can’t hold my arms!” So she let them hang there, as if she were in a stick-up—or was it a stick-down? She figured she’d find herself in this position sooner or later; she was a bank teller.

At least she wasn’t alone in the malfunctioning car. Every few minutes, someone screamed as if being tortured then, purged, grew calm. The frat boy in the seat next to her thought it was all part of the ride, though. He whooped and wooed, ready for a chug-a-lug. Then he announced, “I got to pee!” This was news, and the TV cameras were zooming in.

One reporter, particularly annoying in his neon-green tie, shouted up, “How does it feel to hang upside down?” Then he scampered away when the frat boy threatened to piss on the next one who asked. In the harness next to a woman whose breasts sank onto her chin hung an older man who yelled, “Don’t put me on TV. This ain’t my wife!”

“That’s it,” Sally thought. “I can’t take it anymore. I’m losing my mind. The blood is pushing it out my ears.” She thought of all those times she had said, “Glad that didn’t happen to me.” And here she was, kids pointing and laughing, saying to one another, “Glad that ain’t me.”

Sally felt another scream working its way up her throat—or was it down? Inevitable, like the sky falling. Meanwhile, the crowd behind the fire trucks was getting larger than the lines for The Water Slaughter and Madame Vladongski, Sexual Psychic. The carnies even considered charging admission.

Beth Walker has been published in journals such as *Alaska Quarterly Review* and *Yellow Medicine Review*, and the hardback anthology of TN writers, *Homeworks*. A writing consultant at the University of Tennessee at Martin, she is currently writing about the work of Natalie Goldberg.