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THE GOLDFISH BOY was one of the bestselling debuts of 2017 and was shortlisted for a number of prizes, including the Waterstones Children's Book Prize. Her stunning second book, THE LIGHT JAR, was chosen as the Children's Book of the Week in the *Times*, the *Guardian* and the *Observer* on publication, and THE DAY I WAS ERASED was Children's Book of the Week in the *Times*.



*For Carole*

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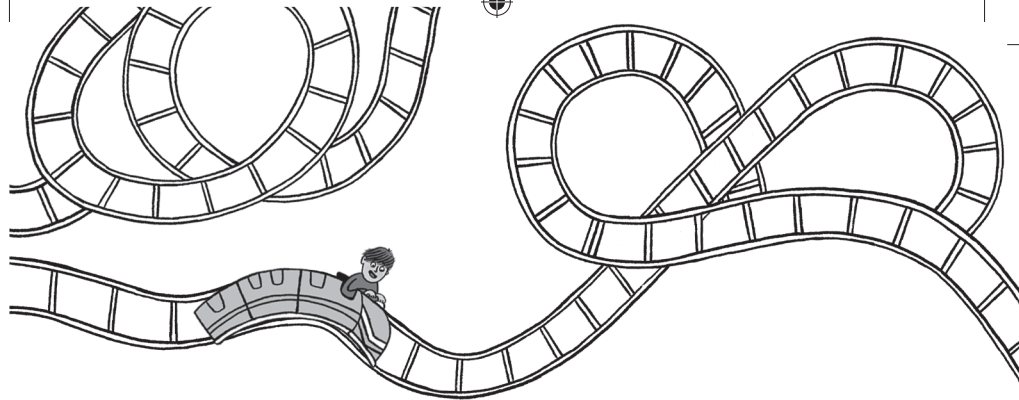
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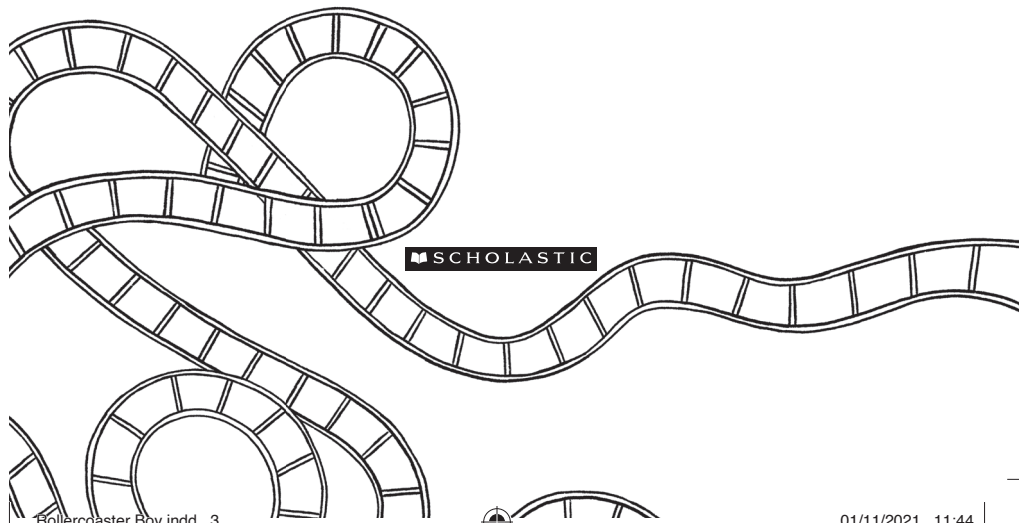
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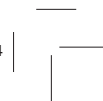
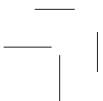
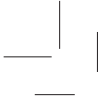
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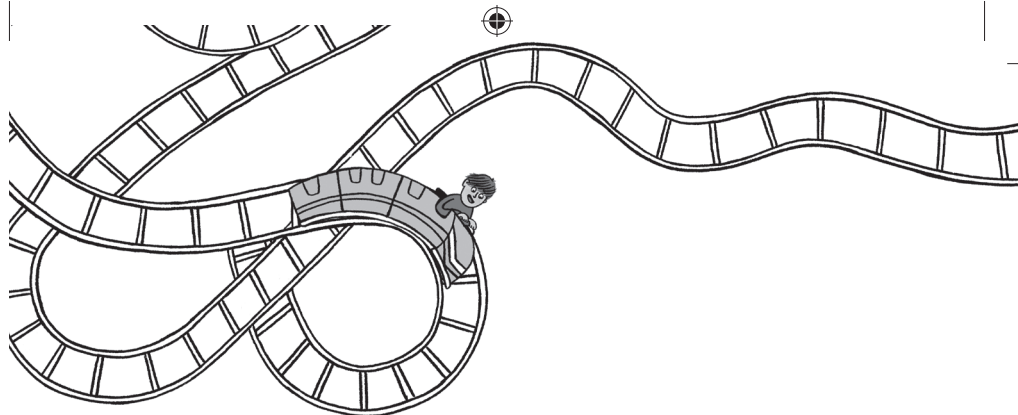


# THE ROLLERCOASTER BOY

LISA THOMPSON







## CHAPTER ONE

“We are not going  
to the fair.”

Aunt Lexie said that life with Dad was like living on a rollercoaster.

“You’ve had so many twists and turns I bet you don’t know which way you’re going next,” she said as she dished up our dinner.

I knew exactly what she meant, but my little sister, Laurie, didn’t understand. She was only six.

“Aunt Lexie? Are we going to the funfair?” she asked. Her eyes were as wide as our plates, which were now filled with sausages, mashed potato and baked beans.

“We are not going to the funfair,” I said. “You’re not supposed to take it *literally*. You are so dumb sometimes, Laurie.”

“Todd, don’t speak to your sister like that,” said Aunt Lexie. She put our dinner on the table and Laurie grabbed the ketchup bottle.

“But I’ve never been on a rollercoaster before,” said Laurie. “*Please!*”

“We’re not going to the fair!” I said. “And anyway, you’re too small to go on a rollercoaster. They don’t let shrimps on scary rides.”

“I’m not a shrimp. I’m SIX,” said Laurie. She squeezed the ketchup on to her plate and a blob of sauce splattered up and on her school jumper. I’d need to check if she had a clean one in her drawer before Aunt Lexie went home. I didn’t know how to use the washing machine so she might need to help me.

I began to cut my sausages up and Laurie got up on to her knees on her seat like she did at every mealtime.

“Laurie, sit on your bottom, please,” said Aunt Lexie. “You can’t eat your dinner like that.”

“But Daddy lets me,” said Laurie.

“Well, I’m not Daddy, so you have to go by my rules until he gets better, OK?” said Aunt Lexie. “And

let's put these dirty stones away, shall we?"

Laurie liked to collect "stuff". She used to collect feathers, and when she got bored with that, she switched to picking up random pebbles from the garden, claiming that they were valuable fossils. Aunt Lexie brushed the stones into the plastic tub that Laurie used to store them. On the lid in black felt pen she had written:

### *MY PRESSUSH FOSSILS*

I poked at the mashed potato with my fork. There were lumps in it. I opened my mouth to say something but closed it again when I saw how tired Aunt Lexie looked. She had been working since eight a.m. in a care home, gone straight to the supermarket to buy us some food, driven twenty-five minutes to our house, filled the fridge *and* cooked us dinner. Now probably wasn't a good time to complain about lumpy mash.

Aunt Lexie put a plate on a tray along with a glass of water. Apart from using the bathroom, Dad hadn't got out of bed for fifteen days now. I'd been keeping track using the calendar in my school homework planner. He *had* been eating more over the last two days though. When he got his appetite back it usually

meant he was starting to feel better.

“I’ll just go up and give your dad his dinner and then I’ll sort out dessert,” said Aunt Lexie. She lifted up the tray and headed to the hallway and the stairs. “It’s chocolate cake and ice cream tonight!”

“Chocolate cake!” said Laurie. She waved her fork and a baked bean flew up and landed in her fringe. I picked it off for her and put it on the side of her plate.

“I *love* chocolate cake,” said Laurie. “Aunt Lexie always gets us special food when she comes. It’s like it’s my birthday or something!”

“We only get special food because she feels sorry for us,” I said quietly.

She looked up at me.

“Why would she feel sorry for us?” she said.

I rolled my eyes. Sometimes it felt like my sister lived on another planet. She just didn’t see what was going on around us like I did.

“It doesn’t matter. You wouldn’t understand,” I told her. She stared at me, her forehead creased.

“Just eat your dinner,” I said. “Then you can have some chocolate cake, OK?”

She shovelled a big forkful of food into her mouth, then shuffled up on to her knees again.

“Have *you* been on a rollercoaster before, Todd?”



she asked, her cheeks bulging with potato.

“I went on one with Dad once. Mum and Dad took us to the fair but you were really small. You won’t remember it,” I said.

Her eyes widened. “Did the rollercoaster go really fast?” she asked. “Were you scared? What was it like?”

I remembered the start of the ride. That was almost the worst bit. There was a teasingly slow crawl up a really steep hill and I was so nervous I felt sick. Dad wasn’t scared though. He had been grinning and giggling like *he* was the kid, not me.

“Todd?” Laurie said, tugging on my sleeve. “Was the rollercoaster fast?”

“Yes, it was really fast. And there were so many loops that we must have gone upside down at least five times,” I said.

Laurie grinned and clapped her hands. “And how high did it go?” she asked. “Did you go as high as the moon?”

“It didn’t go quite to the moon but it did go REALLY high,” I said. She blinked her blue eyes at me, waiting for more.

“In fact,” I said, turning to face her, “it went *so high* that it started snowing! Like it does on the top of a mountain!”

She giggled. “Don’t be silly, Todd,” she said.

I smiled at her and she turned back to her food, humming to herself as she ate.

Me, Mum, Dad and Laurie had gone to the fairground for my eighth birthday. It was supposed to have been a birthday treat but I remember not really wanting to go. Dad hadn’t been well back then, either. He wasn’t tired all the time like now. In fact, he was the opposite of tired. It was like he was a human elastic band, ping-pong around all over the place. Watching him like that made me want to hold my breath in case he suddenly snapped in two.

“Todd?” Laurie said, jolting me out of my memory. I waited for my little sister to swallow some food and carry on. “Do you think Daddy is ever going to get out of bed?”

“Of course he’s going to get out of bed,” I said, trying to sound cheery. “Now, eat up. Aunt Lexie will be down in a minute to cut you some cake.”

She shoved the last piece of sausage into her mouth, then jumped down from the table. I looked at my half-eaten dinner. Thinking about the fair and picturing Mum’s worried face that day had put me off my food. Mum was away working in another country right now, that’s why we had Aunt Lexie to help us.

But what if Aunt Lexie wasn't around? And what if Dad's other mood came back: the mood he had been in when he made me go on a rollercoaster even after I told him I *really* didn't want to? What if the other dad came back? The one who didn't listen and seemed out of control. That was the one I worried about the most: the elastic-band dad.

