

MINTER KROTZER

Pontchartrain Beach

We were not the kind of family who went to amusement parks.
We begged our parents to go just like we begged them for a puppy.
Finally they caved in. One summer evening we made the expedition out to
Pontchartrain Beach – an amusement park next to the lake in New Orleans.
We drove all the way down Elysian Fields instead of taking I-10.
In the distance you could see the lights at the end of the avenue:
the bright constellation of the rollercoaster, the word “Zephyr” following
its curve into the sky, the Ferris wheel, and the Ragin’ Cajun.
At the entrance palm trees welcomed you.

My parents didn’t know how these things went. They bought us each three tickets for
rides. Three tickets is that all? We asked. Three tickets my father confirmed.
It was so hard to decide which ride to take. There were so many:
the Ferris wheel, bumper cars, the haunted house and the Zephyr. My sisters and I stood
next to the children made of wood, with smiles painted on their faces,
to make sure we were tall enough for each ride. But we were not the right height for
the scary rides and so we resigned ourselves to Kiddieland and the Zephyr Junior. After
the rides, we begged for carnival food: cotton candy, peanuts and pretzels. My parents
refused, explaining we were going to dinner somewhere outside of the park, a *grown-up*
kind of place. We left just when the Friday night dates were arriving, teens with long
hair, holding hands and wearing tight jeans.

At Casa Carmella, a small Mexican restaurant on Elysian Fields, Papa ordered chicken
with mole sauce and explained that mole meant chocolate. My parents returned to
themselves at dinner, drinking margaritas on the rocks with salt, enjoying the unusual
food and the peace away from the amusement park. Later on, when they talk about
that night, our one trip to an amusement park, they only mention the restaurant with
the mole sauce and how it was the best they ever had. There’s no talk of Pontchartrain
Beach and all of the rides but that’s what you remember when you are a child: the
Zephyr and the wooden children. Not the mole sauce.