

**NOTTINGHAM PLAYHOUSE SHORT STORY COMPETITION**  
**OVERALL WINNER: MORLEY CHANDLER**

**The Hunted**

Thud!

His feet hit the ground heavily as he landed on the dank forest floor. Parker waited. He waited and waited. Were they still following him? He listened and listened, holding his breath. In the distance, he could hear a faint snap of a twig. They were still hunting him.

Setting off once more, Parker weaved through the woodland, stumbling now and again over logs, hidden in dense undergrowth. As Parker's worn leather-jacket whipped behind him, he could hear his heart thumping the same rhythm that his feet were pounding on the rough surface. Sweat made his sandy hair cling uncomfortably to the back of his neck, his brown t-shirt damp and almost unbearable to wear. Out of the corner of his eye, Parker caught sight of something glinting, as the last few minutes of daylight shone. Shielding his aqua-blue eyes with his hand, he squinted, trying to make out what it was. It looked like lettering, over an entrance of some sort. Maybe to a place; where he could throw them off his scent.

Running on, he could feel his rubber-soled Gucci trainers, embroidered with a bee, blistering his heels – he couldn't stop now, they were closing the gap, hungry for him. He sprinted on.

Upon reaching the end of the path, Parker looked up to see 'Mountain Wood Park' in tired gold and black faded lettering, stretching across two posts, daubed with graffiti. On entering the park he felt an unwelcoming drop in temperature, his breath suddenly becoming visible in front of him. Fearful, his eyes scanned for a place to hide. To the left, a frozen Ferris wheel and sitting next to it, a creaking carousel. Looking right, several eerie structures in ruins: leaving him with an unsettled feeling, in the pit of his stomach.

On passing the Ferris wheel, Parker was startled by a howling in the wind – a warning carried to him as the wind rattled through the Ferris wheel's time-worn bucket seats. When he was younger, the Ferris wheel had been the ride he had always begged his dear grandfather to take him on first. He had adored that feeling of flying-free through the air, like a bumble-bee exploring a summer garden for the first time. Now he felt like a bee- trapped in a net. He could make out the silhouette of his predators, closing in.

Afraid, Parker stepped into a wooden arena. Maybe once this had been the main attraction for the visitors of this park, but now the scattered rusted dodgems would never see life again. This could be a good place to hide, Parker prayed. Awkwardly clambering into the footwell of number 13, the cold metal pedal dug into his leg.

Silence enclosed the park. No sound. No movement, except for a lone piece of tumbleweed, trying to escape.

He waited and waited.

Looking up, over the moth-eaten seat of the dodgem, he sensed several pairs of eyes on him.

Surrounding him.

Laughing at him.

The hyenas had found him.