

'Oh darling, I'm right in the middle of this. Can you give me half an hour?'

'Umm, not really, it starts at six so –'

'I'll take you,' said Dad from across the room, quietly putting the lid back on the biscuit tin. He pointed at it and shook his head at me. 'Come on'.

He went to find his keys and I waited in the hall. I looked up at the sepia photos of fairground rides on the wall. Sometimes I watched Mum blowing dust from the frames and shining up the glass with her sleeve with such gentleness. She'd gaze at the smiling children eating candy floss and the gooey-eyed couples on the Ferris wheel like I might look at the northern lights if I ever saw them. She once told me the tick tock of the grandfather clock was the perfect soundtrack to those photos because it conjured up visions of the big mechanical rides at a fair, clicking and clanking into life. The same grandfather clock that kept me awake every night with its rhythmic, echoing ticking like somebody drumming a long fingernail on my window. I wondered if the sound actually sent Mum into a trance. It would explain so much. Finally, Dad found his keys and I followed him out to the car, buttoning up my coat over my uniform on the way down the driveway. It was bitterly cold and blustery out – clouds were racing through the sky so fast I could hardly find shapes in them – and it was just as icy inside the car, so I tapped along to a rock song on the radio with my feet to warm my legs up. I waited for Dad to make his usual joke.

'I'll just switch the heating on.' He put on a pair of wooly gloves. 'Much better.'

'Oh hey, Dad, I forgot to tell you. I was awake all night waiting for the Sun to come up, and then it dawned on me.'

He laughed softly through his nose. I got my Sky Diary out of my bag and put a tick next to the joke, marking it approved in case I ever found myself in a situation where I had to tell a joke to real people. You have to be prepared. I already had a list of five interesting facts about myself saved up for those horrendous icebreakers at school, although one of them – how I got my name – was only for absolute, total emergencies. I spent the rest of the journey spotting constellations in the freckles on my arm until we finally pulled up at the church hall.

'Have fun in there,' Dad said in a strained voice as he leaned across me to jostle with the car door handle that I could never manage to open. The door swung

Commented [SOH1]: 1.This is an excellent introduction to the conflict between Leena and her mum that so often holds her back. I wonder if you could bring it in a little earlier, maybe when her mum is baking and Leena asks what's in the oven. That way you'll start building sympathy for Leena straight away and readers will find it easier to identify with her, particularly if they experience tension with their own parents (and who doesn't?).

Commented [SOH2]: 2.This northern lights line is a lovely way to relate her mum's actions back to Leena's own frame of reference, firmly anchoring the scene in her POV and reminding the reader of her goals #deepPOV

Commented [SOH3]: 3.You do a great job bringing scenes to life with sounds but I'd love to see you use more sensory detail, thinking about the less obvious senses. Earlier on, Leena's mum was baking cookies – a great opportunity to bring smell into the manuscript. You could invite readers further into Leena's world by evoking memories for them through senses. What might Leena associate with the smell of burnt cookies? What might readers think of? #SensoryDetail

Commented [SOH4]: 4.I love this! Dad jokes are so relatable so you'll help readers connect with Leena here. It's particularly sweet that Leena retaliates with her own bad joke; they share something in common, which no doubt helps Leena cope with the tension between her and her mum.

Commented [SOH5]: 5.You mentioned earlier that this is a thirty minute drive – would Leena really sit in silence all this time? She seems to have a warm relationship with her dad so I'd expect them to chat a little more. Details like this can pull readers out of the story instead of keeping them fully immersed as they wonder, 'wait, she did that for the whole journey?' If she really did, is that because her dad knows she needs the silence to psyche herself for Shooting Stars? If so, this is an important aspect of their relationship so I'd suggest having her dad mention it. #Character #Believability