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Fledgling

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ETHAN KEELEY

Fledgling

Jason felt alive. The intense winds tearing at his face brought the eight-year-old to a state of ecstasy. This was his first roller coaster ride. He sat toward the back with no one next to him and imagined he was in control of each movement—the track was mere illusion.

The first drop forced his head against the cushioned seat; one heavy bar held in his slight figure while the ride brought him to a left turn, then a right, jolting him to either side. Unanimous, joyous screams went up all around. Another ascension, then down again, then a flank, which caused the coaster to turn nearly sideways. Jason felt the sensation of floating; his body began separating from the bar's embrace. Adrenaline flooded his veins. It was all part of the fun—back to a straightaway—he was fine.

They were approaching the last leg of the journey. One final incline, one last push to the end. Jason could see the whole park now: a miniature display. He was utterly detached from the world. The coaster began its final descent. Jason felt himself slipping again as the bar shook looser with each bump. He held on with every ounce of strength he had, but gravity was a ruthless opponent. He was sucked upwards, then pulled downwards. He heard distant screams from above, then only the wind. *Fly*, it whispered.

Jason was free—weightless. He silently watched the unforgiving earth approach him.