

Faith in Machinery and Communion with the Dark

My best friend and I wait to be strapped into a harness and dangled from a cord hundreds of feet into the air. The ride is called *The Sky Coaster*. My hands are sweating, and I feel like my straps won't be tight enough. I'm going to slip right out. My metaphorical balls are not as big as I thought they were.

The kid tying us up at the foot of this giant metal slingshot looks no more than eighteen. I watch him strapping people in and explaining the rules. He's missing a few teeth and is a little handsy with the lady passengers. He is pimple-faced and smells like a carny: sweat, sun, and blue raspberry slushy. It's our turn and he rattles off the spiel about riding and safety and straps us in. He punches the green button and the harness yanks us up by our crotches, creating an unfortunate camel toe with a vengeance. More straps squeeze our thighs. We connect around the waist in the least aerodynamic cloth contraption ever hoisted into the air. We are poorly executed renditions of flying squirrels, vibrating with anticipation and fear.

The machine makes a high-pitched whining noise that must be designed to inspire fear into the hearts of those who dare to ride. All roller coasters and carnival rides make that buzzing sound—they're in cohorts for kicks. We rise higher, moving very slowly. That part is easy. Once you gain enough altitude, you stop noticing the cause of your movements, and all fear dissipates. The park glows brazenly far below us, and we are surrounded by the blackness. The lights below are too bright to see any stars, so the sky is vast and empty. All the other rides appear miniscule in comparison.

The groan from the machinery stops, and we shake back and forth in the air. *Oh shit*. My stomach drops to where my best friend's family waits for us below. We pause a few more seconds.

“Three!”

“Two!”

There is a loud *pop* and for a few brief seconds, we are in free fall. I let loose a scream from low in my belly. I look up into the night, wondering at the absence of stars, plummeting to what feels like my certain death. I look down. As my head tilts, gravity grabs hold of the slack in our cord. It snaps us forward, forcing us into a swinging motion. We fly, maybe now just a hundred feet from the ground instead of almost three hundred. All the intensity and oneness with the blackness vanish. I stare at the ground, forced on my belly by the suspension. The lights are garish in comparison to the emptiness of the night sky. The adrenaline in my blood screams for an outlet. I am no longer content with swinging. I want to freefall from the blackness.