

## Fledgling

His toes clawed into the ground as he faced the steep gradient. Never before had he noticed how steep it actually was, how much space there was between him and the forest floor, a space filled with nothing but air.

He couldn't quite understand why he felt like this now. Even on the day of his first flight he hadn't been so nervous, so scared.

Only a few moments ago, his last sibling had left the nest, flying into the whole wide world to unknown places. He doubted that he would ever see one of them again.

Behind him he could hear the silent whispers of his parents, the rustling of their wings. They were impatient now to have him leave too.

"Are you alright, darling?" His mother glanced at him, her big round eyes looking like dark holes in her white heart-shaped face.

"Taking a last look, don't you, son?," his father said and made a step towards him.

He didn't exactly know what to say. Thinking about it, this might be the first conversation he had ever had with his parents. With many young and hungry chicken, feeding came always first. Talking didn't belong to the list of things his parents usually had in mind.

He turned away from them, staring again into the dark night. The moon was partially hidden behind some clouds but the stars sparkled as bright as always.

"Won't you miss us?" The words escaped his beak before he had really thought about it. "Us all, I mean."

His mother chuckled, "Of course, we will. I am already missing you now when you are still here. But young owls have to leave their family, fly into the world and start their own life, that is just how nature wants it. It happens, no matter if we like it or not."

He couldn't find the right words to tell them how he truly felt, to express what was going on inside him.

So, all of the sudden, he went for a quick "goodbye" and spread his wings.

His inner eye replayed all the memories bound to this place. The broken eggshells of his siblings, the first mouse he had ever tasted, the first stormy night with flashes and thunder, his own first flight through the forest.

And as he fell into the cold air, feeling the wind rush through his feathers, he felt his heart breaking, all the moments forever burned into his mind.

But as he saw the big trees underneath him, the night sky around him, he suddenly felt truly alive, truly... here.

Of course, he was still scared, he was all alone after all, but at the same time, he had left and the world was in front of him with all its experiences, its dangers, its possibilities.

How good it felt to be truly free.