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Age: 14

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Caught in the Moment

My breath came in short gasps, swirling cloudy white in the frosty morning air. I could feel the cold, hard surface of the ladder through my mittens as I grasped the top rung. The harness around my waist shifted uncomfortably as the ropes course attendant struggled to attach a thick, chunky clasp to the back of it.

I shivered against the cold, my mind abuzz with fear and excitement. I looked up at the two thick, gleaming metal poles that towered above me and my eyes widened. They stretched up, high past the horizon, their sleek, shiny surfaces silhouetted against the cloudy sky. The two poles seemed to go on forever, until I had to crane my neck just to see half way up to the tops. A thick steel cable was threaded through them, ready to swing me back and forth like a pendulum. I gulped. Surely those poles had to be higher than fifty feet?

I heard a metallic clink from behind me as the clasp snapped into place. "Ready?" the ropes course attendant asked, appearing below me. I nodded, and he handed me the end of a yellow rope. "Don't let go until I say, okay?" I nodded again and climbed to the top of the ladder.

A few boys in my group helped the attendant move the ladder from under me, so that I was dangling in midair. My friends beamed up at me. I managed to smile, waving shakily at them. "Okay, guys, time to pick up the rope," the attendant said, and everyone hurried to grab a part of the thick, white rope that lay on the ground. "One...two...three...pull!"

Suddenly, the students in my group lifted me up into the air, pulling me along by the rope attached to my harness. Cold air blew through my jacket, chilling me to the bone as the world around me flew past in a blur of browns

and greens. I closed my eyes and let the wind blow my hair across my face, soothing my frazzled nerves.

After what felt like a long time, the pulling stopped. I could feel the pressure on the rope in my hands, the only thing keeping me from falling.

"Okay," a distant voice shouted, "you can let go of the rope when you're ready."

I gripped the rope tighter, the coarse fibers digging into my palms. My heart thudded in my chest, and I was afraid to open my eyes. I knew I had to let go sometime; too late to turn back now. I sucked in a cold breath of air and started counting backwards from ten. My heart beat in time with the seconds, growing louder as each second passed. Five...Ba-BUM...Four...Ba-BUM...Three...Ba-BUM....Two...Ba-Bum...One.

My heart skipped a beat as the rope slipped from my hands, and my eyes flew open.

I gasped.

The world stretched out below me, the rich greens and browns melting into each other. Small canyons in the earth's rugged surface carved intricate, twisted paths through the pristine landscape. Above, soft white clouds drifted silently across the endless grey sky like feathers floating lightly on a breeze. Everything was sharp and clear, intensified by the cold. It was...exhilarating. I could see every detail in absolute clarity, awestruck by the rough, natural beauty that surrounded me.

The most beautiful thing I had ever seen.

And then, before I could even blink, I was falling. The world melted away, muddled hues flying past too quickly for my eyes to make sense of. I closed my

eyes again, feeling nothing but pure, intense exhilaration as I let the ground rush up to meet me.