

Above Their Heads

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It's late - later than most people work. Almost everyone is gone but I got in late and haven't finished everything. Fortunately I don't have much left, just a few articles to type up - which is good because I'm starting to feel burned out. The emptiness of the office somehow makes it harder to keep on typing. I keep looking over my shoulder out the big window beside the desk.

It must be around six, the sun is starting to go down. Still there are quite a few people roaming around the plaza. They're probably going home or finishing up their shopping - the plaza is surrounded by shops located in the lower stories of the office buildings. I watch the people for a while, not wanting to turn back to what I'm supposed to be doing. As the crowd starts to thin out (slightly - the crowd won't really disappear until the stores close) it gets darker. Thick dark clouds are beginning to move in over the tops of the tall buildings, the powder grey of the buildings a real contrast to the dull black of the clouds. But the clouds haven't totally covered the sky, there's still what looks like a glimmer of light around the edges. Except the glimmer doesn't move as the clouds do, it doesn't move at all. Looking at it closer it seems to be below the clouds. Our offices are on the sixth floor, far below the tops of the buildings so I'm not close enough to really see what it is, but it looks as if it's actually suspended between the two buildings on either side of the plaza. Now, looking at the edge of the buildings I can see, at the top of one, a man standing at the spot where the line begins?

I quickly rummage through my desk drawers for my

binoculars. I keep a pair here so when I get bored I can watch the people in the plaza or the offices across the way. Focusing on the top of the building I see it is a man with a rather long pole. My God, this man is going to walk a tightrope between the two buildings! What kind of an idiot would do something like that? And with only some baggy pants on.

I look down at the crowd in the plaza but no one is looking up at the man. This is strange - if someone was going to walk a tightrope between two buildings in the middle of the city you'd think they'd announce it. But no one seems to know.

The man has balanced his pole and steps onto the wire as the clouds continue to creep across the sky. Why would he choose to do this now, at sundown, with bad weather coming on? By the time he gets across it'll be dark, maybe even raining. Strange thing, this - and just the thing to keep me from my work.

Up on the wire the man moves very slowly, his back straight, eyes staring ahead, he takes a step and then waits. I look down at the plaza - he's what, thirty, forty stories up. I get dizzy just looking down from the window in our office and we're only six stories up. Still no one in the plaza has noticed. There's no net, nothing to catch him if he falls so why didn't someone tell the people he was going to be up there. He takes another step and pauses.

And there goes the phone making me jump in my swivel chair, nearly dropping the binoculars.

"Hello."

"Hello, Angela, this is Susan."

"Oh, hello." I put the binoculars on the desk and fix my gaze on the OUT papers.

"Have you finished with your articles yet? Laurie says it would be nice if you could get them to her tonight."

I look over at the rough copy of the interview I haven't finished typing up yet. "I'm almost finished, I only have a couple more pages to type or so."

"Have you checked with Andy about the photographs?"

"Yea, I did that this morning."

"Great. Talk to you later."

Time to finish that article. There's more to type than I thought, it takes me nearly forty minutes. I put the finished copy on top of the others ready to be carried out.

From the corner of my eye I see the binoculars and remember the man. He hasn't moved very far, I thought he'd be halfway across by now. A whistle comes through the window as the wind brushes across it. That man must be having a hard time - the wind is bound to be much stronger up there. There doesn't seem to be anyone on the buildings to watch him or tell him if he should get off the line. He's all alone.

The wind blows again and the man takes another step, rocking slightly. He pauses longer this time. I almost expect him to start going backwards to the building he started on but instead he moves on. The wire flashes like a line of light as he steps on it. I hear something like a tap against the window and notice a drop of water running down the glass. It's starting to rain.

"What are you looking at?"

I jump again and turn quickly. It's Mark looking as unique as ever, his long, wavy hair crowned with a multicolored headband and a long coat of red and purple splotches topping off an otherwise black wardrobe. Ah, the wondrous life that works for these music magazines! I hand him the binoculars and point up.

"There's a man walking a wire between the two buildings."

Mark moves closer to the window and looks in the direction I pointed.

"What is he doing up there? This is really some kind of stupid!"

"And it's starting to rain, too." Just then more drops tap against the window and I look up trying to make out the man against the black sky. "Is he moving?"

Mark nods his head. "He's trying to. He looks like he's thinking about turning back." Mark hands me the binoculars. "How long has he been up there?"

I stand up and take my position at the window. "Quite a while. About an hour and a half I think." The man does seem somewhat lost but I can't see his face clearly. He takes another step as the rain begins to come down at a steady pace. I shake my head and pass the binoculars back to Mark. "I can't believe this. There's no way he's going to make it."

"I don't think he has much choice, he's almost half way across now."

I look down at the plaza. Despite the darkness and rain there are still some people walking around.

"Oh God, the wire's swaying." Mark's voice causes me to look up as the wind hits the window making it rattle against its frame. I look up but can only see the flash of the wire as it bounces.

"Fool. Don't even try it." Mark's voice is low, his teeth clenched. He lowers the binoculars and steps back as the falling pole comes into view. It crashes into the plaza nearly hitting a couple of people. They move aside quickly and look up. The line of light is swaying and bouncing as the rain comes down harder. Another blast of wind rattles the window and the white line breaks, curling toward the buildings like two springs released. I can't see the man.

Any moment I expect to hear someone scream but

we're too far up to hear anyone in the plaza. And then I see him, his arms waving madly as he tries to find the net no one put up. It all slows down, each foot he drops taking several minutes.

He comes within two stories of the ground and I cover my face with my hands. All is quiet, perfectly silent. Slowly I look up at Mark who is staring at me pale, shaken. Did he watch it all? We just stare at each other until we hear the sirens.

In the plaza everyone has moved away from the center where the man lies, a dark pool around his head like a halo. A red light cuts through the darkness and two men in white rush to the body as I feel Mark put his arm around my shoulder. Then another van pulls up next to the ambulance and two people with TV cameras get out.

"You know, no one would have even known what he was trying to do if he hadn't fallen."