

Touching the Void

Joe Simpson

- 1
 - 1 Joe and Simon wanted to find a mountain that would be very challenging. They wanted to climb a mountain that would be difficult and dangerous, and where there were no other climbers or rescue helicopters. Siula Grande is in the Peruvian Andes which are very remote. They wanted to climb up the West Face because nobody had succeeded in climbing Siula Grande by the West Face before.
 - 2 Richard was a traveller whom Joe and Simon had met in a hotel in Lima. They asked him to come with them because they wanted someone to look after their tents and equipment during the days that they were climbing Siula Grande.
 - 3 The weather was worrying Joe. He was worried that a snowfall high up on the mountain could turn into a serious storm which would cause an avalanche. He was worried about something going wrong which would cause their death. Simon was less anxious than Joe, but he understood Joe's fears.

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 - 1 The crevasses on the glacier were very dangerous because their openings were sometimes covered with snow. A climber could step onto this snow and fall through it into the deep crevasse underneath.
 - 2 A climber and his partner make a team, who take it in turns to lead and follow. The leader hammers in the axes and pulls himself up by them, and his partner follows. The climbers are tied to each other by a rope. This means that if one person gets pulled off the mountain, the other person can get pulled off too. So their lives depend on each other, and they have to trust their partner not to make any mistakes.
 - 3 It is essential to drink enough fluid to avoid becoming dehydrated. If you get dehydrated, you become weak and ill, and this affects your ability to climb well.
 - 4 Good: In the morning of the first day, Joe and Simon climbed up the ice field very successfully. They felt very good when they reached the top because it had not been very difficult. They also found a huge ball of snow which made a very good place to spend the night.
Bad: In the afternoon, they were nearly hit by falling rocks. They reached the small gully later than they expected and had to climb up it in the dark.

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 - 1 Flutings are special features of the Andes mountains. They are very dangerous because they are very steep and they are formed of soft powder snow with gullies running between them. Sometimes the gullies are closed off at the top but often a climber cannot see if the fluting is open before he starts to climb it. So he can get trapped in the fluting as he cannot get back down it again.
 - 2 Joe's feelings on reaching the summit were mixed. He felt a sense of anticlimax – a feeling that it was not as exciting as he had thought. He also thought about the future – that now they would have to find a new mountain to climb which would be even more difficult and dangerous than Siula Grande. But he also felt proud that he and Simon had succeeded in reaching the summit.
 - 3 The weather changed. The North Ridge became covered in cloud and snow began to fall. Joe and Simon could not see their way and so they got lost. They did not know which side of the ridge they were on.
 - 4 When Simon climbed up to the ridge, he was walking over a cornice of snow and ice which broke away and fell, so he fell with it. However, he was tied to Joe by the rope, so his fall was stopped by Joe's weight on the other end of the rope.

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 - 1 Climbing down the North Ridge was much more difficult than Joe and Simon had expected. It also took much longer, so that when darkness came, they were still very high up on Siula Grande.
 - 2 A terrible disaster happened to Joe that day because he fell down an ice cliff and broke his leg. He was in a very remote place with no hope of rescue, and he knew that climbers who break a leg do not always survive.

- 3 Joe had broken his leg, so he and Simon were no longer equal climbing partners. They could no longer work together as a team and help each other. He was also afraid that Simon would go away and leave him alone to die on the mountain.
- 4 Simon's plan was to dig a bucket seat in the snow so that he could sit in it and hold Joe's weight. He would tie two ropes of 50 metres length to Joe, and then lower Joe down the mountain. In this way he could lower Joe 100 metres at one time. Simon's plan gave Joe hope again, as he had realized that he had a chance to get off the mountain.
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- 1 Joe and Simon thought it was better to continue down the mountain because they did not want to stop and dig a snow cave, even though the weather was bad. Also, they did not have any food or enough gas left to make hot drinks.
 - 2 Joe asked Simon to lower him down the mountain more slowly. But Simon did not do this because he knew they had to get down the mountain quickly. He was worried that his fingers would not be able to move because they were frostbitten.
 - 3 Joe was hanging at the end of the rope and he could not help himself. He could not climb back up the rope and he could not reach the wall of the cliff with his axes. He could see the opening of the crevasse below him which made him feel very frightened. He was also worried that Simon was going to lower him further down, because he knew that the rope was not long enough to reach the bottom of the cliff.
 - 4 (a) Simon made the decision
(b) The decision was to cut the rope
(c) Simon felt himself being pulled off the mountain and he knew he would die if that happened
(d) He did not know if Joe was dead or alive. But he knew that perhaps Joe would die if the rope was cut.
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- 1 At first Joe was very surprised and happy that he was alive, but then he realized that he might not be able to escape from the crevasse so he became very frightened. He did not know how deep the crevasse was or how many metres of blackness lay under the ledge.
 - 2 He knew the rope had been cut because the end was frayed. He was very shocked and upset and cried like a child because he realised that Simon would not come to rescue him. He was afraid that he would die in the crevasse.
 - 3 Joe had four choices. He could (a) stay on the ledge (b) climb up the wall (c) throw himself off the ledge or (d) lower himself further down in to the crevasse. He did not want to do (a) or (c) and he did not have the ability for (b) because of his broken leg. So he chose (d) because it was the only chance he had of escape.
 - 4 Joe did not want to go back to the ledge because he knew that nobody would find him or rescue him there. If he went back, he knew he would die there.
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- 1 As Simon went down the mountain, he saw the ice cliff with a drop of at least thirty metres. He knew that Joe could not have survived such a terrible fall. Then he saw the opening of the crevasse underneath and realized that Joe had fallen into it. He looked into the opening of the crevasse but saw no sign that Joe was alive.
 - 2 Simon did not think that Joe had survived the fall into the crevasse and he was not strong enough to climb down into it. He knew it would be very dangerous and he did not want to die in the crevasse.
 - 3 Simon was tired and had no strength to stop himself from falling. He was very thirsty. Simon had been at the same place six days earlier with Joe. They had been very happy and excited then, and looking forward to the climb. But now Joe was dead so everything was just an empty memory.
 - 4 Simon was nervous about meeting Richard because he was afraid of what Richard might say, that Richard would blame him for Joe's death. But when Simon told Richard the truth about how Joe died, Richard did not ask any questions. He just said he was glad that Simon had got down safely.

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- 1 Joe saw a cone of snow on the floor of snow. The cone rose up to the roof where there was a small hole with sunlight coming through it. Joe realized that he could climb up the snow cone and escape from the crevasse.
 - 2 Joe saw a ring of ice mountains which were very beautiful. The sun was shining in a clear blue sky. He could see the glacier about seventy metres below him, and in the distance he could see the moraines and the lakes.
 - 3 A sharp clear Voice in Joe's mind kept telling him exactly what to do and made him continue even when he was tired. He knew that if he listened to the Voice and obeyed it, he had a chance to get back to the camp. The Voice would not let him rest for a long time, and made him go on.
 - 4 Joe saw Simon's footprints in the snow on the glacier. He knew that if he followed the footprints, he would be able to avoid the crevasses and cross the glacier safely.
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- 1 Simon was not interested in the mountains any more. The place was beautiful but it also seemed empty and cruel because it had made him cut the rope and probably kill Joe.
 - 2 The storm had blown snow over Simon's footprints so Joe could no longer follow them to guide him safely through the crevasses on the glacier.
 - 3 (a) Joe left his crampons beside the boulder.
(b) He put his sleeping bag in his rucksack.
(c) He made a splint for his broken leg out of a piece of his sleeping mat.
(d) He used his rucksack to carry his sleeping bag, camera and torch.
 - 4 The moraines were an empty place with no colour or life, and no birds or insects. Near the glacier the moraines consisted of huge boulders which Joe could not crawl round. So he had to cross them by hopping on his good leg. This took a long time because he kept falling.
 - 5 Richard wanted to leave the camp because he and Simon had a lot of things to do in Lima. They had to go to the British Embassy to tell them about Joe's death, and they had to call Joe's parents and book flights home. But Simon did not feel ready to leave the camp yet. He felt they should stay longer but he did not know why.
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- 1 Joe was afraid that the tents would not be there and that Simon and Richard had left.
 - 2 The water made Joe feel strong again and gave him hope that he would be able to reach the camp.
 - 3 Joe told Simon that he had saved his life and done the right thing in cutting the rope. He told Simon that he understood why Simon had cut the rope.
 - 4 They did not take enough gas with them so they could not heat enough water to make hot drinks. So they became weak and dehydrated on the mountain because they did not look after themselves properly.
 - 5 Although Joe continued to climb, he no longer searched for more and more difficult mountains. He wrote a book about his experiences on Siula Grande and other books about mountaineering too. He also became a successful public speaker.