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The Tightrope

“When did it all go wrong?” I think as I light a cigarette, the sweet smoke filling the air like the gray, dense smoke choking my heart. I exhale as I see the smoke swirl into shadowy dancing figures in the air. Currently, my life is a mess and the solid path that I once had to stand on has been swept out from under my feet and replaced by a tightrope. The promise of soaring through the air with everything beneath it is enticing, but the possibility of falling from the fatal heights frightening. I put out my cigarette on the cold cement ground and fold further into the tiny corner that I managed to wedge myself into. I shiver from the cold as I reach into my pocket and pull out the folded sheet of paper that has flipped my world around. I unfold it again, adding a new crease to the dozens that snake across the page and read the words on the top in bold, "Stardom Agency Artist's Contract", and look at my tiny, hastily scrawled signature in the corner. I sigh as the familiar weight of choice wraps itself around my shoulders. The agency is a small and new one that can barely stand on its feet in this town of little significance. Moreover, the income would be unstable and could leave me penniless whenever. In the past, I'd always wanted to escape the dragging weight of med school by any means possible, to chase this faint possibility of stardom, doing what I loved. Now, the hefty burden of med school still seems depressing, but also sturdy and reliable. It is a more practical, common choice for me, and I would have the support of all my folks. Most importantly, the pay would be more than enough to get by, and money would not be a daily struggle. I stand up, and drag my worn feet with me, pushing against the wall for support. Slowly, I approach the tin garbage can sitting in the corner

of the parking lot. Every step I take feels like lead, like I am slowly and surely writing my fate in stone. Suddenly I stop, mere inches away from the trash bin, from the exit of my tunnel. I feel a pull, like my heart is made of metal, and my dreams are a magnet, pulling and pulling me forcefully away from the garbage bin. Step after step, I slowly back away from the bin and move towards the tightrope. And then it hits me, the question that may be the answer to my riddle or a plague of endless worry. Does anyone think of what happens when the road ends? When the safe path and the exhilarating tightrope meet and both come to a stop? And when it happens, will I applaud myself for taking the solid path that is slowly draining my dreams, or will I hate myself for not stepping on that treacherous tightrope with adventure as my compass and the wind in my hair? Somewhere deep inside my heart I know the answer, and in my head, that truth is clear too. Now, it was up to my body to act on that certainty and to follow that answer. My hands shake, and my heart is a war drum beating a steady beat in my body as I take those steps. I walk out of that deserted parking lot and into the marble white building. Each step is exhilarating yet painful as I approach a great oak desk and the metal garbage bin leaning to the left. I stop in front of it, pull out the crumpled piece of paper, and I give it to the woman sitting behind the great oak desk. She smiles at me and acknowledges my signature at the bottom left corner, swirled in blue ink. I look up, and her startling blue eyes reach mine as she says, "You have made the right choice. Your new life starts today. I will email you the details of your first project." I nod at her and stride out the door, towards my parked car, ready to go home. And as I drive, I know with certainty that what the woman said is true. Today, my life begins anew, today I take my first step onto the tightrope, and today I acknowledge that the thrill and threat of a dream is better than the tedious but reassuring weight of expectation.