**Touching the Void, by Joe Simpson**

Crouching down on my knees, I turned my back to the cliff edge and managed to get my axes to bite in deeply. I lowered my legs over the cliff until the edge was against my stomach and I could kick my cramponsinto the ice wall below me. I felt them bite and hold. Removing one axe, I hammered it in again very close to the edge. I was hanging on to the ice axe, reaching to my side to place the hammer solidly into the wall with my left hand. I wanted it to be perfect before I removed the axe embedded in the lip and lowered myself on the hammer. As the hammer came out there was a sharp cracking sound and my right hand, gripping the axe, pulled down. The sudden jerk turned me outwards and instantly I was falling.

I felt a shattering blow in my knee, felt bones splitting, and screamed. The impact catapulted me over backwards and down the slope of the East Face. I slid, head-first, on my back. The rushing speed of it confused me. I thought of the drop below but felt nothing. Simon would be ripped off the mountain. He couldn’t hold this. I screamed again as I jerked to a sudden violent stop.

Everything was still. Silent.

My thoughts raced madly. The pain flooded down my thigh – a fierce burning fire coming down the inside of my thigh, seeming to ball in my groin, building and building until I cried out at it, and my breathing came in ragged gasps. My leg! Oh Jesus. My leg!