

Chapter One

I stood at the top of the mountain. Above me was bright blue sky and pale winter sun. Below me was a mile to the finish line. Steve, my coach, stood beside me. He wanted me to reach the finish line in less time than it takes to eat a sandwich.

“Keegan,” he said. “I see that look on your face.”

“What look?”

“You’re thinking about Garth. Don’t.”

Yes, I was thinking about Garth, one of the other racers on the team. Garth had broken both his legs during a time trial a couple of weeks earlier. And just like the run that had hurt him, this was a time trial too. I had to ace this run if I wanted to keep my number-one spot on the racing team. But that meant going really fast. And fast meant I could get hurt like Garth.

“Quit worrying about the speed, Keegan. Relax.”

When someone tells you not to think about something, it is the first thing you think of.

Speed. When I reached full speed my skis would be moving at 110 kilometers an hour. I would be standing on those skis. This meant I, too, would be moving 110 kilometers an hour. That is almost as fast as people fall from airplanes. Before they open their parachute.

I didn't have a parachute. Worse, skis are about as wide as a credit card and not much thicker. As a

downhill skier, my job is to stand on those thin flat pieces of plastic and metal and make sure I don't fall.

What I really don't like to think about is that 110 kilometers an hour is the same as traveling 30 meters a second. My friend Mike, who likes to scare me, figured that out. Worse, after figuring it out he told me. So now I know that in the time it takes for me to breathe in and out my body will shoot the length of a football field.

At that speed, if I fall off those thin flat pieces of plastic and metal I will spend the rest of my life in a hospital. Eating jelly. Drinking warm milk. Getting yelled at by big ugly nurses.

“Keegan, I still see that look on your face.”

“Sorry,” I said. I smiled, hiding what I always hide on the slopes. I am a coward.

“That's better,” he told me. “Are you ready?”

“Sure,” I lied like I always did. I wasn't going to let anyone know I was afraid. Not Keegan Bishop,

provincial champion downhill skier. No one was supposed to know my biggest secret.

“Now remember, when you get to the bottom confirm with the timekeeper that you’re our last guy today. We’ll be opening the run for the public as soon as you’re down the hill.”

I nodded.

Steve continued. “And remind the officials that your number is wrong.”

On my back was a small jersey with big white numbers. Another guy on the team, Budgie McGee, had accidentally taken my number. We hadn’t noticed until he had gone, so I had his number on my back. It didn’t matter, though, as long as I told the guys with the clipboards at the bottom of the hill.

I looked over at the timekeeper at the top. He nodded.

“Go!” My coach yelled.

I went.

I blinked twice. The wind filled my lungs. It filled my ears like the roar of a freight train.

I cut left to miss a boulder sticking out of the snow. I ducked beneath a branch. I hit a jump at freeway speed. It launched me into the air at least one story off the ground. I leaned forward and made sure my skis stayed straight.

I thumped back to earth and crouched low, so I would block less wind. At this speed, the trees on each side of the slope seemed like flashing fence boards.

Halfway down the run I knew I was skiing the best I ever had. If I kept pushing, I would easily stay at number one.

Beneath my helmet, I grinned my grin of fear. And as I cut into a steep turn, I saw it. But couldn’t believe it.

Wire. Black wire stretched between two trees at waist height. I was flashing toward it at thirty meters per second. Hitting the wire at that speed would slice me in two.