

THE CLIMBING

by Daryl Henry

EXT. IDAHO MOUNTAIN RANGE - SUNRISE

The sun balances for an instant behind the snow-crests of Idaho's Medicine Rock Range then rises silently into view, bathing the land in pale gold.

As the blue shadows dissolve, the western flank of the Rockies is revealed: spring-flowered meadows, alpine lakes, broad forests, great peaks of snow and ice. It is a land where a man could meet his gods, if he knew where to look.

EXT. MOUNTAIN SLOPE - DAWN

In the distance a tenuous file of black FIGURES crosses a moss-covered saddle.

EXT. MOUNTAIN TRAIL - DAWN

The figures are hikers-- six BOYS in their early teens and an adult GUIDE-- heading for the high country. They wear large packs, down parkas, mountain boots. The guide wears a red parka, as does one boy. The others wear yellow or blue.

The boy in the red parka walks far out in front, striding ahead, confident, breathing easily. He pauses now, waiting for his companions to catch up.

He watches them approach, pass by, with eyes that are too clear, too cold, too uncompromising for his 14-year-old face. He has a piratical look-- gold earring, black bandana covering shaggy hair. This is QUENTIN.

The adult guide is TIBBETS-- a small, bearded, bespectacled man in his late 20s. He brings up the rear. As he passes Quentin he smiles warmly. The smile is not returned.

As the group climbs on, one of the boys takes out an iPod and turns up the volume. The others mouth the words, break some moves-- except for Quentin, who walks in contemplative silence.

EXT. MOUNTAIN CREST - DAY

Ahead, a giant dead fir guards the trail. The hikers step around it, move over the ridge, descend one by one into the misted valley below. The Rap SONG fades in the morning wind.

EXT. DESCENDING TRAIL - DAY

The hikers weave in and out of sunlight. Abruptly, the sky clouds over with the onset of a late Spring storm.

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Darkness presses quickly into the mountains, into the high, finger valleys. The wind picks up, locking the swaying trees in a swirl of fog. A thin rain turns quickly to wet snow.

Suddenly the wind is drowned in an echoing EXPLOSION.

The boys and their guide freeze, then stare back at the trail which they've just climbed.

EXT. MOUNTAIN CLIFF - DAY

An icy blue slab 100 feet thick has broken loose and is THUNDERING down the mountain, dragging trees and rocks and earth in a whirlwind of billowing snow.

The avalanche finally comes to rest beneath a cloud of snowdust at the base of the cliff. The narrow valley is sealed with a wall of debris five stories high.

FIRST BOY (V.O.)

Fucking hell...

SECOND BOY (V.O.)

We could've been under that.

EXT. DESCENDING TRAIL - DAY

Only Quentin and the guide are calm.

Tibbets lowers his pack, takes out his radio. The boys gather round, except Quentin, who stands apart, considering the avalanche, a thin smile on his lips.

TIBBETS

(into radio)

Wind River, Wind River, this is Tibbets' hike. Over.

(beat)

Wind River, Tibbets' hike. Come in, please.

(nothing)

If you can read this, we are okay. Repeat, the avalanche missed us.

There is only static. Tibbets pushes his Alpine cap to the back of his head.

TIBBETS (CONT'D)

I suggest we cut the trek short and head back. As it is, it'll take us at least two days to hike around that snow fall.

Tibbets surveys his charges. The other boys look to him, then to Quentin.

(CONTINUED)

QUENTIN
(unequivocally)

No.

Tibbets and Quentin exchange a hard look.

TIBBETS
Okay, so it's not a suggestion.
It's a plan.

QUENTIN
It sucks. I say we keep going.
We've busted our butts getting this
far.

A lean, taciturn boy responds evenly. This is Cody.

CODY
It's not your call, Quent.

Quentin ignores him, turns to a slender, cautious boy who's known by his initials, J.D.

QUENTIN
You want to go home, Jadey?

JADEY
Not r-really.

QUENTIN
How about you, Harv?

Harvey, loyal but uneasy, studies his feet.

QUENTIN (CONT'D)
Pudge?

Percy is chubby, thick glasses, inevitable nickname.

PUDGE
I wouldn't mind going home. What
about you, Quent?

QUENTIN
There's nothing at home for me.
(beat)
Ollie?

Ollie is African American, not too tall, chewing a wad of gum like it was tobacco.

OLLIE
We've supplies for six days. The
weather doesn't look all that bad.
I say we keep going.