

CHAPTER SEVEN
No-Fall Zone

*Chamonix, France
March 2005*

Morning dawns thin and cold. Light trickles into the valley. Our crew has taken over a 20-meter circle of asphalt in front of the base terminal of the Grands Montets tramway. The terminal is a functional cement structure with a wooden façade and three peaked roofs. I'm off to the side of the group, putting on a climbing harness, checking my avalanche beacon.

In the middle of our piles of camera gear is Kye Petersen, wearing a camouflage one-piece suit with a fur collar and a black helmet. He twists his torso back and forth, bends to touch his toes, stretching his hamstrings. His body is in continuous motion, discharging nervous energy. I am standing next to Kayce. We're both watching Kye from the periphery. When he takes his helmet off, Kayce gasps.

What happened? she asks. It was such beautiful hair.

Kye's ponytail is gone, his hair now shorn nearly to the scalp. He's still pop-star pretty—there's no losing that—but without the flowing locks, his eyes are hard and intelligent in a way that dares you to disagree with him.

It could grow on me, I say to Kayce.

What neither of us says is how disappointing it is from a filmmaker's perspective. I had imagined slow dissolves from Trevor's face to Kye's, father and son nearly identical. Now, without the ponytail, you have to look harder into Kye to see his

father. Maybe that's the point.

An open-faced man with dark hair and an easy manner steps up and loops the straps of an avalanche transceiver over Kye's head.

This is so we can find you under the avalanche, he says to Kye.

Stephane Dan is the most qualified guide we could hire to keep Kye safe. Known widely by his nickname, Fanfan, he's guided many film crews through the mountains and been a star in his own right. In addition to appearing in numerous ski films, he skied the stunts for Pierce Brosnan in the James Bond film, *The World Is Not Enough*.

Fanfan pats Kye on the shoulder as the young man puts on his beacon, then hands him a climbing harness.

And this is so we can pull you out of the crevasse, he says.

I like Fanfan immediately. His calm manner puts me at ease. He has the thing you most need in the mountains: confidence. You can trust him with your life, if you're a person who can trust anyone that much. I'm trusting him with something even more dear: the life of a kid whose mother has put her trust in me.

I get to wear a harness? Kye asks, feigning excitement. He steps away from the group, and tries to figure out how to get it on.

He flips it around, twists it. Where to put which leg? Which side is up? Fanfan walks over and shows him. Kye walks away from the group again to keep the others from seeing him struggle. Eric Iberg follows him with a camera. Trying to get his feet through, Kye loses his balance and falls to the pavement. Instead of getting up, he lies on his back and tries to wriggle into it.

Let me help, says a gray-haired man in a smooth white ski jacket who crouches beside Kye.

I got it, says Kye, curtly dismissing him. I'd just rather lie down because it's hard to get on.

The man's face is impassive for a moment. He wears the salt-and-pepper goatee of an academic. A sharp nose, an angular face, gray eyebrows. The professor stands up and grins down at Kye. He's seen his share of proud kids come to these hills.

Watching from a perch on a fence rail, Glen Plake is dressed completely in black. Shocks of long, orange hair poke from beneath his hat, streaming behind him as he hops off the fence and strides toward Kye.

The professor sees him coming, notes the orange hair and the saunter—Plake has a singular way of pimp-rolling in ski boots. Lifelong skiers can spot an expert skier just by his walk.

Anselme, c'est un très grand plaisir de vous rencontrer," says Plake, in careful and deliberate French. Anselme, it is a very great pleasure to meet you.

Je suis Glen Plake, he continues. I am Glen Plake.

You are American? asks Anselme.

Yes. From Lake Tahoe.

Ah, yes, Squaw Valley.

I'm from Lake Tahoe but have been in the Bishop area for 16 years.

For skiing or snowboarding?

All skiing. I grew up in South Lake Tahoe and mainly skied Heavenly Valley. When I was 14 or 15 I began climbing to ski, and it opened a can of worms.

Anselme grins. From the ground Kye watches Plake, one of the most famous skiers in North America, fawn over the man Kye has just brushed off.

All of a sudden I realized that the ski resort was this, continues Plake holding his hand up, his thumb and forefinger a half-inch apart. But the mountains are this: He holds his arms out wide, cocking his head up toward the peaks.

Anselme, arms folded across his chest, nods, a don sizing up an apt pupil.

So, off I went, says Plake, pantomiming a small soldier marching. I came to Chamonix 18 years ago. We read your book, and it gave us the information to try to become skiers in the big mountains. I've traveled a lot over the years, but always back here, eh? I've been in Chamonix for four weeks now.

Now, it's been okay, but we need more snow, says Anselme.

The southeastern aspects, the climbing routes, have been good skiing, offers Plake.

Maybe in two days, it gets very warm, says Anselme. It's not good. Maybe not safe.

Everything southeast that you would not normally ski has been quite good.

Yes, but we must be careful, eh, because with the warm, the snow comes down.

Yeah, in big fat slides, says Plake, laughing hoarsely.

Cinching the front of his harness, Kye gets off the ground.

Kye, this is Anselme Baud, says Plake.

Embarrassment sweeps over Kye's face. Anselme smiles warmly, reaching out a bare hand to shake Kye's gloved hand.

Nice to meet you, says Anselme.

Kye purses his lips, shyly dipping his head, suddenly very interested in his gloves, in fastening the Velcro just right, pushing the webbing down between each finger.

This guy's done a lot of stuff, says Plake.

Yep, I know, says Kye miserably. I've seen the book.

In addition to writing the definitive book on Chamonix's ski-mountaineering routes and notching more than a dozen first descents—among them the Arête De Peuterey from the summit of Mont Blanc and the Mallory Couloir on the Aiguille du Midi—

Anselme has been the skiing partner of some of the most famous men in the Alps: Vallencant, Saudan, Boivin, legends who warrant single-name status. Two out of the three died in the mountains. Sylvain Saudan is still alive, still known as the skier of the impossible.

Anselme Baud has no title. He's maintained a simple life in relative obscurity, far below the radar for all but the most ardent ski mountaineers. These days he teaches at the National School of Alpinism and lives comfortably in a small house in Chamonix. He also travels frequently to Nepal and Tibet to teach mountain guides there. Anselme's father was a guide, his grandfather, too.

Weeks earlier, in an effort to surround Kye with the best people money could hire, I called Anselme and asked if we could hire him as a guide. He said he was too busy, so I asked if we could interview him. He was not excited. Peter Jennings' name meant nothing to him. An American crew? Yawn. Although he and Vallencant made films of their first descents, Anselme is not a man who sought the camera's attention.

So I told him about Kye and Trevor and the reason we were coming to Chamonix. Anselme thought maybe he remembered Trevor, but he couldn't be sure. He's lived in Chamonix for 50 years and with a reputed average of 60 deaths a year, there have been some 3,000 corpses in his lifetime.

And he is coming here to know about his father? asked Anselme.

He's never been to Chamonix, I said.

He is a very good skier?

One of the best young skiers in North America. His father was a pioneer. He has many first descents in British Columbia. He loved your book.

His father, he die here?

In the Exit Couloir.

The Exit? repeated Anselme.

The Walker, I said, mentioning another name for the couloir where Trevor died.

Silence over the line meant either he was thinking or I'd lost the connection.

I will see, he said finally. Maybe I can make time to show him something, between classes.

We can pay for your time, I offered. For opportunities missed.

This is the way we couched any and all compensation to the skiers in the film. Since the principals in a documentary aren't actors, you can't pay them, per se. Instead we offered to pay certain expenses—flights for Kye and Plake and a few others as well as accommodations—and then compensate them for earnings they'd forgo to ski in front of our cameras. To be sure, this approach is not up to the highest journalistic standards, but skiers make so little money as it is, and nearly all of it comes from a limited number of days on the snow. If we didn't set it up this way, we wouldn't be able to get them to take time out for us. But Anselme wasn't interested in any of this. Money is not a problem, he said on the phone.

I'd pressed on, asking how much I should budget. He exhaled audibly over the line. If we felt compelled to pay—such an American focus on money—we could give him a day's worth of his teaching salary. Wondering why he'd take the time, why Kye's story has somehow piqued his interest, I thanked him in advance.

Now I watch Anselme gaze at the young man who had dismissed him out of hand. There's not a trace of annoyance in Anselme's expression. There's something else in his eyes, something sad and familiar.

So, we go, says Anselme.

The line into the Grands Montets tram leads inside the building and up cement stairs wet with melting snow, then through a turnstile to the tram dock where the cable car swings into place. Kye worms past a group of Japanese skiers in matching outfits and shoulders his way to a spot near a window inside the car. I follow Anselme into the tram. He moves casually, a teacher walking into a classroom. He steps in behind Kye and looks over his shoulder as the tram lifts out of the station.

When there's more snow in the valley, there is tree skiing? asks Kye as the tram car moves over steep benches of evergreens. I watch him and smile, noticing the way he's beginning to pick up the syntax of Anselme's speech.

Yes, but it is gone now, says Anselme to the back of Kye's helmet. The snow, it ran out.

Tram conversations take on an awkward tension. Everyone is packed in tightly. Short people have noses at armpit height. You're surrounded by breath—the damp hot smells of eggs, coffee, last night's Armagnac.

Anselme pulls out a pack of gum and offers Kye a piece. Wriggling his shoulders and worming his hips, Kye turns around to accept the gum. Now that they face each other, Anselme puts his hand on Kye's shoulder. He points out the window.

So, this is the Aiguille du Grands Montets, says Anselme. Two thousand two hundred meters. First we will go up to the panorama so that I can show and explain the mountains. From there we can go to the Argentière Glacier. From there we will start to make some training on the glacier where it is not a big crevasse problem and it is not so steep.

Are there a lot of crevasses in the glacier?

Yes, says Anselme with a smile.

Nice, says Kye.

Nice? repeats Anselme with a chuckle. Not so nice. One time there was a guide on the Mont Blanc who fell into a deep crevasse that got narrower and narrower. And he got wedged by his head. And it was so far down they couldn't get him out. We tried with a rope and having a man go down ... many things. And then he get dead. The warmth of his body made the ice melt, but as he die, his body get colder and the ice, it re-freezes. And then there is no way to get him out. It's frozen, frozen! Even pulling on his feet. So, Kye, we have to be careful.

Yeah, no doubt, says Kye.

First you have to observe the terrain and where the glacier is going. Large bumps and changes in pitch indicate maybe a crevasse. Also, if the snow is soft and there are many crevasses, you have to take the rope and tie the people together.

At what age do you usually start teaching these skills? I ask.

Probably at 15 or 16, answers Anselme, but it depends on where the people are from. The people coming from the city, maybe it's later, because they do not understand snow, the pressure and movement on snow.

They need context, I say.

Yes. Mountain children, they can learn early because already they know snow from sleds and snowboards and living.

I grew up in the snow, says Kye.

And snowboarders are especially good, continues Anselme. They are always falling down and touching the snow. They are in it with their hands. They know snow better because they are in it. In the beginning we say, Aw, snowboarders do not know about snow because they are not skiers. But no. Snowboarders know more than skiers.

I've done a lot of both, says Kye.

You are a mountain child, yes?

Yes, I grew up in Whistler. My whole life.

So, for you, we start with the technique because you already know snow.

As the tram rises toward the craggy peaks, Kye chomps his gum and holds his skis the way a soldier holds a rifle at ease.

Anselme leads us out of the terminal and up five flights of metal stairs to a high observation deck. Bordered by a steel railing, the platform hovers, or seems to. From up here, the peaks crowd the horizon and jostle the sky with sharp spikes.

Have you ever seen anything like this? Anselme asks Kye.

No, says Kye, never.

Anselme names the needles: the Aiguille Verte, the Aiguille du Midi, the Plan de L'Aiguille, the Aiguille de la Gliere, and on and on. Mont Blanc, which sits in the heart of all these needles, is older, rounded by geologic time. The needles, products of more recent thrusts of the earth's crust, will someday be blunted, too. Below and to the east is the Argentière Glacier, a vast creeping river of ice surrounded by ragged walls of dark rock, stripes of snow.

This year the World Cup was in Les Houches, says Anselme, pointing far to the west. It was in January. The snow was hard and good. Downhill and also slalom. You are skiing slalom?

No, no, never, says Kye.

You are in the bumps?

Two years I skied bumps. Now I just freeride.

And you like to ski in the trees?

Yeah, I love trees.

So it is the same style of the slalom. You have to turn. Use the

edges or you hit the trees.

Yeah, I can use my edges.

This is good. We will see, but this is good.

Kye rushes ahead of us, down the long flight of stairs that descends from the Grands Montets tram. His legs and arms move with the loose grace of youth, his face a taut mask of barely contained impatience. The covered stairway ends on a small patio with a southern exposure, beach chairs, and a tiny café. Skiers in the latest gear sip cappuccino, more interested in lounging than skiing. A quick glance fills Kye with disdain. Yeah, these are skiers, but they're not skiers.

Anselme turns the corner of the stairway, and reads Kye's look. He knows the relationship between real skiers and the tourists whose money makes it possible for him—and Kye, too, for that matter—to make a living in the mountains.

This way? asks Kye as he points to another set of stairs that lead down the west side of the buttress and onto the snow.

Now, I think, says Anselme as he steps up to Kye, we have a coffee.

Kye curls his lip and gives Anselme an impatient look. Anselme responds with a smile as he turns to the small café at the north end of the patio.

Arghh, growls Kye into the collar of his coat. He follows reluctantly.

The café is nearly empty. Dust motes drift in shafts of sunlight. Anselme greets the smiling barista in familiar tones. In English he explains why there are three men following him with cameras and a boom mic. She shrugs, What do I care, mate?

You have coffee, Kye? Anselme asks as he turns from the bar.

Maybe iced tea? Kye says.

I don't think they have this, says Anselme.

Yeah, look, it's right there. Lipton. Anselme follows Kye's finger to a small display of candy and bottled water. On the far right is a plastic bottle of iced tea.

I never knew this one, says Anselme as he takes the bottle from the barista. Iced tea.

With lemon, says Kye, pointing to the tiny picture of the lemon amid all the French writing on the label. Anselme laughs as he steers Kye to a small table by a window with benches on either side. He sits at the head of the table and Kye slides in by the window, taking his helmet off, placing it on the table between them. Through the window he can see all the way down to the village of Chamonix. For the youngster this is an awe-inspiring view. For the people who work here, it doesn't even warrant cleaning the window. Anselme breaks off half a chocolate bar and hands it to Kye.

Thank you, says Kye, politely.

So, how do you feel? asks Anselme.

How do I feel? repeats Kye, giving Anselme an exaggerated thumbs-up. The mountains make me happy. Jet-lagged, but happy. Tired. Nine hours difference and right now it feels like one in the morning. But I am ready to ski.

So, you are a freestyler? Doing tricks?

Yes. I like to jump.

You spin around, like 720.

Like 1080, says Kye.

And 360, too, says Anselme.

For sure.

And, what is it you'd most like to learn? asks Anselme.

Well, I'd like to learn a lot more about snow danger, definitely, about avalanches, one of my main things, says Kye. The other

thing I want to learn is what these mountains look like. I'd like to go and see what they're all about. And I want to see where it was that my dad skied, and where he died.

I notice the way that Kye talks without obvious emotion about the death of his father.

Yes, Anselme says as he stirs another sugar into his coffee. It was a ... difficult circumstance.

Kye nods, looks down at the table, bites his thumbnail, and then looks back up to Anselme who is taking a slow sip of his coffee. He swirls it, letting it melt the chocolate in his mouth, and swallows it slowly.

So, anyway, says Anselme, first we must learn the technique to go down the steep slopes. To be sure, to be safe, you must never fall down. Because if we fall down, it is finished. Okay, sometimes we have a chance, but usually ...

He shrugs his shoulders, offers upturned palms.

Yep. I know, says Kye.

It's better to learn all the technique and the balance and to never fall down, continues Anselme. For me it's not a good way to learn to fall and get back balance. It's not a good way.

Yeah. For sure.

So, we must never fall down, Kye, repeats Anselme, raising his feathery eyebrows. Never.

Yeah definitely, says Kye. Especially on steep stuff. On steep dangerous chutes, it can't happen.

He laughs nervously, chugs the rest of the iced tea. Anselme puts another piece of chocolate into his mouth and then takes a long pull of coffee. Chewing slowly he rests his elbow on the table, brings his fist to his cheek, and sets his chin on it. He looks past Kye, out the window to the mountain faces, absently tugging on his goatee. After a long moment, his gaze returns to the café and

to Kye.

Your father was, um ... he died... 15 years ago? asks Anselme.

I was 6, and now I'm 15.

Ah, yeah, sorry, says Anselme. Nine years.

Kye nods and inspects his iced tea label some more. After a moment he says: February 26th was the anniversary of the day he died. We hiked up to the peak at Whistler, a bunch of friends of his and mine. We hung out at the top ...

You have a brother or a sister?

Yeah, one sister, she's 13.

A skier also?

Yes, she's a skier, but she's a girl. She likes the girl stuff, makeup and everything. She's into the whole scene with the friends. She doesn't ski quite as often as I do.

It's okay, eh? This skiing is not for everyone.

Anselme stands and finishes the last gulp of his espresso. Kye hikes up his baggy pants, cinches the power-strap on his boots, tightens and re-tightens each buckle.

Wide and well-tracked, the slope rolls over and disappears from our view. Anselme flits down it, every turn solid yet light. Wide stance, double pole-plants, he's quick from edge to edge. A spider on skis, he sticks to the hill. The skis perform; he doesn't seem to be doing anything. But he is not supple. The hard corners of his technique have never been smoothed to please the cameras. He is perfectly functional but inelegant. He edges precisely to a skidless stop.

Kye charges like a Border collie finally let off his leash. Running out on a long reach, he banks into a slippery turn. Quick splashes of snow fill with light. Steering, banking, pressing, there's joy in

his shuffling dance. Feathering the edge, he lets go of a turn and spins around backward. Looking over this shoulder, angling a hip, he slips through one, two, three turns. A quick unweight and he's skiing forward again. A long skittering smudge brings him to rest next to Anselme and our film crew.

Kye looks first to Anselme and then over to me. I've finally seen him ski in person, and it pleases me greatly. There is an honesty to his movements, a truth about himself that he's not hiding. Underneath his teenage affectations, he is simple, joyful and resilient.

You are the backward man, says Anselme.

Gotta be, says Kye. It's fun.

Of course. Now, this way.

A vertical cornice runs beside a dark rock. Kye eyes it. It looks like one wall of a half-pipe, a terrain feature that he can work with. He passes Anselme and straight-lines for the wall. The transition is smooth, and then Kye is in the air—high in the air. He turns a long, slow 180-degree spin. Flying through the air backwards, he sees Anselme take off right behind him. The spider leaves the ground, pops, extends his legs. The spin begins with a turn of the head. Anselme looks over his shoulder, and keeps on looking. His body follows, rotating slowly through the sky.

Kye lands backwards. His arms touch down. He soaks up the shock, and looks up the hill. Anselme finishes his 360-degree spin as his skis meet the snow. A double pole plant resets his position.

Yeeehooo! screams Anselme.

The excitement in his voice is more surprising than the jump.

Yeeehaw! hollers Kye.

He spins around to ski forward. Anselme is almost on top of him. And then he's 30 meters in front. Anselme's skis skitter, snow jetting from his edges in machine-gun bursts. He is loose now, not

in perfect control. The professor has left the classroom. Anselme is alive, letting that thing loose that has been caged. The energy, the brio. He's skiing like a kid.

Kye ramps off a berm, floats, lands fast and fearless. This is where the kid lives. He's gaining on the old man. They've outskied our cameras now, and I'm skiing along behind, thrilled to be watching.

Anselme drags a pole on purpose. Snow billows. Kye can't see. It's an old trick, one every skier learns as a kid. The sun is at their backs; the light turns plumes into walls of diamonds.

Kye appears through the spray. And passes Anselme.

So much more slope left. Kye is all heels and leaning now, his skis banking out to the side. Nothing technical. Surfing the earth. Pure, ridiculous fun. Anselme hollers after Kye in French. The words are lost on me, but they sound like a mocking, I'll get you! They eat the slope in long sweeping arcs. The tram station comes too soon.

It's noon. The sun drives shadows into our feet. We're set up at the bottom of a long stairway that leads from the top of the Grands Montets tram down to the snow. Walking side by side down the stairs toward us, Anselme and Kye might be father and son. Kye trots down the last few steps and slides across the snow on his boots. Anselme grins. Kye slaps his skis down. One lands right side up and the other with the base facing the sky. He kicks the upside-down one over and slams his foot into the binding. The heel piece pops up and snaps loudly.

Anselme lays his skis down carefully, scrapes the snow off the underside of his boot by running it back and forth over the top of his ski binding's toe piece. He smoothly steps into his bindings.

Kye poles off toward the piste, which is the equivalent of an in-bounds ski run in North America. He stops. Anselme is headed the other way, toward a boundary rope.

Where are you going? yells Kye.

Out here, answers Anselme. He ducks under the rope and herringbones up a large snow bank that's been formed by snowcats plowing excess snow out of the saddle. I watch him go, figuring he's finding a place to relieve himself.

Don't you think we could go back down there? yells Kye.

Later, says Anselme. Now I will show you something,

Kye ducks the rope and sidesteps up the berm to stand next to Anselme.

What? asks Kye.

Over here.

Anselme pushes off and skis away from the rope, down a short steep slope and onto a large, wind-swept plateau. Kye shakes his head impatiently, drops down the short face, and skids to a stop in the middle of the saddle. The camera crew is already heading off the other way. I corral them and send them after Kye and Anselme. By the time we're all moving in the same direction, Kye and Anselme are two small figures, dark against the blinding white background, dwarfed by the massive castle-topped peaks.

Stay back and start rolling, I say to Pilafian, who is operating a high-definition Panasonic VariCam.

Much to Kye's chagrin, Anselme seems to be pointing out more landmarks. He's back in tour-guide mode.

So, you can see the Mont Blanc, says Anselme pointing to the west toward a hulking mass of blue ice and black crevasses. And before it is this couloir on the left there?

Yeah, I see it.

I skied a first descent of this with Patrick Vallencant.

Wow, says Kye, reluctantly impressed with both the feat and the mention of another legendary ski mountaineer.

And there, in front of that, continues Anselme, you see the couloir going in the shadow to the left?

Yeah, I think I see it. There's a rock in the middle.

Yes, a small rock and in the top there is the glacier.

Yes, I see it, Kye says, wanting to be done with this show-and-tell and on to more skiing.

The name is the Gervasutti couloir, says Anselme, speaking slowly now, calmly, a reverent tone. Seven hundred meters vertical. I have skied it many times. The first time in 1976 with Patrick. Last spring, with my son and one friend, we planned to go and ski from the top. You see where I'm pointing?

Yeah, I see it, says Kye, squinting into the sun, impatience turning into annoyance.

So we climb up that and at the top I broke my binding, says Anselme. I decide to go down. So I tell them, my son and our friend, okay, if it's good you ski it down, no problem. So I come down and join a cameraman with a radio. From the top they say they are ready to start. We say okay. One hundred meters down, my son, he calls and tells me, it's okay the snow is good. I say, good, ski it well!

He nods at Kye who nods back, wanting Anselme to tell it faster than his broken English allows.

And you see down the cornice there? The small line of rock?

Yep.

So my son was skiing down this line and, crack! The serac fall down. There was a big explosion just above him.

He pauses as he looks out at the far-off couloir.

And then my son was taken, says Anselme.

Kye snaps his head at Anselme.

Taken?

He went all the way down.

Shit.

He died, says Anselme, pursing his lips, holding onto himself. Kye looks from the couloir to Anselme and back to the couloir.

And you watched it? asks Kye.

Yes, says Anselme. Edouard, the name of my son, was a great skier. He was going the same line as me. He was skiing well. Skiing very, very hard. He got some first descents, and I go with him to many places. The Himalayas and such. He was 24.

Kye stabs at the wind-hardened snow, his pole poking dark holes in the whiteness.

I was happy to plan many projects with him, continues Anselme. The Himalayas again. Other places. But it is finished now. Just like that.

I'm really sorry, says Kye.

Thank you, he says. It is very hard to begin again.

Anselme stares at the couloir, the terrible, beautiful face of it. His face is still, sun glaring off waxy, sunblocked skin.

Was it the cornice that broke off above him? asks Kye.

It was not the cornice, it was the serac, says Anselme, using the word for an extremely large block of ice usually formed by ice falls at the edge of a glacier.

We cannot know when it is falling down, continues Anselme. Sometimes it is not falling for two months. Sometimes three or four in one week. So, we had to find him and carry him down. It is very difficult.

Kye punches more dark holes in the snow.

It is hard to speak about that and to show you that, says Anselme.

He points again to the western horizon.

But, look, this is the Gervasutti couloir here, and the Aiguille du Midi there, he says, pointing with his ski pole. And behind the Aiguille du Midi is the Glacier Rond, where your father died. We supposed he fell down in there and the rescue, they find him. So, my son get killed in the Gervasutti couloir, right there, and your father on the Glacier Rond, right there. They die very close. It is difficult to observe that.

Kye swallows hard.

Definitely, he says.

I tell that story, I speak about that bad experience, to say, Be careful. We have to be sure about our observation of snow quality and technique. Even if we have many good tracks to follow, and we are ready to go, maybe it's not a good time because maybe avalanche is here. Just because there is one track or many tracks—

That doesn't make it safe, says Kye, somber now.

This is a bad story, says Anselme.

Kye nods in agreement.

But it is a beautiful life, sometimes, says Anselme. And anyway the mountain is here. We have to take the best of the mountain and follow life.

Jordan Kronick, a 30-something, New York-based producer, taps me on the shoulder. Efficient and energetic, he's along to make sure I don't overlook any details. A Canadian who's done his time in Whistler and skis well enough to keep up, he's a stalwart member of the PJ Productions' team. Mostly he watches and makes suggestions: different angles, more coverage.

Ah, Bill, he says, in a way that's meant to remind me of something.

Right, I say, knowing what he's referring to.

Anselme, can you come back here? I ask.

Anselme and Kye turn, annoyed looks on their faces.

I just need to get a couple more things before we move on, I explain. Can you come back and stand in the same place for a moment?

Kye's shaking his head as they move back to where they'd been standing. I explain that I need to get a few more shots, what film people call coverage. Unless I reconstruct the scene, the editor will only have a limited point of view, which makes it difficult to cut. I ask Anselme to point to the Gervasutti couloir again so that I can film a close shot of his ski pole pointing to the area. Then I have him mimic his earlier movement and point to the Glacier Rond, where Trevor died. We shoot from behind his shoulder. Then we move back and shoot medium shots of the two of them in frame, as well as a master of them standing alone on the saddle. All these shots—cutaways, in the parlance of the filmmaker—are necessary to allow the editor to heighten the drama of the scene.

Okay, Kye I just need one close-up of you looking out at the couloir to make this work, I say.

Kye gives me a whatever look and Pilafian moves in close enough to see his reflection in Kye's goggles.

Goggles up, I say.

The sun's too bright, Kye says as he squints at me.

Just for a minute.

Dude, I'm burning my eyes, he says, pinching his eyes shut.

And I realize I've gone too far. Kye's just been moved by his new mentor, just connected with him, and now I'm asking him to playact. He's not going to re-enact the scene, and I'm ashamed of myself for asking. As Anselme and Kye skate away from us, Kronick tells me that I should've gotten more coverage.

Leading Kye across the saddle toward the piste on the summit of the Grands Montets, Anselme spots a lone figure in black standing on top of the snowcat-made ramp: Plake.

Kye, your dad would be stoked to see you skiing next to that guy, Plake says as they arrive.

Kye smiles at Anselme. Anselme returns the look. I motion for Pilafian to get into place with his camera. Another spontaneous scene may be unfolding, and I want to cover it while it does.

Did he show you the turn? Plake asks.

I don't think so, Kye says. Anselme shakes his head.

This one, says Plake as he makes an exaggerated motion to lift his uphill ski. He pushes forward, stomps the uphill ski and, shifting all his weight to it, presses it through a smooth turn.

The Anselme turn, says Plake.

I quietly direct Beat Steiner, a Super-16mm shooter, to get close shots of their skis, their pole plants. This time, if anything worthwhile happens, I'll get the cutaways on the fly and not have to ask them to re-enact anything.

This is good, Glen, says Anselme. He sidesteps up the small ramp.

This is a special turn for a narrow couloir, says Anselme. So, your weight is all on the downhill ski. Your feet are wide. And it's just so.

Anselme raises his uphill ski, pushes forward, and steps all of this weight onto the uphill ski. The ski responds beautifully, coming around in a tight arc. It looks like the easiest thing Kye has ever seen. Why are these guys making a big deal of it?

Kye sidesteps up. Plants his poles and makes a fast hop turn, his skis leaving the snow as he changes directions.

This is not the one, says Anselme.

Don't jump, just stamp, Plake says. Plant both poles and unweight.

Kye tries again and falls.

Another attempt, this time he rocks back on the tails of his skis.

Be careful, you have to finish your turn on your downhill ski, says Anselme.

Another attempt.

Arghh, Kye yells.

You leaned in, says Plake. The key is to get on the uphill ski first. No hop.

Another.

Anselme: No rotate. You rotated.

Plake: Step and slip. Every turn counts, man.

Anselme: It is a lazy technique.

Plake: But it works the best.

Anselme: Use the least amount of energy when you ski.

Plake: The gravity is the power, not your body.

Another attempt leaves Kye twisted.

You're still jumping, says Plake. If you're skiing down, that's where you want to be looking. Not where you've been. Where you're going. Look where you're going.

The last one is worse than his first. Kye collapses, smacks his hand into the snow.

I can't learn this turn, says Kye. I'm really sorry.

You're all right, says Plake. We'll go someplace where it's steeper and you'll be right.

Hopefully, or else I'm never going to ski this, says Kye.

What about this, can you do this? asks Plake. He plants both poles to one side of his skis, springs, and drives his tips into the snow. He rides up and over his tips, using them as a pivot, and

lands facing the other way.

Tip roll, says Anselme. He pushes off and snaps up on his tips, executing the old trick perfectly.

Hey! yells Plake. All right!

Kye pushes off, springs, drives his tips into the snow, and falls.

Plake's laughing. Get up!

I'll be fine, says Kye. I'll just have to learn how to ski.

My father taught me the tip roll, says Plake. It was what the ski instructor used to do at the bottom of the hill. He'd come down and bop, do it right in front of the lodge. Hello everyone, I'm here, I've arrived!

On the shoulder of the Grands Montets, the snow is hard, smooth as a hockey rink. The town of Chamonix, dark and delicate, is far below. Kye stands on the steep face. The surface is blank, the wind calm, the shadows a ghostly blue.

Okay, we work all the way down this, says Anselme. You will get it here, I think.

Kye kicks his edges into the surface. They barely shave off any snow.

It's hard, he says.

Perfect practice, says Plake. Nail it here and you're good to go.

There is nothing but snow below them—a half mile of linoleum-hard snow, a kitchen table tipped on edge. If Kye falls here, he will slide a long, long way, but he won't crash into rocks, fall off a cliff or into a crevasse. This is a training hill for experts.

Anselme makes three turns, each one ending in a complete stop. Kye follows, his first turn is nearly as tight as Anselme's, but

the next ones are ragged, off-balance.

Now, you must get this, says Anselme more sternly than before.

There are other techniques for descending steep slopes that work as well, but technique is not what Anselme and Plake are really teaching. They need Kye to learn this turn because with it will come confidence, which is more important. To stick to the steepest faces, a skier must believe it is possible. Technique is just the tool. Belief and courage are what make it powerful. When kye can make the turn, every time, he will believe in himself.

Sliding back on his heels, he nearly tumbles.

Right there, Plake says. It's right there.

Kye looks at him as if to say, Where?

It's right there in front of you, says Plake. You can do this.

Kye tries again, and again.

Just take it, says Plake. It's yours.

And then something happens, a surprising suppleness. The key is in the initiation of the turn, and Kye's found it. No hop. All edge and pressure. The hill relents; gravity becomes a lubricant. His skis caress rather than chop. He carves to a complete stop.

Good, says Anselme.

Another turn, smoother still.

Now do another 500 more of those and you'll be right, says Plake.