

AVALANCHE (Written by Davy Gardner)

"/" indicates where next line of dialogue begins.

COLD OPEN

EXT. SWISS ALPS - DAY

AILEEN

We should go back to the group,
they're gonna leave without us.

THOMAS

I want a picture from this side.

AILEEN

This is far enough.

THOMAS

Fine. See? Look at that. Perfect
picture of the Swiss Alps.

AILEEN

I don't 'get' pictures anymore.

THOMAS

What do you mean you don't 'get'
pictures?

AILEEN

I'm sure a professional
photographer's been here with a
better camera, and I'm sure you can
get those pictures online, you can
look it up. Why do people need it
to come from *their* camera?

THOMAS

Aileen, that kind of thing really
makes me worried about you.

AILEEN

Don't be patronizing, Thomas, I was-

Distant thundering interrupts. PANIC.

AILEEN (CONT'D)

What's that sound?

THOMAS

I don't know, is it thunder?

THOMAS (CONT'D) AILEEN
An avalanche, an avalanche! Oh my God!

AILEEN (CONT'D)
The bubble things!

THOMAS
The what?!

AILEEN
The inflatable air- just pull these
red straps! Pull that strap NOW!

Two inflations. Thundering snow crashes down. FADE TO:

INT. THOMAS'S AIRBAG - MINUTES LATER

Heavy breathing in a confined space. His head hurts.

THOMAS
Aileen. Aileen? Aileen?!

He bangs the walls of the airbag in the dark, scared.

THOMAS (CONT'D)
Oh fuck. Oh God. The flashlight.

Unzips pockets and clicks on a mini LED flashlight.

THOMAS (CONT'D)
(looks around.)
Okay. Radio, where's the radio?

He finds it.

THOMAS (CONT'D)
Here! Hello? Aileen!? Are you-

INT. AILEEN'S AIRBAG

Aileen wakes up to:

THOMAS
(Through walkie-talkie.)
-there? Are you ok?! Honey, are you
ok!? Please, Leeny, are you-

AILEEN
-I'm here! Thomas, I'm here!

THOMAS
Oh thank God. Are you alright, are you hurt?

AILEEN
I'm ok, I'm in my airbag.

THOMAS
I'm in mine.

AILEEN
Are you okay?

THOMAS
Hit my a head a bit, but yeah.

AILEEN
Oh God. ...Thomas?

THOMAS
Yeah?

AILEEN
(Scared.)
Do you think we're close to each other?

THOMAS
I really don't know.

AILEEN
It doesn't-

INT. THOMAS'S AIRBAG - CONTINUOUS

AILEEN
-feel like it.

THOMAS
Yeah, it doesn't.

AILEEN
This can't be happening.

THOMAS
(loses cool.)
Shit, we could die down here!

AILEEN
(sharply.)
No, don't say that! Just *please* be calm!

THOMAS

Calm?!

AILEEN

When you inflate these things they send a GPS to the climbing company. They know where we are. Someone's coming to get us right now.

THOMAS

How do you know that?!

AILEEN

Yahcob told the whole group in the safety seminar!

THOMAS

You're banking on Jacob the climbing guy? He's 26 years old!

AILEEN

So what?

(Sarcastically.)

He's 10 years younger than us, so he must be bad at his job?

THOMAS

That's not what I said.

AILEEN

And it's pronounced *Yahcob*!

THOMAS

WHO CARES. We're gonna suffocate!

MARCIA

Oh we'll be ice cubes long before the air runs out.

THOMAS

...Hello?

AILEEN

...Who is that?

MARCIA

It's me, Marcia. I was in the group? They were leaving and I saw you two go off, so I came round the ridge to tell you.

AILEEN

Oh no. You're in an airbag too?

MARCIA

I am.

THOMAS
 (Overcome with guilt.)
 Oh God. We are *SO*, so sorry.

MARCIA
 Don't be! The mountain invited us
 down here. And I'm feeling
 connected to you both already...

END OF COLD OPEN

HOST INTRO
 Most of us, at one point or another
 in our lives, get trapped in an
 avalanche.

Now, while that's not true at all,
 most of us DO go through extremely
 difficult times, and so do our
 relationships.

I'm Jonathan Mitchell, this is The
 Truth, and today's story is about
 how trying times can lead to new
 perspectives.

ACT ONE

INT. THOMAS'S AIRBAG - MINUTES LATER

THOMAS
 Maybe we climb up? It might only be
 a few feet of snow above us?

AILEEN
 But if it's more then we'd die.

THOMAS
 There has to be something / we can
 do to-

AILEEN
 -Wait to get rescued, that's all we
 can do!

MARCIA
 Prayer can work?

Long beat. Thomas and Aileen register that she's off.

THOMAS
 (disturbed/moving on.)
 Uh, yeah, maybe. ...Aileen?

AILEEN
 Yeah?

THOMAS
 Let's just try to reason our way
 through this, okay?

AILEEN
 All we can do is wait for help!

MARCIA
 Changing the unchangeable or
 relying on a savior.

AILEEN
 I'm sure there's a nicer way to say
 this, but *what the fuck* are you
talking about, Marcia?

THOMAS
 Jesus, Aileen!?

AILEEN
 What?!

THOMAS
 She's down here because she was
 trying to help us!

AILEEN
 Well why's she saying such weird
 shit!?

MARCIA
 Never mind.

AILEEN
 No! Explain it. What was that?

MARCIA
 It just seems that your rescue team
 is on the outside, and his is
 crammed in there with him.

Beat.

AILEEN
What the fuck are you talking
about!?

THOMAS

Hey, hey! We're *all* terrified!
We're *all* in crisis mode here!

MARCIA

I didn't mean to complicate things,
it's just some people have an
internal nexus of / control while
others-

AILEEN

I don't know what you're saying!?

MARCIA

-Right. Sorry. I guess adrenaline
makes the tongue lighter. I'm
sorry.

Aileen slows her frustration down, forcing a nice tone.

AILEEN

Look, we just don't-

INT. AILEEN AIRBAG

AILEEN

-know you, okay? And I just...

MARCIA

Yes, dear?

AILEEN

What do you do, Marcia?

MARCIA

I'm a spiritual healer.

THOMAS

That makes a lot / of sense-

MARCIA

-And a professional listener.

THOMAS

Sorry I thought / you were-

MARCIA

-And a poet.

THOMAS

Finish / ed.

MARCIA
And a human being.

Beat.

THOMAS
That's great.

AILEEN
You're a human being? Do you pay
your rent with that?

MARCIA
Ha, snarky! Professionally
speaking, I'm a couple's counselor
who restores love with abstract
awareness.

AILEEN
(Under breath.)
Oh, fuuuuuuck.

THOMAS
(Under breath.)
Christ, no, Jesus Christ.

MARCIA
What's that?

THOMAS
Good for you, Marcia.

AILEEN
Yeah, that's, nice.

MARCIA
It is!

Teeth chatter.

AILEEN
I'm really starting to feel the
cold.

THOMAS
It's freezing.

AILEEN
I'm scared.

THOMAS
Yeah, same.

MARCIA
We'll be ok.

AILEEN
What's gonna happen to us?

THOMAS
If we...?

AILEEN
Yeah.

THOMAS
I don't know.

MARCIA
(Hesitant.)
I've worked in medicine, so I have
some idea. If you're sure you want
to hear.

AILEEN
Tell us.

MARCIA
There's shivering, weakness,
shallow breathing, confusion,
altered consciousness, and loss of
consciousness.

Beat.

AILEEN
Okay.

MARCIA
It's good we have dry clothes. And
that we have layers.

THOMAS
Do you know- How long do you think
before we...?

MARCIA
I'd say 10 to 20 minutes.

THOMAS
Oh God!

AILEEN
How is this happening?!

MARCIA
(Comforting.)
It'll be okay! This company's very
safety conscious. Without their
gear we'd already be gone. They
will find us.

This brings them a small dose of calm.

AILEEN
Thank you, Marcia.

THOMAS

Yeah, thanks.

AILEEN

(Positive self-talk.)

Yeah. We're gonna get through this.

THOMAS

Yeah, we're gonna be ok.

MARCIA

I think you're right!

THOMAS

Yeah!

MARCIA

And I can see another positive...?

AILEEN

What?

MARCIA

There've been Jesuits, shamans, monks, all kinds of fascinating folks all over the globe who've deprived the senses in order to discover new ways to see.

Aileen starts breathing loudly and more anxiously.

MARCIA (CONT'D)

So, I think maybe THIS, way down in here, could be where the real climb begins!

Aileen verges on panic attack:

AILEEN

Oh my God, this is hell. *This is hell!* This is a nightmare! LET ME OUT OF HERE! LET ME OUT!

Aileen bangs the sides of her airbag.

THOMAS

AILEEN!

AILEEN

She's out of her Goddamn mind.

THOMAS

She might die down here because of us, why can't you / just try to-

AILEEN
Because of US? US?!

Beat.

THOMAS
Wow.

AILEEN
What?

THOMAS
Because I wanted to get a picture,
it's my fault? Is that it?

AILEEN
I wasn't gonna say that.

THOMAS
Yeah, you were.

AILEEN
I wasn't!

THOMAS
You think I knew an avalanche was
coming?!

AILEEN
I told you we should stay with the
group!

THOMAS
So you knew this was coming?

MARCIA
Hm.

AILEEN
HEY! Don't! Marcia, DON'T!

MARCIA
What?

AILEEN
"Hm"? Don't "hm", that's
counseling! "Hm" is counseling!

MARCIA
(Genuinely.)
Oh, I *truly* wasn't, really. I mean,
some say counseling is mostly just
listening, but believe me, that's
not how I do it, so.

AILEEN
Then explain it.

MARCIA
What?

AILEEN
The "hm".

MARCIA
I just thought it was a compelling idea. That you knew something was coming. And that maybe you both have for a while?

AILEEN
Seriously?! THIS is my relaxing vacation?! *Buried alive with my husband and couples counselor?!*
(Breaking point.)
AHHHHHHHH!

THOMAS
Aileen don't scream! You need to conserve energy!

AILEEN
Oh, do I? Look who's suddenly a survival expert.

THOMAS
It's general knowledge, you're literally wasting your breath. When the oxygen level drops below-

AILEEN
-Oh, good! Man-splain my death to me as I die.

THOMAS
(Harsher.)
Why the fuck are-

INT. THOMAS'S AIRBAG

THOMAS
-you attacking me right now?

AILEEN
I just want you to be more...

THOMAS

Like whoever you wished you married
instead of me?

Long beat.

THOMAS (CONT'D)

Marcia? Did you say something?

MARCIA

...No?

THOMAS

Oh. I thought I heard something.

MARCIA

No, dear.

AILEEN

Well I'm sure she's thinking all
sorts of stuff about us.

MARCIA

Well I am down here too? And there
is some tension, no?

THOMAS

Please God. Please, God, save us.

MARCIA

(suddenly more excited.)
God?! Are you a spiritual man?

THOMAS

Look Marcia, I'm sure you're a
great counselor and a nice person,
and maybe you're in shock, I don't
know, but we are NOT going to talk
about our marriage right now.

MARCIA

I didn't ask you about your
marriage?

THOMAS

Yes you did, you *just* did.

MARCIA

I asked if you were spiritual?

THOMAS

Oh.

Marcia thinks on some level, they want her to. She wonders if she should. She takes a deep breath, deciding.

MARCIA

Alright. I'm feeling I should just ask you both this: When *will* it be the time, to talk?

AILEEN

Any time except now.

THOMAS

Not now.

MARCIA

(Under breath.)

Ha.

AILEEN

What?

MARCIA

I understand. But the only time it's ever going to be is now.

THOMAS

Jesus Christ, this is so *suffocating!*

MARCIA

(Through a light smile.)

Oh, that's good. It's all in the language, isn't it? Hard not to see metaphors, no?

Teeth chatter.

AILEEN

How is this happening? How did we get here?

THOMAS

I want to be home.

AILEEN

When do you go numb? I'm not numb, it just hurts.

MARCIA

I think it takes a bit longer to get to that point.

THOMAS

I'm really shivering a lot now. Are you two?

AILEEN
Yeah.

MARCIA
I am too.

AILEEN
Oh my God. It's happening. We're-

INT. AILEEN'S AIRBAG

AILEEN
-freezing to death.

THOMAS
Yeah, I think so.

Long beat.

AILEEN
Thomas?

THOMAS
Yeah?

AILEEN
...Maybe we should.

THOMAS
What?

AILEEN
I just feel like- if this is, you
know if- maybe it makes sense for
us to talk about-

Thomas breathes angrily. He's gonna lose it.

THOMAS
-Aileen, please. Stay with me here.

AILEEN
We could die!

THOMAS
Exactly! And even now, you'd rather
side with a stranger than me!

AILEEN
I'm not siding with her!

THOMAS
Why can't you just be on my team?

AILEEN

She's gonna be here either way! We don't have a choice!

THOMAS

You wanna spend this time fighting?!

AILEEN

Of course not! I'm just saying that it might not be the worst thing in the world for our last words to be moderated by a professional?!

THOMAS

You were *screaming* at her two minutes ago, now you want her to be our therapist!?

AILEEN

Never mind! You're impossible! You are such a coward!

That struck a nerve. Beat.

THOMAS

I need a few-

INT. AILEEN'S AIRBAG

THOMAS

-minutes alone. I'm turning my radio off.

He does.

AILEEN

Thomas?! Did he seriously turn it off?! We have minutes to live and he's-

(searches for word.)
sulking like a child!

MARCIA

Oh, that's good. How did that feel?

AILEEN

IT FELT BAD, MARCIA!?

MARCIA

No, not Thomas. Conjuring up this "sulking child"?

(MORE)

MARCIA (CONT'D)

It felt different than everything else you said, didn't it?

AILEEN

Marcia, look, my father's an evangelical minister. I get it. I'm not interested in converting to your new-age whatever.

MARCIA

Just talking.

AILEEN

Well I don't wanna talk.

Beat. Teeth chatter.

MARCIA

Are you a Scorpio?

AILEEN

Marcia?! I don't want to talk!?

MARCIA

About *anything*? Oh, Aileen, if we don't talk...we'll die.

AILEEN

What?

MARCIA

Doze off in a cold like this, that's it. Talking keeps the lights on.

AILEEN

Well I still don't want to.

MARCIA

Okay. I just don't want you to fall asleep. Why don't you join me in an improvised prayer?

AILEEN

Thomas? If you're there, please come back. Please.

MARCIA

No, trust me, it forms a powerful flow when more than one perso-

AILEEN

-No!

MARCIA

It's *nothing* unusual, it's just self-induced trance for associative discovery, that's ALL.

AILEEN

(Yells.)

NO!

MARCIA

Alright. Well I need to keep myself awake but no need for you to join me.

She deeply breathes in and out. It sounds like the words come from her breathing.

MARCIA (CONT'D)

Hooh, heee. Hooh, heee. Hooh-
Heeere we are breathing
Heeere we are cold
Heeere we are mountain
Weeeee were young, old.
(like a transition.)
Young old, lungs cold, be bold-

AILEEN

(in agony.)

Thomas? If you're there, I'm sorry.
Please, come back.

MARCIA

(a bit faster.)

Freezing up freeeing up bringing up
COLD.
Open the notes for the singing up
GOLD.
Frost n' lost n' frost n' lost n'
FOUND!
Frost n' lost n' frost n' lost n'
SOUND!
The time, the hearth, the home.
The climb, the heart, the poem.

AILEEN

Thomas?! PLEASE COME BAC-

INT. THOMAS'S AIRBAG

His walkie has been off.

THOMAS
 (To himself.)
 Ok, Thomas, just keep it together.

He turns it on.

MARCIA	AILEEN
-poem wohm womb WOMB WOMB-	Why, God, why are you doing this to me!?

He turns it back off.

THOMAS
 Nope, nope, need a few more
 minutes.

MIDROLL BREAK.

ACT TWO

INT. AILEEN'S AIRBAG

MARCIA
 Suffocate loving fate medicate /
 moderate-

AILEEN
 -AHHHHH! FINE! Fine! For the love
 of God, Marcia, I'll talk to you,
 just stop!

Marcia slows to a stop.

MARCIA
 Oh. It was healing for me but I can
 stop.

AILEEN
 We've been married for ten years.

MARCIA
 We really don't have to talk about
 this, dear.

AILEEN
 We dated on and off for 4 years
 before that.

MARCIA

...

AILEEN

We don't normally do climbing trips like this. This was...a "thing". I'm a recovering alcoholic. I relapsed 43 days ago at a work thing in Chicago. People said these outdoors-y couples trips are a good way to keep your mind off...

She trails off, guiltily.

MARCIA

...Off of drinking alcohol?

AILEEN

(like: obviously?!)
Yes, Marcia?

MARCIA

Well it could've been something else. Or someone else.

AILEEN

What?

MARCIA

Had there been an affair?

AILEEN

No!?

MARCIA

It's alright if there was.

AILEEN

There wasn't!

MARCIA

Okay, I just felt an affair.

AILEEN

Well there wasn't.

MARCIA

How's the sex?

AILEEN

Let's talk about you.

MARCIA

Ha. What do you want to know?

AILEEN

Honestly? How'd you get like this?

MARCIA
Like what?

AILEEN
Marcia, I can tell.

MARCIA
What?

AILEEN
That you're a smart woman. I can hear it. And I can tell you used to be different.

MARCIA
Huh. Well, yes, I was bit feistier before- My husband was *perfect*. He was loud and fun and happy, like a sparkler. He died in a car crash.

Beat. Aileen senses something.

AILEEN
There's more.

MARCIA
You're smart too.

AILEEN
So?

MARCIA
Well one night I erupted over something small and we had a fight. There was this awful storm but I kicked him out of the house anyway. That's why he crashed.

AILEEN
I'm sorry.

MARCIA
Was a long time ago.

AILEEN
Yeah, but. ...That'll do it.

They chuckle.

MARCIA
I suppose so. That'll do it, I like that. And isn't that sad?

AILEEN
It's *tragic*.

MARCIA
No, no, sad that it takes getting
shaken up *that much* for us to just
wake up.

AILEEN
Huh. Yeah-

INT. THOMAS'S AIRBAG

We shift perspective to Thomas's airbag where he has been
listening to them on his walkie talkie.

AILEEN
-that is sad.

THOMAS
(To himself.)
Huh. Yeah.

AILEEN
So you said you're a writer?

MARCIA
Yeah. But I haven't tried to
publish anything.

AILEEN
You should.

MARCIA
Maybe.

AILEEN
(Getting dazed from the
cold.)
Wow, I'm getting really foggy or
something.

MARCIA
Aileen? Most couples come to
counseling when it's already too
late. But here we are.

AILEEN
Yeah.

MARCIA
There's something strong and happy
with you two.

AILEEN

I thought so. I was so sure.

MARCIA

It's there. It's just buried under the snow.

AILEEN

How do you save it?

MARCIA

Maybe just phrasing it differently.

AILEEN

It's too complicated.

MARCIA

That's such a normal feeling.

AILEEN

Ever since my drinking became a thing, I've felt...

(Searches for it, cold.)

I dunno.

MARCIA

Don't worry about the words.

AILEEN

Stained.

MARCIA

Did you stop having sex?

AILEEN

He didn't want to anymore.

THOMAS

I wanted to sleep with you, honey-

INT. AILEEN'S AIRBAG

THOMAS

-but it wasn't you, it was a drunk person.

AILEEN

Thomas?! You're back! You can't leave like that!

THOMAS

Once you started you couldn't stop.

AILEEN
Was your radio even off?

THOMAS
I felt like the issue. Like you
didn't want me.

AILEEN
I was just sick. I am sick.

THOMAS
(Genuine sympathy.)
I know. I know, honey. And I
could've done so much more.

MARCIA
...I'm happy you're back.

THOMAS
God, it's so cold.

AILEEN
I can't feel a thing.

THOMAS
Me neither.

MARCIA
It's getting there.

AILEEN
(Disoriented.)
How did we get here?

THOMAS
I dunno. I can't think straight.

MARCIA
You won't have to.

INT. THOMAS'S AIRBAG

THOMAS
Why don't we work?

AILEEN
No idea.

THOMAS
I want to.

AILEEN
I do too.

THOMAS
Why's it feel impossible?

AILEEN
Not sure.

THOMAS
We were good?

AILEEN
We were! But now it's...

THOMAS
Puzzle pieces that don't fit.

SFX: We might very faintly hear cardboard puzzle pieces falling on a table and hands moving them around.

Their altered consciousness begins.

AILEEN
Yeah.

THOMAS
Well.

Beat.

MARCIA
What's that puzzle look like?

THOMAS
What?

MARCIA
Tell me what it's like. Don't solve it.

THOMAS
Uh. It's-

INT. AILEEN'S AIRBAG

THOMAS
-messy. Ha, very messy.

Beat.

AILEEN
Colorful.

THOMAS
Like a mural.

AILEEN
(Struggles to talk.)
That pulls you in.

THOMAS
What?

AILEEN
It's hurts to move my jaw.

MARCIA
Talking keeps the lights on.

AILEEN
I'm tired.

THOMAS
I need-

INT. THOMAS'S AIRBAG

THOMAS
-to go to sleep.

MARCIA
Talking keeps the lights on.

SFX: We might faintly hear sounds of fishing in a river.
Casting a line, reeling it in, a fish flipping around.

THOMAS
Aileen, you drink like a fish. And
that lets me off the hook. It lets
me sleepwalk, faultless. And feel
worthy.

AILEEN
Of what?

THOMAS
You. The things that suck about me-
when you had a problem too, it
balanced them out. I was worried.

AILEEN
That what?

THOMAS
You'd realize you deserve more than
me.

AILEEN
I don't deserve more than you?

THOMAS
Always thought you did.

AILEEN
I love you Thomas.

THOMAS
I love you Aileen.

AILEEN
...Marcia?

MARCIA
Yes, dear?

AILEEN
Are we dying?

MARCIA
Absolutely. And all the time.

Beat. Teeth chatter.

AILEEN
Thomas, I had-

INT. AILEEN'S AIRBAG

AILEEN
-an affair.

THOMAS
What?

SFX: Wine bottle cork popping, pouring wine in a glass. Maybe Aileen coming home drunk, keys falling on the ground.

AILEEN
With alcohol. Every night, in front of you.

THOMAS
Were you drinking cause of us?

AILEEN
No. I drank cause it felt good. Or it didn't feel bad.

THOMAS
Why did you feel bad?

We hear a 4 year-old girl's voice as if a distant memory:

KID
I don't know yet.

THOMAS
Aileen?

KID
I don't know yet.

AILEEN
I don't know yet.

THOMAS
Did I let it happen?

AILEEN
We both did.

THOMAS
We were young.

AILEEN
We were young.

THOMAS
But here we are.

AILEEN
Cold.

MARCIA
(breathing.)
Heeeeh-

INT. MARCIA'S AIRBAG.

MARCIA
hooooooh. You two are sweet.

Marcia is smiling as she continues breathing throughout.

AILEEN
Remember the beach?

SFX: We hear the beach.

THOMAS
And when I got burned.

THEN THOMAS
(In pain.)
Did we bring any aloe?

THEN AILEEN
Oh God, it's so bad haha!

Then Aileen and Then Thomas laugh.

AILEEN
And we had those voices.

THOMAS
(In a funny voice.)
Of that neighbor of ours.

THEN AILEEN
(In the same voice)
Did you steal my mail?

AILEEN
(In a grandma way.)
And we did your grandmother too.

THEN THOMAS
(In the same grandma way)
I didn't get a thank you note, for
my thank you note.

They laugh. A pause.

THOMAS
And we melted butter.

SFX: Home cooking, butter in a pan. Wine glasses cheers.

AILEEN
Lit candles at dinner.

SFX: Match and laughing over a dinner conversation.

THOMAS
And then you slept in my arms.

AILEEN
(Shakily.)
Heeeeh, hoooh.

Aileen starts breathing like Marcia. Thomas does the same.

One speaks while the other two breathe, "Heee hoooh", passing it like a theater game.

SFX: "Trippy" hallucinatory mix of the sounds we've heard.

AILEEN (CONT'D)
We're still breathing.

Thomas walks up.

THOMAS
Aileen. Oh my God.

AILEEN
What?

THOMAS
I was looking in New Releases and
look at this book.

AILEEN
What is it?

THOMAS
-just look.

AILEEN
(reading.)
Under the Snow by Marcia Haynes?
So?

THOMAS
Marcia.

Aileen gasps.

AILEEN
It's not about-

THOMAS
Yeah.

AILEEN
Are you FUCKING kidding me?! No.
This can't be- Without even giving
us a courtesy call!? This is
defamation of character, or
something. I'll tell you what it
really is, an outrage. Did she even
change our the names?! What the-

Fun music plays us out as she rants.

END.