

Characters

Chandra Merrick (M/F) – a thrill-seeking adventurer.

Iria Carson (M/F) – a reporter.

Stagehand (M/F) – a person who operates the props.

Scene 1 – Steep Mountain Path

(A steep mountain path is implied but without any scenery. This play has the potential of being quite messy. A plastic covering on the floor may be necessary. At rise, Chandra is seen centre stage facing one side preparing for a major hike by checking his equipment. All of this is done through pantomime. The only real prop is a backpack. During the whole scene he walks in place as if climbing a mountain. Stagehand stands just to the side of Chandra and faces him. Near Stagehand is a box full of props. Stagehand is not seen or acknowledged by either Chandra or Iria. Iria enters and stands downstage or off stage at the front of the audience. Stagehand makes wind sounds.)

Iria: (as if on the air) Mr. Merrick, Mr. Merrick, can you hear me OK?

Chandra: (as if trying to speak over the wind) Yes, I can hear you fine.

Iria: Good, good. I am from the Extreme Sports Channel. We have been trying to make contact with you for a few days now.

Chandra: (puts on his backpack) Yes. I saw your helicopter this morning. It's not easy flying around in this terrain.

Iria: Well, we really appreciate that you are willing to speak to us in the midst of your historic climb and we are anxious to hear your story.

Chandra: No problem. I am always happy to talk to...

Iria: What our audience wants to know is how you are dealing with this horribly grueling challenge you are engaged in.

Chandra: Well, uh...

Iria: I mean you have decided to climb Mount Kaikalu—one of the most remote and treacherous mountains in the world and you have chosen to brave the mountain alone. Few teams have ever survived to reach the top and never has a solo climber made it back to tell their story.

Chandra: I am doing quite well, thank you. In fact...

Iria: Ah! Modesty and fortitude are such admirable qualities for an adventurer such as yourself. It must be humbling knowing what you are about to encounter. You have ahead of you many hours of torturous and grueling suffering in the midst of the brutal cold, the difficulty of breathing thin air, the unbearable pain and fatigue, and the cruel spectre of dying alone in a remote wasteland of blowing snow. Yet, you face it all with stoic defiance.

Chandra: Well I, uh... **(reaches into a pocket and takes out a power bar)**

Iria: No, no, no. You don't have to say it. We all know what you are about to sacrifice and why... and we, as a nation, are proud of your efforts to let us watch you endure these horrible things as we eat our potato chips and watch from our comfortable couches.

Chandra: Potato chips? **(puts away the power bar)**

Iria: Sorry. Think nothing of it. **(pause)** So, our listeners are waiting patiently to know how you are doing after several days of hiking up the foothills of the great mountain. You must be on the final trek up the steep cliffs by now.

Chandra: Yes I am. For the next few hours, I will be making the final ascent into the forbidding environment of the mountain itself. Hopefully, the satellite above will track me and I will be able to describe my climb to you and your listeners.

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Iria: Wonderful! Tell us about the conditions you are experiencing there.

Chandra: Well, it is a little cold here but I expected that. Other than that, it is a beautiful clear day and the way forward looks bright and clear.

Iria: It must be a breathtaking scene there for you, then.

Chandra: Oh yes. Quite beautiful.

Iria: And no sign of the impending powerful and potentially life-threatening storm ahead of you?

Chandra: Storm?

Iria: My goodness! How such a thing must completely destroy your optimistic confidence in the eventual success of your goal. You must be devastated.

Chandra: Well, I must admit the storm is a surprise. I spent many months preparing for this climb and researched the best window of time based on predicted weather patterns but one has to expect surprises and sudden changes in such an extreme location. I have prepared myself for these possibilities.

Iria: **(disappointed)** I see. Well, we all applaud your efforts and confidence. I am not surprised this particular storm caught you off guard, though. It is said to be a strong and fast-moving weather disturbance.

Chandra: Is that so?

Iria: Yes. I imagine you will begin to feel some of the storm's powerful winds very soon.

(Stagehand places a strong standing fan in front of Chandra and turns it on. If it has variable speeds, the speed should be gradually increased.)

Chandra: Well, yes. As a matter of fact, I am beginning to experience some of that now.

Iria: And how are you holding up?

Chandra: Just fine. It is, of course, getting harder to walk but I am able to maintain a steady pace.

Iria: That is great news. We are all pulling for you and for your success. Climbing a remote icy cliff no one has ever heard of and which can offer absolutely no monetary gain or be of no social or political significance is something we all can only aspire to in our dreams.

Chandra: Thank you... I think.

Iria: And how are you holding out against the rain?

Chandra: Rain?

Iria: Terrible pounding bitterly cold rain. I've just been given a weather update for your area by our meteorologist.

Chandra: But there is no...

(Stagehand sprays water into the airflow of the fan so that it sprays all over Chandra.)

Iria: Are you still there? The storm may be disrupting our communication.

Chandra: No. I hear you just fine. I am starting to experience some precipitation now.

Iria: Oh how disheartening this must all be on a beautiful climb that soon dissolves into a hellish nightmare. You must be soaked and full of doubt.

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Chandra: No, actually...

Iria: Imagine listeners the strength and stamina that must be drawn upon for someone to be able to withstand these challenges all the while knowing the worst is yet to come.

Chandra: I'm sorry. What did you say?

Iria: I was just reminding our listeners of your bravery in the midst of what is to come: the terrible cold and blinding snow. As you climb higher and higher the frigid temperatures will turn that rain into snow.

(Stagehand throws tiny bits of white paper into the airflow of the fan.)

Chandra: Well, of course, I expected snow but that shouldn't be any kind of terrible challenge.

(Stagehand puts dark sunglasses on Chandra.)

Chandra: Although it is getting a little hard to see.

Iria: I can only imagine the sheer terror that must be gripping your heart right now. To know that at any moment your life could be ripped from you by the impassioned bitter cold hands of nature.

Chandra: I cannot think about such things. I have to focus on the job at hand.

Iria: Of course. You can't allow the possible dangers to affect you. I imagine that the decreased amounts of life-giving oxygen you are experiencing at such an altitude has not diminished your resolve.

Chandra: That has not been a factor, I am proud to say. Years of intense training have allowed me to increase my breathing potential and...

(Stagehand clips a clothespin or something similar to Chandra's nose.)

Iria: You were saying?

Chandra: I, uh, am experiencing a little difficulty now.

Iria: You must be close now to the summit and to the apex of your years of work and preparation. We are here pulling for you. Hopefully the sight of the frozen dead bodies of those who have failed before you will not deter you.

Chandra: Bodies?

Iria: Oh, yes. Many before you have tried this climb only to sacrifice their lives. At such temperatures and thin levels of oxygen, a body does not decompose and can only remain to stare at you as a reminder of what is in store if you do not succeed.

Chandra: I hadn't thought about that.

(Stagehand puts a bone or skull into Chandra's hands. Chandra cries out and drops the bone.)

Iria: What was that?

Chandra: Oh, nothing. There must be some interference with the signal.

Iria: Well, that's a relief. I thought for a brief dreadful moment that you may have encountered one of the fierce and hungry mountain bears that are so endemic to that area.

Chandra: Oh, come on. Not a bear. There are no...

(Stagehand growls.)

Iria: What terrible misfortune! And now that it grows dark the danger must be even greater.

(The stage lights go down a little.)

Chandra: I hear it but I can't see it! **(tries to look around in desperation)** Where is it?

(Stagehand growls again then knocks Chandra to the ground as he screams. Stagehand gets up as if nothing has happened. Stagehand exits and returns with a small first-aid kit. Chandra works his way back up to a standing position.)

Iria: Hello? Are you there? Hello? Have we lost communication? Have we lost the only possible lifeline to our hero? Is it possible we shall never hear from him again and that we shall be left to imagine all the possible and horrible endings to his story?

Chandra: I'm here.

Iria: **(unconvincingly)** Oh, well... good. What happened? Were you brutally mauled by a bear? I thought we may have heard a blood-curdling howl near you.

(As Chandra talks, Stagehand applies band-aids and/or bandages to his face.)

Chandra: With such limited vision I may have mistakenly run into a bear's territory.

Iria: Were you attacked? Are you bleeding profusely in the snow? Have you been torn to shreds?

Chandra: No. I think the bear meant only to frighten me away from her den. I managed to escape and run away. I do have some minor cuts and abrasions.

Iria: How horrible. Can you describe the entire ghastly scene to us in every gory detail?

Chandra: There really isn't much to describe. I was overcome but not seriously hurt. Fortunately, I equipped myself with medical supplies.

Iria: And you are able to patch yourself up?

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Chandra: Yes. It is challenging in these conditions but I can manage.

Iria: The menacing creature wanted only to frighten you?

(Stagehand removes Chandra's backpack and takes it offstage then returns.)

Chandra: Yes. It did manage, however, to take my backpack and all my food.

Iria: But how can you possibly go on now without your supplies?

Chandra: I will have to rely on my own strength and deep woods survival skills to get me through and finish the climb.

Iria: You are truly an inspiration to all of us. Think of all of those who are pulling for you now, the masses of concerned citizens hoping you will be able to get through this unscathed. Think of them sitting there in their upholstered easy chairs sipping on warm coffee or tea, nibbling on their cream pies, throwing logs on their fires, snuggling up with their families all to listen to you as you inspire them to chase their dreams.

Chandra: It's good to know I have so many fans.

Iria: Yes it is but how do you make it so real for them? How do we help them realize the tremendous challenge you face and the nearly impossible odds of success you must deal with?

Chandra: Well, I don't know.

Iria: Let's take just one example. There is always the ever-present and impending cold. Even with all that advanced equipment, it must be difficult to keep warm.

Chandra: Well, not really. I...

Iria: Oh, such modesty to downplay the terrible dangers of such things as frostbite and the eventual certainty of the loss of your hands and legs. Even now the cold must be working itself past all those barriers of clothing. It attacks first the outer extremities like your fingers and hands.

Chandra: My hands are perfectly...

(Stagehand grabs a roll of duct tape and tapes up Chandra's hands.)

Chandra: Now that you mention it, I am beginning to feel a little stiffness and numbness.

Iria: Oh my. That's it, then. The up comes down and the down floats up and all the angels sing their marching song.

Chandra: That's it? What do you mean by "that's it"? What are you talking about?

Iria: Confused?

Chandra: Well, yes.

Iria: That's how it all begins, isn't it?

Chandra: How what begins?

Iria: The end.

Chandra: You've lost me.

Iria: I'm afraid we *have* lost you. It begins with the bitter cold that envelops then devours the human body. Next, the mind is taken. Confusion sets in and the climber is no longer in control of his own faculties. Soon he becomes lost and is then overtaken by the high mountains he so foolishly thought he could tame. That is how it always happens.

Chandra: Oh, no way! No, no. That is not going to be the end of this story—my story! I have worked and trained too long to be struck down. I will conquer this mountain through sheer will if I have to. I will crawl on my hands and knees through walls of snow and ice if I have to. I will burrow myself under a rock and hibernate on these slopes until Spring if that’s what it takes to make it to the top.

Iria: How we admire your strength and, shall I say, your foolish determination!

Chandra: Wait!

Iria: What is it? More disasters?

Chandra: No, the top! I am near the top of the mountain. I can sense it. I can feel it. I am nearly there! With any luck, I will reach the summit as we speak. This is it. This is the culmination of all the months of planning and preparation. This is the great event I have dreamed of and worked for. This shall be the greatest moment of my life. I have achieved...

Stagehand: OK, cut!

Chandra: What?

Stagehand: (walks to Chandra) I’m sorry. It’s just not happening for me. I don’t think your heart is really in this. You can’t just go through the motions, you’ve got to *work* it, really *sell* it! Why don’t you take a break and we’ll try it again. (calls out to the theater) OK, everyone. Let’s take five.

(Stagehand and Iria exit. Chandra is left wandering on the stage in confusion and disarray.)

Curtain