

**Where We Finish**

A play in two acts

By Larry Maness

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## **Characters**

**Carol Evans: Director, Evans Alternative Center**

**Stage Manager**

**The Girls: The teenaged girls may number from a minimum of four to as many as the stage can reasonable handle.**

**Maria: The leader of the girls**

**Students 1, 2 and 3: Three of the girls**

**Tisha: A teacher at the Center**

**Allison: A college student and volunteer at the Center**

**David Drummond: Chair of the Budget Committee**

## WHERE WE FINISH

by  
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**Setting:** A large open room with a dozen or more straight-backed chairs arranged in rows. Arrangement of the chairs will indicate a classroom and various other spaces or objects. On the opposite side of the stage, two chairs face each other across from a desk.

**Time:** Present.

**At Rise:** The Stage Manager crosses the stage and stops.

### STAGE MANAGER

Welcome to \_\_\_\_\_ High School's theatre.  
As you can see, we have pared down  
the sets eliminated the flats and scrim,  
reduced the lighting, tossed out the furniture except  
for these straight-backed chairs and opted for  
no extravagant costumes.

But we are not complaining. We have food in  
our tummies, roofs over our heads, and gas  
in our S-U-Vs. Most of our classmates are  
not being shot at, beaten, or even threatened  
as we walk in our neighborhoods. Truth is  
we have it pretty good.

That cannot be said for all of the students in  
our fair city. Some have trouble learning English,  
some drop out to get a job, others...well, you'll  
meet some of the others soon, just like  
you'll meet Carol Evans momentarily.

Not much to see here without the flats and scrim,  
fancy lighting, furniture and extravagant costumes.  
There's a reason we haven't budgeted for those  
in this production which I will explain later.  
But this is theatre, a place to suspend belief and engage  
our imaginations which is what I ask you to do.  
Fill in the lush colors my descriptions suggest as we begin  
our journey along the \_\_\_\_\_ River/Lake  
filled with sailboats and kayaks and canoes and the  
occasional rowing shell cutting through the calm  
waters on this crisp fall morning enhanced by the  
glorious turning leaves.

Carol Evans enters.

STAGE MANAGER (cont.)

Carol takes this walk every day on her way to work as the director of the Evans Alternative Center, a small, one-story cinderblock facility catering to...

A dozen or so teenaged girls--The Girls--some showing signs of early pregnancy, some carrying bundles of young babies, some about to light cigarettes, all chattering eagerly in their native languages burst onto the stage.

CAROL

No smoking near the Center. And in English, please.

The cigarettes are put away as The Girl's chatter gets louder.

CAROL (cont.)

You know the rule.

THE GIRLS (In unison.)

No one gets in unless they speak English.

CAROL

Tries to speak English.

THE GIRLS (In unison.)

Tries to speak English.

STAGE MANAGER

Carol opens the front door and the girls pour in...except for Maria.

The Girls scramble to get their seats, handing the two or three babies to the Stage Manager as they fly by. The Stage Manager exits with his load. Maria holds back, then ambles toward Carol.

CAROL

You're late. Again.

MARIA

Non hablo decisiones buenos.

CAROL

In English, please.

MARIA

I said I'm here because I don't make good decisions.

CAROL

Like failing to come to school?

MARIA

Like coming to school and failing.

CAROL

You need to try harder, Maria. You need to...

MARIA

Yeah, yeah.

Maria takes her seat. The Girls high five and goof. The Stage Manager enters as Carol moves to her desk on the far side of the stage.

STAGE MANAGER

Carol enters her office. There is a knock on her door.

CAROL

Who is it?

Tisha steps into Carol's office waving a newspaper.

TISHA

Me.

CAROL

With good news?

TISHA

Have you read this morning's paper?

CAROL

I have, Tisha, and that's not good news.

TISHA

Tell me about it. How can this city put up with a man like David Drummond who does nothing but cause trouble?

CAROL

He ran his campaign on cutting costs of city government and saving taxpayers money, now he's making good

CAROL (cont.)  
on his promise.

TISHA  
Closing down places like us? Penny wise and  
pound foolish, that's what it is. He's throwing us all  
out on the street.

CAROL  
I couldn't agree more, but he hasn't thrown us out  
on the street yet.

TISHA  
You just wait.  
(Beat.)  
How's the preparation for your meeting  
with him going?

CAROL  
I sent in all the facts and figures he asked for  
but he wants to see me privately before I  
meet with him and his budget committee.

TISHA  
When's the grilling before the committee?

CAROL  
Three weeks.

TISHA  
Three weeks of torture wondering if they'll vote to  
shut us down. I don't know how you stand it.

CAROL  
I stand it because I have no choice. None of us do.

TISHA  
Yeah, well.  
(Beat.)  
Maybe you'll learn something during your private meeting.  
When's that?

CAROL  
This morning.

TISHA

What's it about?

CAROL

I don't know. He just asked if he could stop by.

TISHA

The man's a shark. I'd be careful if I was you.

CAROL

Always good advice, now hadn't you ought to get to class?

TISHA

I'm on my way.

CAROL

Before you go, give me an update on Maria. I'm worried about her.

TISHA

She makes worrying about her pretty easy. She fights everything and everyone. The only thing she cares about is her baby daughter.

CAROL

Who I haven't seen for a week. How is Rosie?

TISHA

Seems fine. You haven't seen her because Maria's living with her mother again. Mom baby sits while Maria is here.

CAROL

I thought Maria was living with her boyfriend? What's his name?

TISHA

Jermaine. He's now out of the picture. From what I gather, he didn't like changing diapers and took off. Maria took it pretty hard. She doesn't like being on the losing end of anything and having to move back in with her mother was quite a defeat. She's been mad at the world ever since.

CAROL

So I've seen.

TISHA

Unfortunately, most of the other fathers do the same thing and leave our girls with very little support. And that shark Drummond wants to close us down and put them on the street. Why?

CAROL

He hasn't done anything to us yet and I plan to see that he doesn't. Now off to class before the girls get restless.

TISHA

The girls are always restless.

Tisha enters the classroom and stands in front of her seated students. Carol busys herself with paperwork.

TISHA (cont)

All right, students. You were asked to think about what you would like to be...

MARIA

...when we grow up?

The Girls chuckle and chatter.

TISHA

In some ways you've already grown up, haven't you? Some of you have babies and responsibilities that all parents have.

STUDENT 1

All single parents have.

TISHA

Yes, a single parent like me who was in a class like this not all that many years ago. Ms Evans taught it and asked the very question I asked you all to think about: What kind of future do you want for yourself and your family and what are you willing to do to get it?

MARIA

Rob a bank.

More chuckles from The Girls.



TISHA

And end up in prison?

MARIA

I'm in prison now. At least, I feel like it. If I knocked over a bank, I've have money for clothes and stuff.

TISHA

The kind of prison you are in now, Maria, you can get out of. You have options and opportunities. You throw all those away when the warden locks that iron gate behind you. Now enough foolishness, let's get back to the question. What does your future hold?

STUDENT 2

I'd like a job.

TISHA

What sort of job?

STUDENT 3

I'd like to work in hospital. The orderly was nice to me when I had my baby.

TISHA

You want to be an orderly?

STUDENT 3

I guess.

TISHA

Why not a nurse?

STUDENT 3

I dunno.

TISHA

Or better yet, why not a doctor?

STUDENT 3

Me?

TISHA

Why not?

MARIA

Because we're here and not in some ivy covered school. We got no silver spoon and won't get one unless we knock off that bank.

Again, The Girls titter.

TISHA

We can't control where we start, that's true. Where we finish is another matter. It sounds like Maria wants us all to give up. Is that what you want us to do, Maria?

A defiant Maria glares straight ahead.

TISHA (cont.)

Or, maybe you'd like to fight on like the rest of us. I'll take your silence as a yes. Now all of you, write down the answers to the questions I asked you to think about.

The Girls and Maria begin writing.

David Drummond, a nervous, antsy man enters along with the Stage Manager.

STAGE MANAGER

The chairman of our fair city's budget and finance committee is David Drummond, a man some call the Grim Reaper because he puts an end to...

DRUMMOND

...excess.

Drummond looks around approvingly.

DRUMMOND (cont.)

I applaud the sparseness of your sets.

STAGE MANAGER

Thank you.

DRUMMOND

No one can afford to be extravagant these days, now I'm in a bit of a rush. Where's Ms Evans?

STAGE MANAGER  
Right this way.

The Stage Manager ushers Drummond into Carol's office.

STAGE MANAGER (cont.)  
Someone to see you.

Stage Manager exits. Carol offers Drummond her hand. They shake.

CAROL  
Mr. Drummond.

DRUMMOND  
Ms Evans. I'd like to get right to the point,  
if I may?

Carol sits. Drummond paces.

CAROL  
Please do.

DRUMMOND  
As you are no doubt aware, during last year's  
election, I pledged to return our city government  
to its former days of fiscal responsibility, if elected. We  
need to spend less money and we need to spend it on new  
ideas that work.

CAROL  
I am aware of your pledge.

DRUMMOND  
Over the past several months, I have sought to  
cut out the waste, eliminate the duplication and  
return some sense of living within our means  
to city government.

CAROL  
I know many of the people you've laid off.

DRUMMOND  
We all share the sacrifice.

CAROL  
I don't know that we all do, Mr. Drummond. You

CAROL (cont.)

seem to be managing quite well.

DRUMMOND

I don't complain in public, if that's what you mean, which is why I wanted this private meeting. I don't offer praise in public either until I'm convinced praise is merited. But I will say at the beginning that you may be on to something with your proposal. Very creative if I might say so myself.

CAROL

What proposal is that?

DRUMMOND

The one that came in a day or so after your report on the status of your Center.

CAROL

Ahhh, that proposal.

DRUMMOND

Let me start with your report. I went over it again before coming here and I can say without equivocation that once the full budget and finance committee sees that document, they will vote to cancel all future funding for your Center.

CAROL

That would be an outrage.

DRUMMOND

The outrage is a failure to succeed, Ms Evans. The numbers you yourself provided prove that. There are more young women coming through your doors now than when you started twenty years ago.

CAROL

Because the need is greater, Mr. Drummond. We don't create the need, we respond to it. The girls that finish our program know how to balance their checkbooks, plan nutritious meals, and properly care for their children whose fathers—in most cases—have run off and left them. Many of our girls finish high school, some go on to college. We provide hope to these young girls, if you shut us down, who will do that?

DRUMMOND

Their parents.

CAROL

You know that isn't always possible. Some of their parents are struggling, too.

DRUMMOND

All right, Ms Evans, the truth is I don't have an answer for who will provide for your young girls, but the beauty of your proposal is that we may never have to get to that point. What you've put forth is a clever bit of forward thinking. I like that. No expense to the tax payers, I like that, too. And if successful, maybe more of your girls would have the tools to carve out a better life. Admirable all the way around.

CAROL

And, which tools are those?

DRUMMOND

Discipline, hard work, confidence to succeed. I don't have it put to memory, but it's all there in your proposal. Yours and your co-author, what's her name?

CAROL

Tisha?

DRUMMOND

Doesn't sound right. The coach for the team.

CAROL

Now I know the proposal you're talking about and my co-author, Allison Stevens.

DRUMMOND

That's the one.

CAROL

Spunky young lady. Full of ideas. I think I should explain before we go any farther. That proposal has been kicking around here ever since Ali started teaching physical fitness to our girls about a year ago.

DRUMMOND

Needed time for polishing, I take it. Get the fine tuning right before sending it out for review. Always a good idea.

CAROL

It is, yes. In fact, it needs more fine tuning. I think we should hold off on any decisions regarding that idea until...

DRUMMOND

Nonsense. Granted it does seem a little out of place coming from an organization like yours, but that's part of what makes it new and refreshing. Imagine the good publicity our town would get—not to mention the Evans Alternative Center—if your young women did enter the \_\_\_\_\_ (town name) Regatta and win. We'd be the envy of every city across the country. In fact I've already contacted a few mayors...

CAROL

No, you shouldn't do that.

DRUMMOND

Why not? Not that I'm claiming your idea as my own, not at all. I merely added my own touch as it were, my own stamp as a follow-up to my campaign promise to produce new initiatives that actually generate results. Picture this, Ms Evans, your girls on the victory stand as fine examples of hard work, commitment to a cause, discipline, and success. The fact that I publicly supported you from the very beginning wouldn't hurt me one bit either.

CAROL

Victory might be a stretch, Mr. Drummond.

DRUMMOND

Not a guarantee, of course, but Ali Stevens has a pedigree in this sport. I did my checking before coming over. Her mother rowed in the Olympics and Ali...

CAROL

Never lost a high school race until her accident.

DRUMMOND

Which makes her an ideal coach, if you ask me.  
I'd like to meet her if that's all right. Part of my  
reason for stopping by.

CAROL

That may not be possible. She's just starting class.

DRUMMOND

Just a peek in then. I always like to connect  
names and faces.

Allison, sporting the preppy look, limps in using the support of a cane, and joins Tisha in front of the class.

TISHA

You look like you need to lie down.  
Leg causing you more trouble?

ALLISON

Kept me up all night. Again.

TISHA

Want me to take over for you?

ALLISON

I'll be all right.

TISHA

You sure?

ALLISON

Positive.

Tisha exits past Drummond and Carol who enter and stand at one side of the classroom.

ALLISON (cont.)

Okay class, how do we begin?

The Girls stand.

THE GIRLS (In unison.)

With the core.

ALLISON

Which is?

THE GIRLS (In unison.)  
The strength and foundation for everything.

The Girls move their chairs to one side.

ALLISON  
Ready?

MARIA  
Not quite.

Some of The Girls giggle. Maria breaks ranks. There is aggression in her action and voice.

ALLISON  
What is it this time, Maria?

MARIA  
Same as it was last time. Same as it was the time before that. Same as it was since you first got here. I need an example if I'm going to do things right. I need somebody to show me how it's done, you know? All I've learned from you is...

Maria exaggeratedly limps around, dragging one leg. Again, some of The Girls giggle.

MARIA (cont.)  
How's that gonna help me? I mean, you stumble around like the drunks on my street. You...

Maria stops and rejoins the ranks when she sees Drummond and Carol. Drummond bristles.

DRUMMOND  
Is this a prank?

CAROL  
No, sir. This is our coach, Allison Stevens.

Allison offers her hand that Drummond shakes hesitantly.

DRUMMOND  
But you're injured.



ALLISON

Making progress every day. Small progress, but...

DRUMMOND

And your crew?

Carol gestures toward The Girls.

CAROL

Here.

DRUMMOND

Here?

MARIA

What's a crew?

Drummond reaches his boiling point.

DRUMMOND

Is this some sort of joke? A laugh a minute at my expense? I told you I was a busy man and I will not be made a fool of.

CAROL

Mr. Drummond...

DRUMMOND

Let me make myself perfectly clear to all of you: This Center will close because of proven incompetence or it will stay open as an example of fresh ideas that work. It is your choice.

Drummond exits.

CAROL

Mr. Drummond? Wait.

Carol inhales a calming breath and lets it out in the following silence.

ALLISON

Uh-oh.

CAROL

Why didn't you tell me?

ALLISON

I thought I had a few weeks before your meeting with Drummond's committee. I didn't know he'd show up here today.

CAROL

Why didn't you tell me you sent him that proposal? A proposal that I said the Center could not afford, could not hope to carry out, and could not support.

MARIA

I know a crib. I know a posse, but a crew? Anybody?

CAROL

Not now, Maria.

MARIA

Just asking.

CAROL

Allison? Why did you send Drummond that proposal?

ALLISON

It wasn't the one I showed you earlier. I revised it.

CAROL

You revised it.

ALLISON

Yes. I made corrections that resolved your objections.

CAROL

You did?

ALLISON

I did. I got a loaner for a boat so there's no expense there, I will be the coach, and when we win the regatta, everyone --Drummond included--will jump on the bandwagon to support us.

CAROL

That's part of the problem, he's already on the bandwagon. Or, more to the point, he's not on it,

CAROL (cont.)

he's driving it. Like most politicians who hear a new idea, he's claimed it for himself as a shining example of a fresh idea that works. Wouldn't surprise me if he said it was his idea to begin with which is why he got so mad and stormed out. He's afraid he's going to be proven wrong to all those mayors he's called.

ALLISON

No he isn't.

CAROL

If nothing else, Allison, I admire your optimism.

MARIA

Coach of what?

CAROL

Only you failed to let me see your revisions that resolved my objections.

ALLISON

I am sorry.

MARIA

Coach of what?

CAROL

Do you have any idea what you've gotten us into?

ALLISON

I was just thinking...

CAROL

No you weren't. Had you been thinking you never would have done it.

(Beat.)

Sorry. I know you weren't trying to cause problems.

MARIA

Should we leave?

CAROL

No. You all heard Mr. Drummond, the Center will stay open as an example of fresh ideas or it

CAROL (cont.)

will close. I have no intention of closing.

MARIA

What's the fresh idea?

CAROL

It involves all of you and should have been discussed with all of you before word of it ever left this building. Unfortunately, that did not happen so you'll just have to hear about it now.

(Beat.)

What do we call a computer?

STUDENT 3

A tool.

CAROL

That's right, a tool. We use it to get information, to make purchases, to play games. There are other tools we use to help us achieve other objectives. A car, for example, takes us from A to B just like a boat. Only the boat we have in mind for our use is powered by four young women.

MARIA

No motor?

CAROL

No motor.

STUDENT 2

Four young women as in us?

CAROL

As in you.

STUDENT 1

We could row out and have a picnic or something.

CAROL

Not really in this kind of boat. Allison?

ALLISON

It's built for speed. It's long and narrow and is

ALLISON (cont.)

called a shell. The people who row it are referred to as crew.

MARIA

Now we're getting somewhere. Why do they do it?

ALLISON

Sorry?

MARIA

Why do they get in the boat and row?

ALLISON

To win the race.

CAROL

That's partially it. There are other reasons that fit our purpose once you look at the boat as a tool that helps us learn how to work together, how to be more disciplined, how to focus on a goal as a team, and perhaps, to achieve the ultimate by winning the race.

MARIA

And that's gonna help us? Rowing some boat?

CAROL

I wasn't sure myself when Allison first brought the idea to my attention, but the more I thought about it I believed the experience has benefits. Two obvious ones are that you'll be more physically fit rowing and the second is that it might be a lot of fun, and who here couldn't use more fun in their lives?

MARIA

And Allison is the coach?

CAROL

Yes.

MARIA

She's got a bum leg.

CAROL

And more experience and knowledge of the sport than most.

MARIA

I think we need to talk about this, right?

THE GIRLS (Ad lib.)

Yeah, right. We need to talk. Sure, etc.

CAROL

Of course. This has to be a collective decision since it is outside of our general scope of activity. Talk it over among yourselves and let us know your decision.

Carol and Allison exit and enter Carol's office where Tisha waits.

TISHA

I thought Drummond was going to run me over. What did you do to that man?

ALLISON

It's what I did.

TISHA

Hit him with your cane?

ALLISON

Stepped out of line. Like all the social service agencies in town, I knew the Center could be in trouble if Mr. Drummond voted against our funding. I was just looking for a way to help and thought of that idea we tossed around a few months ago. It seemed to fit his 'fresh ideas' campaign theme.

TISHA

That crazy boat idea?

ALLISON

More or less.

TISHA

You tossed that idea around, Carol and I caught it and buried it.

CAROL  
Drummond likes the idea.

TISHA  
He what?

CAROL  
Likes it. He wants us to move ahead. If we don't, our future doesn't look very promising.

TISHA  
He's going to shut us down? He said that?

CAROL  
He's going to shut us down.

TISHA  
That no good...  
(Beat.)  
What are we going to do?

CAROL  
We have no choice; we're going to accept the challenge. It's not exactly one I was looking forward to, but that doesn't matter. What matters is that we consider what is before us as an opportunity, assuming that the girls are willing to participate.

TISHA  
You mean row that boat.

ALLISON  
They can be a fine crew.

TISHA  
Oh, God.

CAROL  
That's our challenge. We have to get a boat in the water ready to race by the time of the regatta.

TISHA  
When is that?

ALLISON

Two months more or less.

TISHA

Is that possible? Two months?

ALLISON

We've got a good start with the exercises. Everything I've presented to the girls strengthens the core: thighs, stomach, back, legs. A strong rower uses them all.

TISHA

But we don't have any rowers, strong or otherwise. We've got kids, some with their own kids, trying to make their way. What do the girls think about all this?

CAROL

They're talking it over as we speak.

The Stage Manager moves into the classroom.

STAGE MANAGER

I'm like a fly on the wall.

MARIA

You know what this is? I'll tell you what this is, this is Allison Stevens putting her stamp on all of us. Remember when she came here after her accident? Big time private school rowing lady who ruined her damn leg some way and had to give up the sport of the preppy elite. Only she isn't giving it up if we let her put us in some tippy boat and then screams at us to it row faster.

STUDENT 1

When would we find the time? I mean, I'm not against helping out, but I don't have time to do what I need to do as it is.

STUDENT 2

If we did, what about a baby sitter? I can't run off without a baby sitter. I'm thinking no way on this one.



STUDENT 3

Might close the Center if we don't do something. I mean, you heard what the man said.

STUDENT 1

What do you all think?

THE GIRLS (Ad lib.)

I don't know. Maybe we could do it. I can't swim. Do you gotta swim? I say not. I don't know, etc.

STUDENT 3

What will happen to all of us if they close the Center? Where will we go? Anybody got an answer for that? Maria?

MARIA

I don't have an answer for everything. All I know is something's not right with this. It stinks.

STUDENT 3

Everything stinks since Jermaine walked out.

MARIA

Don't talk crazy.

STUDENT 3

I'm talkin' like it is. Ever since Allison came here, you two been at it. She wants to do one thing, you want to do something else. She wants us in a boat to save the Center and you want nothing to do with it. Now that Jermaine is out of the picture, you're in Allison's face big time. You're taking Jermaine's walking out on her is what I say, and it's not her fault.

MARIA

Do I gotta like everybody?

STUDENT 3

No, but you gotta like Ms Evans and Tisha. You fight Allison on this and you bring them down, too. Even if we don't want to do this, maybe we should.

STUDENT 1

She's right. Maybe we should.

MARIA

Because that rich girl says so? She's got everything  
in the world and we've got nothing but an up hill climb.

(Beat.)

I say vote. All in favor of Allison Stevens  
using us in some game of hers, raise your right hand.

Student 1 and 3 and two other of The Girls vote in favor.

MARIA (cont.)

Against?

Maria's hand shoots up. Some of The Girls abstain, but Student 2 votes with Maria.

MARIA (cont.)

The nos have it.

A pause as the meaning of the vote sinks in.

STUDENT 1

Who's gonna tell Ms Evans?

MARIA

Me.

STUDENT 2

Not me.

STUDENT 3

Not Maria either. She'd take too much pleasure in it.

STUDENT 1

I'll go.

MARIA

Hey, this wasn't my crazy idea.

STUDENT 3

We gotta let her know. Come on.

Student 1 and 3 walk with the Stage Manager toward Carol's office. They stop outside  
the door, listening but not wanting to interrupt.

CAROL

You know the one aspect of Ali's proposal that

CAROL (cont.)

always resonated with me was the early morning sight of the crews out on the River/Lake. All their work and effort always looked so peaceful, just gliding along on the calm, quiet water.

TISHA

Gliding along on all that money.

ALLISON

What's that supposed to mean?

TISHA

No offense, Allison, but you have to admit that the polo and yachting crowd are more likely to crew than any of the girls in this Center. That's one reason I was against this idea to begin with: our girls don't fit in and when you don't fit in, you get embarrassed. They've got enough problems, I don't want to add embarrassment to the list.

ALLISON

Embarrassed from what?

TISHA

Come on, Ali. Look at you. You're the poster child for all that I'm talking about. Your family has money, your dad sails every day at your summer place, your mother is on more charity boards than I can count, and you are a born preppy, private high school and all.

ALLISON

Am I supposed to apologize?

TISHA

Not at all. You should, however, consider the fact that a solution for a problem in your world will not necessarily transfer to solving a problem in the world our girls live in.

CAROL

I'm afraid she's right about that, Allison.

ALLISON

So we shouldn't try.

CAROL

Of course we should try.

ALLISON

I've heard the question you've ask to your classes: What do you want to be and what are you willing to do to achieve it? When the answer comes back nurse, you present the possibility of doctor. And to be a doctor, you need discipline, responsibility, pride and confidence in yourself. Being part of a team dedicated to winning teaches discipline, responsibility, pride and confidence. As for putting anyone in a position where they might be embarrassed, that will not happen.

TISHA

How can you be so sure?

ALLISON

Because I won't embarrass myself. I'll be in the boat.

CAROL

You?

ALLISON

The four requires a cox. That'll be me.

CAROL

How? You can't bend your leg enough to get in a car, let alone a racing shell.

ALLISON

I'll train with the girls. We'll get ready and we'll get better. Together.

TISHA

Assuming you have a crew.

ALLISON

Assuming.

TISHA

I wouldn't get my hopes up. Those girls follow Maria and these days, Maria doesn't like anything.

ALLISON

My hopes were up when I made arrangements to have a shell delivered. It should be here any time.

CAROL

Aren't you getting a little ahead of yourself?

ALLISON

The way I see it, I'm way behind. I want to change that, Ms Evans. I want this to happen. I know the girls and I are different in many ways, but in others we're very much the same. They have obstacles they need to overcome...

She taps her knee with her cane.

ALLISON (cont.)

...I have mine as well. Everyday I make a little progress, they do the same. If we keep at it, who knows where we'll end up, but we'll have done our best.

STUDENT 3

Have you done your best yet?

STUDENT 2

Not even close.

STUDENT 3

When you gonna get close?

STUDENT 2

I don't know. You got something in mind?

STUDENT 3

Yeah, I don't want to make a mistake on this. I've already made too many or I wouldn't be here. Besides, I don't want to let you or me or any of the girls down because we made the wrong choice on this.

STUDENT 2

Be a shame to let Ms Evans down. Tisha, too.

STUDENT 3

What'dya think?

STUDENT 2

If you're thinking what I think you're thinking,  
Maria might explode.

STUDENT 3

She needs to learn to control her temper.

STUDENT 2

We can help her do that.

STUDENT 3

Yeah, right after we do this. You ready?

STUDENT 2

Go for it.

Student 2 and 3 enter Carol's office.

CAROL

That was fast.

STUDENT 3

Maria wanted a quick vote.

CAROL

Then, I take it you've had your discussion.

STUDENT 2

We have.

CAROL

And what is your decision?

The two students look at each other, coming to a silent agreement.

STUDENTS 2 and 3

We want to help, Ms Evans. We don't want  
the Center to close. We'll jump in that boat.

Allison pumps her fists, goes to the girls and gives them a hug. All three exit. Carol and Tisha look at each other.

CAROL

Surprised?

TISHA  
Surprised.

CAROL  
Maybe we don't give our girls enough credit.

TISHA  
Allison, either. It took a lot of guts for her to do what she did.

CAROL  
It's going to take more for her to work the girls and herself into shape.

TISHA  
Do you think that's why she did it? She needed a challenge to push herself back into a boat?

CAROL  
I think that's part of it. The other part is that she doesn't want the Center to close.

TISHA  
That makes all of us.

--End Act I--

Act II

**Setting:** The same.

**Time:** A few days later.

**At Rise:** The chairs are along one side of the space except for five—four one behind the other, and one facing the four—creating the seat positions of a coxed rowing four. The impressed Stage Manager walks around the ‘shell’, observing the stunning craft.

STAGE MANAGER

And what do we have here for your able imaginations?  
Correct. Twenty-nine and one half feet of Vespoli  
DS Four racing shell with a stern cox position facing  
the four rowing positions. This sparkling white beauty is  
tough, stiff and very light to produce maximum speed in all  
weather conditions from a slight chop to nasty rollers.  
Inside, the under carriage utilizes super ball bearings  
permitting faster seat travel as the four rowers push off  
carbon foot-stretchers when their oars catch water using the  
Euro-style riggers. As you can see, the riggers attach to the  
side of the shell, two on each side, alternating left side,  
right, back to left, ending with the last the rigger on the  
right. The coxswain sits in front facing the rowers.

The Stage Manager digs into his pocket and pulls out a small, threaded plug. He holds it so all can see.

STAGE MANAGER (cont.)

Under the cox’s seat, this small, but critical plug  
gets screwed into a threaded hole in the shell’s  
fiberglass. When the boat takes on water, or  
capsizes, it is towed to the dock, the plug is  
removed and the water drains out. It is the  
responsibility of the cox to make sure the  
plug is in and tightened before the boat is  
launched. The cox also steers the shell by pulling lines  
attached to the rudder. A left pull, the craft moves to port; a  
right pull, starboard.

(Beat.)

I think you’ll agree she’s a real beauty, except for  
the large fiberglass repairs on the bottom—one fore and  
one aft—both caused by an angry Allison Stevens swinging  
an axe and sinking her promising rowing career. After six



STAGE MANAGER (cont.)

months in rehab, she went back to her private school and community service brought her here: the place where girls of all sizes and shapes get a second chance.

Carol enters her office and sits at her desk where she looks over a resume. There is a knock on her door. The Stage Manager opens the door and lets a hesitant Allison—now barely managing her crutches—inside the office.

STAGE MANAGER (cont.)

Allison Stevens. The last applicant for the physical fitness position.

The Stage Manager exits.

ALLISON

Ms Evans?

CAROL

That's right.

They shake hands.

CAROL (cont)

I didn't know about the crutches when I agreed to the interview.

ALLISON

I didn't mention them.

CAROL

You do know that the position, part-time, of course, entails working with youngsters who, in most cases, haven't given a high priority to physical conditioning. That combined with a lack of understanding of proper nutrition...

ALLISON

I understand.

CAROL

I'm glad you do because I'm rather at a loss. How is it you believe, given your current physical state, that you should be taken seriously for this position?

ALLISON  
May I sit?

CAROL  
Of course.

Allison sits. She puts her crutches on the floor.

ALLISON  
I know this must appear that I am wasting  
your time, but if you would hear me out.  
(Beat.)  
Please.

CAROL  
All right.

ALLISON  
As my resume indicates, I was first stroke on  
my school's women's four. I started freshman  
year, continued as a sophomore, and had my  
accident a few months ago at the beginning of  
my junior year.

CAROL  
What happened?

ALLISON  
We never lost a race and were favored to  
win the \_\_\_\_\_(town's name) Regatta last fall.

CAROL  
Your accident. What happened?

ALLISON  
I made a mistake. I know your Center is known  
throughout the city for reaching out to young women  
who have a tendency to do that, to make mistakes.

CAROL  
Young women without means, Allison. Young women  
who have no place else to go. This is the last chance for  
many of them.

ALLISON

I'm glad you reminded me of the 'without means'. If I get the job, I will perform as a volunteer. I cannot accept any salary. That's a condition of my community service. Five-hundred hours. Most of the kids have to do fifty, but the extra four-fifty is part of my punishment. That and paying for a new Vepsoli for the school.

CAROL

What's a Vespoli?

ALLISON

The shell I destroyed. My parents say my greatest strength is my greatest weakness: the need for perfection. And when I don't get it from those around me, I don't handle it very well. *I was* the best. That was the problem. There aren't many scholarships given out for crew but coaches from all over were coming to that regatta to see me. I wanted to reward them with the perfect race.

CAROL

And, did you?

ALLISON

Far from it. I had an implosion. The night before the regatta. I'd asked my coxswain to meet me at the boathouse to go over a few issues about the course. You can gain or lose valuable seconds if you swing wide in a turn. Do you know much about crew?

CAROL

I'm sure you can fill in the blanks.

ALLISON

In a crewed four, the rowers sit one behind the other with the cox who is responsible for navigating the course and setting a winning pace, in front of them. When I got to the boathouse, the rest of the crew was there as well as our cox. I don't remember now what exactly was said, except that I was the brunt of their jokes, the target of their ridicule. When they saw me, all the laughter stopped but everyone knew I'd overheard. An awkward silence engulfed us. I felt sorry for all of us. For me because I thought I was someone

ALLISON (cont.)

the others looked up to, not someone who was hated; for them because a horrible truth had been revealed in a spiteful snicker directed my way.

I deflected attempts to console me. I wasn't about to let anyone know how much I wanted to melt in a puddle, to vanish so the incredible pain swelling inside would go away. But I said nothing. I simply stood there until they all left. When I was certain I was alone, I removed the axe used at the club to cut dock lines in case of emergency and chopped through the bottom of our Vespoli.

I must have howled with each blow as if I were chopping away at my own limbs because someone was running toward me shouting for me to stop. I ran for the door, tripped over something along the way and fell on the axe. Had I been alone, doctors said I would have bled to death. Instead, I severed the tendons and cut through the muscle just above my knee. The boat I took the axe to is in the backyard of my parent's house all patched up, just like me.

CAROL

How long will you be on crutches?

ALLISON

A few months, then I graduate to a cane.  
After that, who knows?

CAROL

And your racing career?

ALLISON

The doctors say it's over, but I don't want to believe that. Not yet. I'm only seventeen. Nothing should be over when you're seventeen.

CAROL

I wish all the girls here had your attitude.

ALLISON

I can bring more than attitude, Ms Evans. I know the ins and outs of proper training. You have to in order to be a competitive rower. I also know the basics of proper nutrition.

CAROL

But can you teach either?

ALLISON

I know I can do the job, Ms Evans. If you give me the chance to prove it, I'll start right now.

CAROL

Our girls have gone home for the day. I suggest you do the same. I'll call you.

ALLISON

Which means I'm out of luck, doesn't it?

CAROL

Which means I have to think about it.

Tisha enters and walks around the shell, taking it all in, nearly in shock.

TISHA

Oh, my God! It's huge!

Carol joins her as Allison exits.

CAROL

Nearly thirty feet.

TISHA

What did I tell you when you hired that girl?

CAROL

That I shouldn't.

TISHA

Tell the rest of the story.

CAROL

You didn't think Ali could relate to our girls. You didn't think our girls would pay any attention to a preppy. You were right at the beginning, but they

CAROL (cont.)  
seem to have worked out the rough edges. All  
but Maria.

TISHA  
They haven't seen this boat yet.  
(Beat.)  
I know you had your own doubts about hiring  
Ali. Why did you do it?

CAROL  
Because of something she said.

TISHA  
Which was?

CAROL  
Nothing should be over when you're seventeen.  
That's what the Center is all about, possibilities  
for a brighter future.

The Girls and Maria scamper into the room and surround the shell.

MARIA  
What the hell?

CAROL  
No swearing inside the school.

MARIA  
What is it?

CAROL  
It's a boat.

MARIA  
Where's the rest of it?

CAROL  
Very funny.

MARIA  
No, I'm serious. Where's the rest of it?  
I mean, it's like ten inches wide.

Student 1 sits on one of the seats.

STUDENT 1  
How do I look?

MARIA  
Out of place.

STUDENT 1  
No, really.

Student 3 sits in another rowing station.

STUDENT 3  
Kinda tippy. I mean, what happens if  
I fall in.

MARIA  
Not if, when. And when you do remember: you two  
voted to do this. Right, girls?

THE GIRLS (Ad lib.)  
Right. Yes. You got it, etc.

Student 2 sits in the third rowing station.

STUDENT 2  
I've seen these boats down on the River/Lake.

CAROL  
And what did you think?

STUDENT 2  
Sorta stupid, I guess. You row going backwards.  
You're bound to crash into something.

CAROL  
That's what this seat is for. Maria, have a  
seat here where the cox sits.

The Girls burst into laughter.

TISHA  
No dirty talk, now. This is still a classroom.  
It's coxswain. Cox for short. The person here  
steers the boat. Maria?

MARIA  
No way.

Allison enters with her cane. She is delighted at the sight.

ALLISON  
Beautiful, isn't she?

MARIA  
She who?

ALLISON  
The shell. You refer to a boat as a she. We certainly have a lot of work to do before we climb aboard and put this baby in the water.

Maria jumps in the cox's seat and turns an imaginary steering wheel, cranking it hard left and right while making the sounds of screeching car tires.

MARIA  
I guess this puts me in the driver's seat, huh?

ALLISON  
For the time being.

MARIA  
What's that mean?

ALLISON  
It means we have to select our crew. May I?

CAROL  
By all means.

ALLISON  
We need four on oars. So that everybody gets a fair chance, let's line up.

The Girls form a line. Maria reluctantly joins.

ALLISON (cont)  
First a little information about what you can expect. On my school team, coach had us in the boathouse by five in the morning on summer days and on the water by five-thirty.



MARIA

Where's our boathouse?

ALLISON

We don't have one so we're going to make do without. In the late spring and early fall, we arrive at the boathouse a little later depending on when the sun came up. I think we ought to compromise and shoot for being here at the Center at six.

MARIA

I think we ought to shoot the alarm clock if it goes off that early.

STUDENT 1

Six in the afternoon?

ALLISON

In the morning.

Four of The Girls take one step back out of the line.

ALLISON (cont.)

A requirement is that you know how to swim.

Three more of The Girls take one step back.

ALLISON (cont.)

Let's not all fight for a seat, now. Come on. We're all in this together.

MARIA

How long does a usual practice take?

ALLISON

Two hours minimum, but I'd plan on an extra half an hour at the beginning.

MARIA

And then all day here at the Center?

CAROL

I know it's a sacrifice, but...

MARIA

What it is is a crazy idea. I tried to tell everybody,  
but nobody listened.

Maria steps off the line along with two other girls, leaving Student 1, Student 2 and Student 3 as the crew.

CAROL

Come on now, we need one more.  
(Beat.)  
Anyone?

When no one steps forward, Allison joins the line.

CAROL (cont.)

You can't do that.

ALLISON

Why not?

CAROL

Your doctors said your rowing days were over.

ALLISON

Maybe I can prove them wrong.

Allison puts one hand on the back of a chair for balance and slowly, painfully tries lowering herself into a squat. Halfway down she falters and falls over at Maria's feet. Allison looks up, then reaches for Maria's hand.

STUDENT 3

Maria? Ali's right, we're all in this together.

After a pause, Maria reaches down and helps Allison up.

ALLISON

Thank you. That didn't work out so well.  
I'll have to get better, that's all.

MARIA

Why don't you just buy somebody to row the boat?  
You know, whip out your checkbook and write a  
big number with lots of zeros.

Allison looks stung. She turns to Tisha.

ALLISON

I see you've picked up a convert gliding along on all my family's money.

TISHA

I never said a word. Believe me, Ali, I never...

CAROL

I will say it. The bickering here is going to stop. Tisha to Allison, Allison to Tisha, Maria to everybody. The picking at one another, the sniping. All of it is over as of right now. At this moment, what brought all of us to this Center does not matter. What matters now is that we work together to save this place. If we don't, Drummond will lock the door and throw away the keys. You all seem to be forgetting that.

(Beat.)

So, what's it going to be?

(Beat.)

I want an answer. If I don't get it, I'll lock the door and toss the keys away myself just to be rid of you.

STUDENT 3

We follow your lead most of the time, Maria, but this time we're not because you're wrong.

STUDENT 1

We want someone to lead, but now you're an anchor dragging down the ship.

Maria knows she's on thin ice and looks for support from The Girls.

MARIA

What do you say?

THE GIRLS (Ad lib.)

I don't know. Maybe you should go along. You can't always get your way, etc.

MARIA

Okay, that's it then.

Maria walks toward the exit.

CAROL

Where are you going?

MARIA

Does it matter?

CAROL

It does if you're walking out on your responsibilities.

MARIA

You should tell that to Jermaine—if you can find him.

Carol walks to Maria and puts one arm around Maria's shoulders.

CAROL

Look, Maria, growing up is never easy. People let you down when you need them the most. You know how that feels and if you walk out that door, everyone in this room will feel exactly the same way: You let us all down when you had the chance to pick us all up.

(Beat.)

What's it going to be?

Maria agonizes in the tortured silence. She doesn't know what to do. Carol puts her other arm around Maria in a heartfelt hug. Tisha embraces Allison. The Girls gather around Maria.

STUDENT 2

Don't do it, Maria. Stay. Help us.

Maria shrugs off the growing emotions building inside.

MARIA

This is a crazy, stupid thing, you all know that? Crazy. I tried to get you to see that, but you went against me. So, okay. I'll back off. I don't like it just like I don't like the idea of climbing inside some skinny damn boat and rowing someplace backwards. But maybe that makes sense. I mean, I had Rosie at sixteen the same year I quit school. All backwards. All the girls in here been going backwards until we came to the Center.

Maria offers her hand to Allison. A shake turns into a quick hug.

MARIA (cont)

Tisha said you were hot stuff rowing this boat.

ALLISON

I did pretty well.

MARIA

No, no, better than that. Who beat you?

ALLISON

No one.

MARIA

That's the way it is with me on the street. No one beats me 'cause no one messes. You understand what I'm saying? That's why these girls look up to me. They know I'm there, I got their backs so nobody messes with them either. That makes us sort of a team to begin with. A team on dry land. I'm not sure how any of this might work if we try this on water.

ALLISON

Does that mean you're with us?

MARIA

It means this is another goofy idea about as goofy as closing the Center.

ALLISON

It wouldn't be fair if that happened.

MARIA

Of course it ain't fair, but you get used to that at this end of the world. You learn early the playing field's never even. Somebody's always got the upper hand—except here at the Center.

(Beat.)

Do you think you can make this happen? Can you get us on the water without drowning like rats?

ALLISON

I can.

MARIA

Get us to the finish line where Drummond and everyone else can see that good things happen here?

ALLISON  
Yes.

MARIA  
Then let's get to work.

ALLISON  
Let's do. It won't be easy or fast,  
but we've already got a good start with  
the exercises you've been doing. Remember:  
the core muscle groups are the thighs, stomach,  
back and shoulders. We use them all.

Allison sits in the boat. She holds her cane upside down so that the handle is at the bottom. Bending her good leg, she demonstrates a stroke using her cane as an oar.

ALLISON (cont)  
You want to lean forward by bending your  
knees. When the blade of the oar catches water,  
you drive backward using your legs, stomach  
muscles, back and shoulders. Release the blade  
at the end of the stroke and repeat.

STUDENT 1  
That doesn't look hard.

Student 1 takes the makeshift oar from Allison and sits in the boat as Allison gets up.

ALLISON  
Let's all give it a try.

Student 2 and 3 and Maria get in the boat.

STUDENT 2  
I need an oar.

MARIA  
I need a cigarette.

ALLISON  
I'll pretend I didn't hear that. No smoking  
or drinking until we reach the finish line. Let's  
see a stroke. Ready? Begin.

The crew give it a try and are out of sync with one another. They try again. They look around at each other, they let out an embarrassed laugh. They stop.

STUDENT 1

Maybe this is harder than I think.

Carol and Tisha back out of the way.

CAROL

I want to thank you all.

The Girls and Allison are too focused to respond.

ALLISON

All right, all right, let's try this again.  
Stay together this time. You are a team,  
pull as one.

The crew tries again, no better this time either. Allison takes her cane.

ALLISON (cont)

Not to worry, not to worry. It takes some  
getting used to like anything else. Let's work  
on something you've done before. Ready? A  
jog through the park. Only at the end, a few  
sprints for stamina. Let's go. Everybody.

All The Girls, including the four crew, jog off. Allison limps slowly off behind them. Carol and Tisha exit to Carol's office.

TISHA

What is that old expression? 'It's a long row  
to hoe.' This is going to be a long row to row.

(Beat.)

When's the regatta?

CAROL

In eight weeks.

TISHA

Miracles happen.

CAROL

Maybe we just witnessed one.

TISHA

You mean Maria?

CAROL

Yes. Do you think the girls can pull this off?

TISHA

Let's just say I'd prefer some back up,  
a plan B.

CAROL

Drummond was clear, there is no plan  
B. We do this or we close.

TISHA

We could come up with another fresh idea.

CAROL

Such as?

TISHA

I don't know. It just seems that we've got a lot  
riding on four city girls who haven't got a very  
good track record for doing the right thing.

CAROL

They came to the Center, that's a good thing.

TISHA

True.

CAROL

For the most part, they're sticking with it.

TISHA

Agreed.

CAROL

And there's Allison cracking the whip. I have  
no doubt now that they've started this, that  
they'll finish because they see how important  
the Center is to their lives.

TISHA

True, but you saw Allison trying to get in the boat.  
Maybe she's the weak link in this. Folks can



ALLISON (cont.)

overcome a lot, but not everything. Did you ever think what it might do to her if she can't do it, if she fails and those four girls row off without her?

CAROL

It would be devastating.

TISHA

Maybe that's our Plan B.

CAROL

What is?

TISHA

A back up for Allison. Somebody needs to be ready in case she can't go.

CAROL

You can't ask one of the other girls to be the cox. That would show we don't have any faith in Ali.

TISHA

Then we do it in secret. Someone who won't utter one word, yet someone who's ready to step in if need be.

(Beat.)

You.

CAROL

Me? Don't be ridiculous.

TISHA

I'm not. I'm making sure the Center stays open. That's what this is all about, isn't it? We're not going to pretend that we can come in first in any regatta. This isn't about winning, this is about saving face for David Drummond who shot his mouth off about his fresh ideas so now we need to make him look good. If he looks good, the Center stays open. If he looks bad, he'll take it out on us and shut us down.

(Beat.)

The way I see it, you've got to be ready to jump in that boat in case Allison's leg won't let her.

CAROL  
You're putting me in a terrible position, you know?

TISHA  
I know. The question is, are you going to do it?

CAROL  
(Beat.)  
Yes. But I don't like sneaking around Allison's back. It's dishonest.

TISHA  
Sometimes a little dishonesty is necessary.

Tisha exits Carol's office. The Girls come staggering in their room followed by the crew, gasping from their run.

STUDENT 1  
I'm dead.

STUDENT 2  
I need air.

MARIA  
If I ever hear the word 'sprint' again, I'll rip out someone's tongue.

STUDENT 3  
It's going to make us stronger.

MARIA  
Yeah, right.

STUDENT 1  
You can't be stronger when you're dead.  
When you're dead, you're dead.

STUDENT 2  
And I thought having my baby was hard.

Allison comes hobbling in on her cane.

ALLISON  
That was good. That was really, really good.  
A great way to end the first session. But it's

ALLISON (cont.)

only the beginning. Don't forget that. Tomorrow we'll do it again, add a little something and then by the end of next week, we'll launch the shell.

MARIA

You going to be ready?

ALLISON

I'll be ready. Don't worry about me, just go home, get some rest, eat well, and we'll see you tomorrow.

All The Girls exit, leaving Allison alone. She sits in a chair, back straight, a look of serious concentration on her face. Slowly, she begins to exercise, lifting her uninjured leg directly in front of her. She repeats this move several times with ease.

Curious at the silence, Carol pops her head in Allison's room. Carol sees the exercise, slips back into her office, sits in a chair and begins to mimic Ali's actions. After a bit, Ali shifts to her bad leg. It is painful and slow, but she manages one leg lift, then another. It takes all her energy, but she pushes on until she can do no more.

In Carol's office, she's doing surprisingly well, but tires quickly. She stops, enters Ali's room and sees Allison rubbing her bad leg.

CAROL

How's it going?

ALLISON

It's going.

CAROL

You going to be okay?

ALLISON

I'm going to be fine.

(Beat.)

Did I ever tell you that my mother rowed a single in the Olympics?

CAROL

Drummod did but you never mentioned it. That's quite an accomplishment.

ALLISON

Yeah. She lost by a few seconds. All those

ALLISON (cont.)

hours on the water, all those workouts to get in the best shape of her life, all those grueling strokes on the day of the race and she came up three seconds short.

(Beat.)

I told her that when I went to college I was going to train in a single so that when I got my shot at the Olympics, I would bring home the gold for her.

CAROL

That's an admirable goal, Allison. Your family must have been very proud at the thought.

ALLISON

And very disappointed when I had my meltdown. I replay that night over and over and over again, and I still don't know why I did it. In one mad rage, I threw my life away.

CAROL

That's a little harsh.

ALLISON

But true.

CAROL

Everyone makes mistakes, Allison. That's part of growing up. How we handle those mistakes is what matters.

ALLISON

I've heard you say that to the girls.

CAROL

Because it's true. None of them would be here if everything in their lives were perfect. What they all have in common is the recognition that they need to change if they want their lives to get better. It's like you working to get back in that boat. That's something you really need to do, isn't it?

ALLISON

Yeah. I thought the desire would go away, but it never has. Everyday I think about throwing away this cane, running into the boathouse where I had

ALLISON (cont.)

my accident, and shouting that I'm back! That anyone would care is another matter.

CAROL

Why wouldn't they?

ALLISON

You know how it is. You let people down, they don't want to have anything to do with you. I let my team down, my coaches, my parents. That seems to be what everyone remembers, not any of the good things.

CAROL

Is that what this new opportunity is for you? A chance to show everyone that you can be trusted again, that you belong?

Allison shrugs.

ALLISON

I don't know. What I know is that I'd better keep working if that's going to happen.

Allison begins her leg exercises, starting this time the slow and painful extension of her injured leg.

CAROL

I'll see you in the morning, Allison.

Carol goes back into her office where she, too, begins more leg extensions.

Lights Down on Act II, Scene I.

Act II, Scene II

**The Setting:** The same.

**The Time:** Three weeks later.

**At Rise:** The chairs are along one wall opposite Carol's office. The Stage Manager enters.

STAGE MANAGER

It's been a rocky road these past few weeks. The girls are tired and sore, Allison is tired and sore, Carol Evans is tired and sore—but progress has been made. The girls launched the shell, got in, got off the dock and back without anyone falling in. Allison even managed to slide into the cox's seat, although it took her twice the amount of time and a lot of help to get back out. Still, progress. If the race were held today, they could get to the finish line but likely in last place.

Would that satisfy David Drummond? Probably not, but there are still a few weeks to go before the actual regatta begins. Today, we are all gathered in abundant sunshine along the shores of the beautiful River/Lake so the girls can see—as spectators—what a race like this is all about.

As you can see over there near the boathouse, singles, doubles, fours and eights are being launched. Crews step into their seats, adjust their feet into the stretchers, set their oars in the riggers and push off the dock to row easily down to the staging area where they maneuver among the other thirty or so boats already in the water and try not to run into one another, snap an oar, or cause general chaos.

The good part of this day is the weather: bright early morning sun, light air, and only a gentle ripple on the water. A perfect day for the race between three private high schools: Lambert Hills Academy, Ashton-Heath Prep, and, Allison's school, Norton Stevens.

To my left, Lambert Hills and Ashton-Heath have social tents set up for alumni to stop by and catch up with school news. To my right, Norton Stevens

STAGE MANAGER (cont.)

has two tents for the same purpose. Dozens of people mill about, cotton sweaters draped over their shoulders in school colors of maroon, dark green, and admiral blue. Loafers, khakis, Nantucket Lightship handbags mix with the younger set sporting their flip-flops, extra large dark sunglasses, and pale yellow linen shorts.

The crew--Student 1, Student 2, Student 3 and Maria in their usual attire of jeans and sweats--enter led by Allison whose limp has much improved, still she uses her cane, but not nearly as much. The State Manager exits.

ALLISON

We want to take this all in so you'll know what to expect on race day.

MARIA

How come everybody around here is wearing those nasty army pants? My mother the other night was watching an old war movie of some guy, some general in the army smoking his pipe and struttin' around in those baggy, cream-colored pants. Everybody here's got 'em on.

ALLISON

Khakis.

MARIA

Whatever.

STUDENT 1

Wouldn't be caught dead in 'em.

STUDENT 2

Got to have some color.

STUDENT 3

Lime green or somethin'.

ALLISON

Khakis go with everything.

MARIA

So do jeans.

ALLISON

We want to watch the races, not the fashion. See there? The singles are about to take off. All boats are on a staggered start. One boat takes off, then a few seconds later, the second and so on until everyone is on the course racing against the clock.

A starting gun fires. The crew ducks and scampers around.

MARIA

What the hell?

STUDENT 2

Let's get out of here.

Student 1, Student 2 and Student 3 move off leaving Allison and Maria alone.

ALLISON

Sorry, I should have mentioned the starting pistol.

MARIA

This is like crazy. Firing off guns, old army pants, and a bunch of rich kids rowing those damn skinny boats. This is how you live?

ALLISON

Lived. Past tense, but yes. This was how I lived. I still go to school at Norton, but the rest of it is over.

MARIA

But you miss it.

ALLISON

Some.

MARIA

Not some. I can tell. You miss it. You'd like nothing more than to be out there rowing with your pals than standing here with us.

ALLISON

I wouldn't say that.



MARIA

I would. You'd have to be sort of crazy not to. I mean, whose life would you want to live? Theirs or ours? If you had a good leg, there'd be no question. If you had a good leg, you'd have kept walking right past the Center and never would have stepped inside.

ALLISON

Probably.

MARIA

No probably about it.

Maria waves energetically at people in the distance.

MARIA (cont)

Look, some of your friends are waving back. They see you. Hey! Over here. Look who we got over here!

Allison pulls Maria's waving arm down.

ALLISON

I'm not exactly winning the popularity contest at Norton.

MARIA

Because you smashed up your boat?

ALLISON

That's part of it.

MARIA

That must've been something, you swinging that axe. Wish I'd've seen it. Felt pretty good, didn't it?

ALLISON

At the time.

MARIA

Ya, well, you weren't supposed to hack your fool leg off. But that happens, you know? You're out having a night with your boyfriend and the next thing you know you got a baby. It's called paying the price and everything's got a price tag.

ALLISON

Is that what happened to you and Jermaine?

MARIA

Sort of. We talked for a while, you know? I mean like weeks before we did it. He said he was in for the long haul and I believed him. That's why it hurt so bad when he left. But, I'm over it. He's gone and I've turned a new page. I'm into rowing now, rowing and raising my daughter.

(Beat.)

You said your friends up at that fancy school turned on you for smashing up that boat. What's the other part of you not winning any popularity contest?

ALLISON

I refused to apologize.

MARIA

For what?

ALLISON

I was part of a team, Maria. When I destroyed the shell, I cost my team—not just me—a chance to win.

MARIA

So?

ALLISON

I was selfish.

MARIA

What you were was mad. Something got you that way. What?

ALLISON

My teammates.

MARIA

Say what? Your teammates got you mad, you chopped up their boat, and now they won't speak to you because you're the one who's supposed to apologize when they started the whole damn mess? What do they teach you at that school you pay so much to go to?

ALLISON

It does sound a little foolish, doesn't it?

MARIA

Foolish? You and your friends wouldn't last five minutes on the street if you can't think things out better than that.

ALLISON

What do you suggest?

MARIA

What I do when folks try to mess with my head.  
I kick their ass.

ALLISON

I don't think I'm going there.

MARIA

Sure you are. I mean, you're halfway there already.

ALLISON

How do you see that?

MARIA

We're taking in this race, aren't we? We're scoping it all out because we're going to row in one soon for the benefit of the Center and one David Drummond. But, if along the way, we'd happen to smoke the team from Norton, that'd be icing on the cake. That's in your mind even if you don't know it's in your mind. You want to kick their ass.

ALLISON

Norton Stevens is the best team around.  
They're not going to let some...

MARIA

...boat full of city kids?

ALLISON

...some inexperienced team beat them to the finish line.

MARIA

Might do them good if we did. I can see it now...

Maria's motions resemble her steering a car.

MARIA (cont)

...out of nowhere comes this phantom boat  
driven by Allison Stevens chugging to the lead.  
She... Wait a second.

(Beat.)

Allison Stevens? Norton Stevens? You got a  
connection there?

ALLISON

My great-great-great grandfather founded the school.

MARIA

Founded the school? And you take an axe and go  
chopping up one of his boats? I'd say you've already  
done some ass kicking. Welcome to the club.

Maria and Allison high five.

ALLISON

It's a pleasure.

A troubled Carol enters. Students 1, 2 and 3 gather around Maria and Allison.

CAROL

I figured I'd still find you all here.

ALLISON

How'd the meeting with Drummond's finance  
committee go?

CAROL

As expected. The vote went against us.

STUDENT 1

They shut off the money?

CAROL

They shut off the money in the traditional sense. It's  
up to you girls now to put in a good showing at the  
regatta. How does all of this look to you?

STUDENT 2

Not enough color, you know, not enough splash.

STUDENT 1

Too much khaki.

STUDENT 3

Boring. Even the rowers are decked out in plastic wrap.

ALLISON

Spandex.

STUDENT 3

Whatever. It's just as boring as khaki.

CAROL

I was asking about the race. How does that look to you?

MARIA

We're going to smoke Norton Stevens.

CAROL

Interesting that name should come up. You girls had already left for here when I got a call from one of the coaches at Norton.

(Beat.)

Perhaps it would be best if you and I talked about this privately, Allison.

ALLISON

What did he say?

CAROL

I think you know.

Allison and Carol start to leave.

MARIA

Hold on a second. I'm getting a bad smell here. What did this coach say?

STUDENT 1

Yeah, what?

CAROL

He wanted to remind me that Allison's service commitment to the Center will end in two weeks. At that time, if she

CAROL (cont.)

gets medical clearance she will be welcomed back to the team in time to race with Norton in the regatta.

MARIA

Whoa.

STUDENT 2

It doesn't mean Allison's leaving us.

MARIA

Don't count on it.

STUDENT 3

Allison?

ALLISON

One of the coaches saw us practice, that's all. He saw that I was back in a boat with you guys. He called my house a few days later to talk.

MARIA

I knew you missed those kids over there. I could see it written all over your face.

ALLISON

I was offered a fresh start at Norton. A new boat, a new crew. New people I could work with, just like here.

MARIA

Oh, yeah, right. Just like here. Boathouse and everything.  
(Beat.)  
When are you leaving?

ALLISON

I didn't say I was leaving. I'm explaining what happened. I didn't make the call. I only picked up the phone.

MARIA

And didn't say no or get lost or that you already had a crew. You didn't say nothin' about us, did you? We were all of a sudden expendable, us and everybody at the Center. That's exactly what David Drummond thinks, and Jermaine and everybody else who wants to sweep us under the rug when it suits them. Close your eyes, turn your back, and walk away. That's what you're

MARIA (cont.)  
going to do, isn't it?

Allison has no answer as the reality that she's leaving sinks in.

MARIA (cont.)  
You make me sick, you know? I was  
beginning to buy in to all you were selling  
and now I can't stand to be around you.

Student 1, Student 2, and Student 3 join Maria. Their searing glares cut into Allison as they all tear off.

An awkward silence follows.

ALLISON  
I was hoping today when I brought the girls here  
to watch the races that I'd look out at all the  
boats and know instantly that I should turn my  
back on Norton. That didn't happen.  
(Beat.)  
Look Ms Evans, I don't want to hurt anybody. What do you  
want me to do?

CAROL  
What do you want to do?

ALLISON  
Die.

CAROL  
And second?

ALLISON  
I don't know.

CAROL  
Maybe you should get your things from the Center  
and move along.

ALLISON  
But my service hours aren't complete.

CAROL  
They're done, Allison. You're done. The girls won't have  
anything to do with you now and I can't blame them.

ALLISON

But the Center...

CAROL

Good bye, Allison.

Allison walks away as Drummond enters. He waves at her in passing but Allison ignores him.

DRUMMOND

I see our coach is here. Crying was she?

CAROL

We're all crying today, Mr. Drummond.

DRUMMOND

Maybe something in her eyes. Down studying the course, was she? That's what I'm doing. Looking for the best vantage point to view the race with a few invited guests who see the value of thinking outside the box, of putting new ideas into action. We're all excited for you Ms Evans. You, your coach, your team. We've all got a lot riding on this little experiment, don't we?

CAROL

Experiments can fail, Mr. Drummond. You should keep that in mind.

DRUMMOND

Are you saying things aren't going well?

CAROL

I'm saying dealing with people includes uncertainty.

DRUMMOND

Always good to keep in mind, but I've seen your team out practicing. They're making progress, Ms Evans, they're not the fastest, but then the regatta isn't for another few weeks.

(Beat.)

One thing I might suggest, if I might. All the teams wear uniforms identifying their school or club. Have you thought what you might do about that yet?



CAROL

We haven't gotten that far, I'm afraid.

DRUMMOND

Excellent, because I have an idea, one that I would pay for myself, you understand. We both know the dismal financial straights your Center is in and we don't want to add to your burden. I was thinking of a racing jersey with "Beat the Drum for Fresh Ideas" printed on it or "Fresh Ideas Beat the Drum" or "Drum..."

CAROL

I get it.

DRUMMOND

They all need a little tweaking, I admit, but something, I'm sure can be worked out.

CAROL

I'm sure.

DRUMMOND

And I'm paying. It's my contribution to the cause.  
(Beat.)

Well, I'll be on my way. Call my office and let me know which slogan you'd like. I'll even make some extras for you and your staff.

CAROL

They'll all be thrilled.

Drummond exits. Carol cups her face in her hands.

CAROL (cont.)

Arhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!

The Stage Manager enters.

STAGE MANAGER

The primal scream of the female under attack. In the wild, she fights back and, if you are Carol Evans, you do the same in the classroom of the Center you founded even though you share it with a twenty-nine and one half foot Vespoli DS Four—a craft you wish

STAGE MANAGER (cont.)  
you'd never laid eyes on.

Tisha enters as the Stage Manager exits. Carol lies on her back doing sit-ups as Tisha holds down her feet.

CAROL  
Is that one hundred?

TISHA  
Eighteen.

CAROL  
Feels like one hundred. Or maybe it's me who feels one hundred. The walls are collapsing around us and here I am flat on my back.  
(Beat.)  
I confess, Tisha, I was a little lax getting into shape once I saw Allison doing so well.

Carol gets to her feet.

TISHA  
I thought we weren't mentioning that name.

CAROL  
Slip of the tongue. The other item I didn't mention to you is that the other reason I cut back on my exercises is that I thought I might have hurt something.

TISHA  
Hurt something where?

CAROL  
I don't know, back, hip. It wasn't a sharp pain, it was one of those in a general area. All I know is it hurt, so I backed off. Way off. What's next?

TISHA  
Squats. Did you see a doctor?

CAROL  
No. Let's skip the squats.

TISHA  
That's what you said yesterday.

CAROL

Maybe if they had another name. ‘Squats.’ Who wants to do squats?

TISHA

How about a few leg lifts to keep you limber?

CAROL

How about something easy for a change?

TISHA

‘The girls should see no sign of weakness.’ I believe I’m quoting you directly.

CAROL

And I believe that. It’s just that at the moment I am weak and angry and ready for this to be over.

TISHA

Just think how bad you would feel if we hadn’t had Plan B in place.

CAROL

I couldn’t feel worse, Tisha, if the truth be known. The only thing that keeps me going is how the girls have pulled together. Who would have thought it? Allison moves over to the enemy and the girls gain strength from that. That put a fire under them.

TISHA

They want to row past Allison so badly they can taste it. Smoke Norton!

CAROL

Yes. I admit to a bit of that motivation as well. I only hope I can do a better job as cox so the girls get their wish. Out practicing alone with all that room on the water to maneuver is one thing. Surrounded by other boat traffic is another. I can see myself steering our floating torpedo right into another crew.

(Beat.)

What time are the girls showing up?

TISHA

Any time. How about a couple of squats when they come in so they can see how tough their leader is?

CAROL

Anything for the cause.

Carol completes one squat and begins a second when the pain begins. She grabs her back in agony. Tisha rushes to her side.

TISHA

Oh, my god!

CAROL

Help me to a chair.

Carol limps to a seat as all The Girls enter. Maria, Student 1, Student 2 and Student 3, bristling with energy, move to the shell, pick up canes that each holds like an oar, sit at their positions and row in perfect synchronization. When they stop, they put down their canes and high five with joy.

MARIA

What do we say?

THE GIRLS (In unison.)

Smoke NORTON!!!!

MARIA

I can't hear you!

THE GIRLS (In unison.)

SMOKE NORTON!!

MARIA

Much better.

Maria, Student 1, Student, 2, and Student 3 gather around Carol.

MARIA (cont.)

We ran six miles. Stopped. Did a dozen sprints before jogging back here.

STUDENT 1

We're ready!

STUDENT 2

Fire the starting gun!

STUDENT 3

(Beat.)

You all right? You look a little greenish.

CAROL

Fine. Couldn't be better.

STUDENT 1

More like pale or something.

TISHA

One too many squats.

MARIA

Good for the core.

CAROL

So I'm told.

STUDENT 2

So, what did you want to see us about?

CAROL

Uniforms.

MARIA

Say what?

TISHA

Team uniforms.

STUDENT 3

Like those plastic wraps the rich kids wear?

CAROL

Not exactly. Tisha?

Tisha opens the door and the Stage Manager enters wearing a t-shirt with "The Drum Beats With Fresh Ideas" printed on it. Maria circles the Stage Manager, gawking. She bursts out laughing followed by hoops and hollers from The Girls.

STUDENT 1

You're kidding, right?

STUDENT 2

Who's going to wear that?

CAROL

We all are.

MARIA

What's with the drum beat?

CAROL

David Drummond. This is his idea and his contribution.

STUDENT 3

No way.

The Stage Manager does a runway walk and exits.

MARIA

I don't think we need to discuss this, do we girls?

All The Girls give a thumbs down.

STUDENT 1

That all right with you, Ms Evans? We don't do the t-shirts.

CAROL

Fine with me.

STUDENT 3

We'll come up with something on our own.

STUDENT 2

Something better.

MARIA

Won't take much.

(Beat.)

You sure you're all right?

CAROL

Raring to go just like you girls.

(Beat.)

Smoke Norton!

THE GIRLS (In unison.)  
SMOKE NORTON!!

All The Girls prance out lead by Maria, Student 1, Student 2 and Student 3.

TISHA

Raring to go, huh? Raring to go to the doctor.

CAROL

And what? End up in the hospital? Not a chance.  
Those girls have worked too hard for this and I'm going  
to be in that boat.

TISHA

If it kills you.

CAROL

Let's find out.

Tisha helps Carol to her feet. They move gingerly to the cox chair. Carol eases onto the seat with Tisha's help.

CAROL (cont.)

Not too bad.

TISHA

Uh-huh. What about when you're in the water and  
all those waves smash into the boat. You'll be screaming  
out in pain with each hit. Then what?

CAROL

I don't know. Help me out of here.

Tisha helps Carol to her feet. Carol holds onto Tisha as Carol limps in great discomfort. Maria enters unseen. She watches in dismay as her team's cox barely puts one foot in front of the next as Tisha and Carol exit. Maria is in shock.

The Stage Manager enters.

STAGE MANAGER

One last image: the boathouse at Norton Stevens.  
Built in 1898 in the classic shingle style and  
resembling the Oxford-on-Thames  
boathouses with massively high ceilings, wooden  
plank floors and sides, and over ten-thousand square  
feet to store shells and chase-boats, and stationary

STAGE MANAGER (cont.)

rowers for crew to workout on when they are not on the water.

Allison enters without her cane and wearing a Norton Spandex top. She holds a jump rope in her hands and begins to jump.

STAGE MANAGER (cont.)

Allison begins her normal routine after everyone else has left. The jump rope is only to warm-up. Afterward, she'll row three miles on a stationary rower, then settle back in a whirlpool to increase the circulation in her bum knee—which is improving with the daily whirlpool and ice baths and massages provided by the trainers.

Maria enters and looks around. Allison stops jumping rope as a chill fills the air. The Stage Manager exits.

MARIA

It's like a mansion in here. Why'd your grandpa build it so big?

ALLISON

Great-great-great, but that's all right. He lived life on a grand scale.

(Beat.)

What are you doing here?

MARIA

Looking for you.

ALLISON

Last time you wanted to knock my block off. I could see it in your eyes.

MARIA

I remember.

ALLISON

I'm stronger now.

MARIA

I didn't come to fight. I came to talk.



ALLISON

Strange. Last time you didn't want to talk or listen. You only wanted to jump to conclusions.

MARIA

I don't want to talk about last time. I want to talk about now, about tomorrow and the regatta.

(Beat.)

You're cox with a new team. I've seen you out practicing. You look real fast.

ALLISON

We're in the elite fours. We won't be racing against you guys. The Norton boat in your class is a group of freshmen. Just beginners, really. With a lot of luck, you might have a chance.

MARIA

We won't be racing against anyone unless you help us.

(Beat.)

Ms Evans tried to take your place and it didn't work out. We have no cox and no chance to save the Center unless we do well in the regatta.

ALLISON

Did Ms Evans send you?

MARIA

I came on my own. I've been doing a lot of thinking. You were right about getting in that boat and learning about discipline, responsibility, pride and confidence. I see more of it in all the girls, including myself.

ALLISON

I'm glad it's worked out for you.

MARIA

That's the point, it hasn't worked out and it won't unless we have a chance to save the Center. That's what this is all about. You know that. It was your proposal that Drummond fell in love with. If we don't get to that starting line, it's all over. We need you in our boat.

ALLISON

You're asking a lot.

MARIA

I know it. You kept one team from winning it all when you chopped up your boat, now I'm asking you to walk away from another Norton team to join ours.

ALLISON

I can't do that.

MARIA

You did it when you walked away from us.

ALLISON

That's not fair.

MARIA

We get a lot of that at this end of the world. We get ignored, shoved to the side, left out of the conversation when the answers require that someone pay attention to us. You know that's true or you never would have submitted your proposal to Drummond. What I don't get is how the discipline, responsibility, pride and confidence you preached to us everyday only relates to me and the girls. Why do none of those stellar qualities apply to you?

ALLISON

Are you through?

MARIA

Not quite. I need an answer. Should we haul our shell to the dock? Or should we take our own axe to it?

ALLISON

I wouldn't recommend that.

MARIA

Is that a yes?

After a beat, Maria and Allison exit. The Stage Manager enters.

STAGE MANAGER

What a wonderful day for a regatta. Seven schools, five clubs, and an open class in the singles, doubles,

STAGE MANAGER (cont.)

fours and eights will soon be plying these tranquil waters. It is estimated that nearly two hundred rowing shells in all their splendid colors will participate in the day's activities while along the shore spectators number over one-thousand, some of whom are finding their places now.

The Girls--minus Maria, Student 1, Student 2 and Student 3--enter wearing brilliantly colored large loop earrings, brightly colored died hair with sparkling make-up and a t-shirt with "Save the Center" printed on it. They burst with energy and calm down only slightly when a gimpy Carol and Tisha join them. They, too, wear the "Save the Center" t-shirts.

Maria, Student 1, Student 2 and Student 3—loop earrings, colorfully died hair and sparkling make-up—enter wearing the "Save the Center" t-shirt and cluster around their shell. They take to their rowing positions with troubled expressions.

At the back of the stage, Allison in her Norton Spandex, runs across the stage as Carol—aided by Tisha—limps to the shell.

STAGE MANAGER (cont.)

We've already seen some shattered records this morning and the dramatic comeback of one of Norton Stevens elite crew: Allison Stevens who made her return as cox after a serious injury. Well done, Allison. Your boat set a new course record.

Allison runs across the stage in the opposite direction as Drummond enters and approaches Carol. He wears "The Drum Beats With Fresh Ideas" t-shirt.

DRUMMOND

Our coach was in a Norton boat? What's the meaning of this? Why isn't she here with our girls? I've got a tent full of dignitaries waiting to see the race.

Allison makes another cross at the back of the stage. Carol tries vainly to get into the cox's seat.

DRUMMOND (cont.)

What are you doing?

Carol points proudly to her t-shirt.

CAROL

Read the message, Mr. Drummond. I'm trying to save my Center.

The Girls cheer Carol's painful attempt. Carol gets halfway into her seat when Allison appears at her side. The cheering stops.

ALLISON

Is this seat taken?

Carol freezes.

CAROL

I thought you were racing with Norton.

ALLISON

I raced with Norton this morning. This afternoon, I'm racing with you if you'll have me.

Tisha tosses Allison a "Save the Center" t-shirt that Allison puts on.

MARIA

What changed your mind?

ALLISON

A conversation. And, an idea. Mr. Drummond?

DRUMMOND

Yes?

ALLISON

It's not likely we can row our shell into first place, but would you accept us beating the Norton Stevens's entry in this race?

DRUMMOND

If you beat Norton, who wouldn't be thrilled?

ALLISON

And the Center keeps its funding?

DRUMMOND

Yes, of course, with my blessing.

Drummond steps away.

CAROL

Are you crazy?

Allison holds a threaded plug in her hand so all can see.

MARIA

What's that?

ALLISON

It's the plug that keeps the water out of the freshman's shell. Without it, they'll take on enough water to slow them to a crawl. We'll pass them in the first turn.

The realization of what this means connects as Maria, Student 1, Student 2 and Student 3 and all The Girls begin their chant.

THE GIRLS (In unison.)

Smoke Norton! Smoke Norton! SMOKE NORTON!!

The Girls, Allison, Carol, Tisha, Drummond and the Stage Manager all form a conga line and dance as they continue their chant.

TISHA

Looks like we're going to race after all.

CAROL

Looks like we're going to stay in business.

Everyone dances off the stage, except the Stage Manager.

STAGE MANAGER

It was a memorable race in many ways. The Girls beat Norton by ten water-logged seconds and Drummond had his picture taken with the crew and dignitaries. Most importantly, his committee approved the Center's funding for another year, which brings me back to why this theatrical production was presented on a shoe-string budget.

This play was based on a real Alternative Center struggling every year to keep its doors open. They are not the only ones experiencing economic difficulty. Right here in our community there is a tremendous need,

STAGE MANAGER (cont.)

that's why our theatre company has decided to present a gift of \_\_\_\_\_ dollars to \_\_\_\_\_ (a local charity), which represents the money we saved on sets, scrims and extravagant costumes. It's not a lot of money, but it's a start, and we never know where we'll finish until we get in the race.

--The End--