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Professor Steiner

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Spot for One

*I week before:*

The race announcer came onto the loudspeaker.

“All boats line up! Suffern, Poughkeepsie, Newburgh!”

This was my last race of the season and 2000 meters was the only thing standing between my boat being undefeated for the season.

The boats all lined up in the water close to one another. I glanced over at the other teams and realized we had some tough competitors. We had to do everything we could to win it for Suffern, my coaches expected nothing less from my boat.

“This is the start of your race.”

I nervously gripped my oar and eagerly waited for the two words which indicated the start of this intense race.

“Ready to row!”

This was it. The race was about to begin and we had to win.

“Ready, Row!” my coxswain Gillian, who is in charge of our boat screamed into her tiny cox box microphone which was wired to the boat.

I looked up to Gillian a lot. Not only was she a role model to me, but she was also one of my best friends. She's taught me everything about the sport of crew for the last four years and I

couldn't imagine getting bossed around by anyone else. She was the perfect coxswain, teammate, but most importantly a great friend I could always go to for help or if I needed advice.

"Power 20" Gillian screamed louder when she realized the other teams boats were quickly approaching ours.

Arlington and Kingston flew through the water faster than us and before I knew they were passing us.

I began to panic. We needed to win. Everyone on the team counts on the Lightweight Four, my boat with my four best friends, to always win.

"Make me proud like always girls" Gillian screamed at us.

And that's when the boat began to fly.

I could feel the force that all my other boatmates were putting into their strokes.

Nobody wanted this more than us, and Gillian's words of encouragement gave us that much more reason to give it everything we had.

Stroke after stroke we began to pass Arlington.

Then Newburgh.

Our lead began to get longer and longer.

"200 meters, left this is your sprint!" Gillian yelled.

We got to 200 meters and began to row at a faster pace with more intensity. I squinted as the sun beamed down on my face, I could finally see the finish line. I could taste the victory it was so close. My breathing became shortened and I gasped for air as I gave the last 200 meters everything I had. We crossed the finish line with our fastest time yet with Arlington and Newburgh nowhere in sight.

We were the lightweight four. The lightweight four was my crew boat which consisted of four seats and a coxswain's seat. Gillian, Rachel, Alyssa, Ryann, were my boatmates. The four rowers need to be under 130 pounds each to be eligible to row light weight, and at times this was difficult. We rowed together for 5 long years. Our coach tried countless options in the lightweight four before finally finding the perfect fit of us five. Practice after practice we continued to impress our coaches with how well we worked together on and off the water. If we weren't at practice we were hanging out or getting a bite to eat. We were confident that we were the best lightweight four boat in our county. We were going to stay undefeated no matter what. Only one race left in the season and we were ready to take home the gold. Together the lightweight four was unstoppable, and together we dominated.

I'll never forget the times we all shared together.

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*The practice after our win:*

I pushed through the water as it forcefully pushed back at me. I looked around at my best friends sitting in the boat all around me, I wouldn't want anybody else by my side. I glided through the current and began to accelerate in speed as the boat began to pick up. The wind blew through my hair and the crystal clear water splashed onto my body with every stroke cooling me down on the hot day. The boat zoomed past the beautiful trees on the side of the body of water. I was in my happy place with my four best friends; I was rowing in the lightweight four.

“What a beautiful day for a row” Gillian said.

Gillian picked up her cox box and we all knew that meant she was ready to start bossing us around. The cox box is a microphone that is wired through the entire boat so that each person in the boat can hear the commands given by the coxswain.

“Hands on!” she said.

We got ready to lift the boat.

“Up and over head, ready up,” she said.

We lifted the boat from our shoulders up and over our heads with our arms extended high. The weight of the boat put my arm muscles to the test. All those lifting exercises we did in the off season were really paying off I thought to myself, as we held the boat above our heads. We began to walk the boat down the long grassy path to the dock.

“Ready to roll, ready roll,” she said.

We gently rolled the boat back down to our waists, put our toes to the edge of the dock, and placed the boat into the crisp water of the reservoir. We got our oars and began our row for the day.

“Ready to row, ready row,” said Gillian.

The blades of our oars entered the water at exactly the same time. The boat glided through the water with perfection. Each blade entered and exited the water in the same motion with perfect timing. The boat glided through the water of the reservoir completely still and it did not tip from side to side. The boat was perfectly balanced. It was ready to pick up the speed and pressure.

“Power 10!” Gillian screamed into her microphone.

“1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,” Gillian said.

When Gillian called a power 10, I always listened. This was when we begin to put more pressure into our strokes while rowing at a faster speed. Gillian would be able to feel if we were truly putting in more effort into our strokes so when she made this command I always gave it everything in my boy to make the boat fly through the water.

Stroke after stroke, the boat began to glide faster and faster through the cold water. The wind blew through my pony tail and sweat dripped down the side of my face. We were undefeated, and we were loving it.

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*The day I got the bad news:*

The next morning after I walked into school with pride after another win with my best friends. I headed to the wall outside my coach's office where the daily crew lineups for races were listed. I never had to check the list since it's been same the last four years, of course my name was going to be listed under the "Lightweight Four" boat with my best friends. I checked the list just to see who would be rowing in the other boats, and that's when my heart dropped.

I couldn't hear and my head started to spin. My vision became blurred. There must be a mistake. My name was not there.

I ran my finger down the list to the lightweight four boat, where my name has been listed since before I could remember. I read the names to myself over and over again in my head.

"Rachel, Ryann, Alyssa, Gillian, *Eva*."

"*Eva*?" I said in confusion. I turned to Rachel who was standing besides me.

"Why isn't my name listed under the Lightweight Four?" I said.

“Why are they changing the lineup after four years of it being me, you, Alyssa, Ryann, and Gillian, are they crazy?” Rachel said.

I stood there and tried to think of what to say, but no words were able to come out of my mouth.

Eva was a grade younger than me but she has been getting recognized by our coaches for learning very quickly. A lower classman was going to replace me in *my* varsity boat?

I continue ran my finger down the list until I finally came across my name. I had been moved to the girls single race.

“The girls single race? Why am I being replaced? Am I not good enough?” I said to Rachel.

“Of course you are Jackie, you’re the best rower in the boat I’m sure there is an explanation for this,” Rachel said.

I have never rowed in a single before and today was the last day of practice before the big race. I frantically looked for my coaches. I found them, with my eyes swollen and red.

“What's wrong? You’re rowing in the single for the race this weekend!” said Coach Jacoby. He sounded excited and even proud.

“I can’t row in a single. I’ve never done it before and the race is tomorrow,” I said.

“We picked you to row in the single because you have the most experience. We know you can do it. If you cross the finish line, we will gain extra points to ensure we win the regatta,” said Coach Trainor. My coaches saw me rowing in the single as a huge honor, but all I saw it as was a huge disappointment. I was devastated. After five years of domination with lightweight four, I wasn’t going to be apart of our last race together, and I had Eva to blame for that.

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*The day before the big race:*

I launched the single boat, also known as a scull and rowed in the single for the first time in my life that day. My coach followed me in his launch boat as I practiced in the single. It was a very new and uncomfortable feeling for me.

How was I going to get the hang of this by 6 a.m.? The boat kept tipping left and right and I couldn't keep the balance still. I rowed up and down the reservoir but I couldn't row in a straight line. The boat kept zigzagging up and down the reservoir. I slammed the oars into the water, I was frustrated and scared. I wanted to be back in the comfort for rowing with my four best friends.

"How am I going to row down the course lane if I can barely steer in a straight line?" I said to my coach.

He could see the frustration in my eyes and he tried to calm me down.

I rowed back to the boat house and docked the boat. I got out and began walking over to my friends.

"I can't do it. I'm not going to do it. There's no way I'm going to row in a single. By myself. All alone," I said.

"It's going to be a close regatta tomorrow and they need you to row in the single to gain extra points that can possibly be the points we win by. All you need to do is cross the finish line and it will gain us extra points," said Gillian.

Gillian knew I respected her opinion and would always listen to what she says since she's my coxswain, and it's my job as a rower to listen to her.

“If you don’t row in the single it could cost us the race,” Rachel nagged.

“After tomorrow's race we will all be back together in the Lightweight Four; just do it for the team,” said Ryann.

“You’re one of the best rowers on the team, you can do it,” said Alyssa.

My coaches believed that I could do it and so did my teammates. What if we lost the regatta over one point? I had to row in the single. I wouldn't be able to live with myself if we lost the regatta because of me. I needed to be a good team player. I needed to prove to myself and to my coaches that I could accomplish this, and take chances for the team.

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*The night before:*

The night after practice my stomach was killing me. My mom made my favorite dinner of spaghetti and meatballs but I couldn't eat. The smell of food made me nauseous.

I tossed and turned in my bed all night long. I was so nervous I could barely sleep.

The bed creaked as I flipped sides and tried to get comfortable.

I looked at the clock, it was already 2:00 a.m., I need to sleep if I was waking up at 4 a.m

I closed my eyes and then opened again, 2:14 a.m.

Then, 2:27 a.m.

Finally 3:31 a.m.

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*Race day:*



After only 30 minutes of solid sleep my alarm went off at 4 a.m.. I woke up to the sound of rain hitting the roof of my house and the sound of trees swaying from the wind. The weather was absolutely horrible.

The entire bus ride to the regatta I felt like I was going to throw up. Everyone was singing, smiling, and ready for a fun regatta, but I was petrified.

I sat in the inside seat on the bus and tried to hide the fact that I was nervous for my race but everyone knew what was going on. I buried my face in my pillow and tried to pretend I was sleeping so that nobody would bother me. That didn't work.

"Don't stress out about your race, Jackie, you're going to do great," said Rachel.

The bus finally pulled into the Newburgh boathouse parking lot. As I stepped off the bus I could hear the sound of the waves from the Hudson River harshly hitting the rocks on the shore. The loudspeaker came on and they announced that races would be delayed due to bad weather. I was terrified. I prayed that they would cancel the regatta. I was already scared enough to race in the single on a nice day but now there was no way I could row in the single in this horrible weather.

Whitecaps rolled through the water as the wind blew harshly. About an hour they came on the loudspeaker and finally announced that the regatta was back on.

"The first race is the women's single race, please get ready to launch your boats," the lady on the loudspeaker said.

I could hear the chatter of the concerned parents on the shoreline.

"I would never let my children row out there in this kind of weather, it's dangerous," said one of the parents.

Perfect. Now I was completely terrified. I wanted to leave. I wanted to hide. I wanted to be *anywhere* else in the world but there. My race was about to begin so I had to stay calm. Coach Jacoby and Coach Trainor launched my boat into the water.

“Good luck!” they both said.

I began to row to the starting line. My heart was beating a million beats per second. I wanted to quit but I told myself I couldn't. There were three other girls single boats in my race and they lined us all up at the starting line. I looked over at my competition. They all looked like strong rowers. I looked back over and began to concentrate and focus on my race. I sat in my boat at the starting line just waiting for the horn to sound signaling the beginning of the race.

“Ready, row!”

I began to row as hard as I could but my hands were so cold and stiff I couldn't feel my grip on the oars. Water splashed up from the waves soaking my hands. My hands kept slipping off the oars.

The current was rushing the opposite direction, making it nearly impossible to gain distance. Stroke after stroke it felt like I was going nowhere, perhaps even backwards. I pushed harder and harder with my oars through the water. I turned to my side and saw one of the other girls rowing in her single. She was beginning to get a lead on me. I needed to pick it up.

Whitecaps continued to crash over the small boat, soaking me completely. It was freezing and I began to shiver and my teeth chattered. The harsh waves changed the direction of my boat over and over again making it nearly impossible to row in a straight line and I was zig zagging down the course.

The current began to push my boat near the jagged rocks on the edge of the shoreline. It was like I was on the S.S. Minnow about to be shipwrecked. *I can't crash this boat, everyone's watching me.* I pushed harder and harder, trying to get my fragile boat away from the rocks.

I wanted to give up but that's when I heard the sound of the cowbells that my teammates were ringing in the distance. It was a tradition, we rang cowbells when we could see our teams boats coming down the race course. These cowbells gave me a reason to keep pushing myself and a reason to row harder.

"Let's go Jackie!" I heard my teammates yelling in the distance. The sound was getting closer and closer and I could hear the echos of my teammates and coaches cheering.

Finally I crossed the finish line and I heard the sound of the horn sound. It was *over*.

I finally looked up and I could see the other girls that were in the race already on the dock getting out of their boats. I realized that I had come in last place in the race.

I rowed over to the dock and got out of my boat. My teammates were all there ready to hug me but I wasn't in the mood.

My race was an embarrassment. I came in last by over a minute.

I ran past everyone with tears rolling down my face. I rushed to the bathroom and locked myself in the stall.

They came on the loudspeaker. "Due to bad water conditions, the remaining races have been cancelled."

My teammates all flooded around me with excitement and encouraging words.

"Wow, you're really brave, I could never have been able to go out there and row in this weather," said Alyssa.

“I came in *last*. That’s nothing to be proud of. I should have done better.”

“I would have never gone out there in these conditions. You should be proud of yourself that you were brave enough to get into that boat,” Gillian said.

My teammates crowded around me chanting my name. They lifted me off the ground and held me in the air screaming JACKIE, JACKIE, JACKIE!

That’s when I realized it's not always about winning all the time, it's about what you learn in the process and who’s by your side to get you through it.

The award ceremony was about to begin and the announcer came on the loudspeaker.

“First place in the girls single race goes to...KINGSTON!”

“Wooooooooo!” Shouted the Kingston rowers.

“Second place in the girls single race goes to...NEWBURGH!”

“Yay!” Screamed the Newburgh rowers.

“And third place in the girls single race goes to...SUFFERN!”

*And that’s when Suffern cheered louder than I’ve ever heard us cheer before.*

I jumped up onto the podium and waved my third place medal in the air with pride.