

# The Flying Machine

By

*Siobhan Gilbert*

**WHY I LIKE IT:** *Drama Editor JOHN SULLIVAN writes...* Full disclosure: my own experience with boating is confined to canoes, what's normally termed a rowboat, and diesel powered shrimpers. I'm calling the sport portrayed in this piece sculling, but that may be off-base so I hereby apologize to the playwright in advance if I've misprised anything about her concept.

*This full-length play features some lively, often wild staccato and (for me / see above) very unusual call and response style dialogue – some of it spoken and some internalized) between an elite athlete in training and her coach. The pain of an over-torqued physique and the mental grind of maintaining peak focus and performance in a numbingly repetitive regimen of grueling workouts are at times so palpable it hurts right through script.*

*This piece hits a number of interesting chords. A buff intensely physical woman with Olympic goals pairs with a slightly geeky science oriented man; a nuanced struggle to achieve some balance between assertion and mutual acceptance ensues. The raw physical experience and the neuroscience of nociceptors illuminate the play's exploration of pain and trauma from somatic and cerebral perspectives echoes the differences in perspectives on a fatal tumor portrayed in Margaret Adelson's Wit. And of course, the ways and means and rationales employed by coaches to boost a prize athlete's performance dangerously past the bounds of any sane limits are crucial to the play's tenor and the arc of the plot. The mental and emotional tentacles that transform an autonomous human, who also happens to be a marvelous athlete, into their own prize athletic creation are also laid bare in this piece.*

*One parting note: I spent a lot of time, while immersed in this piece, visualizing (and again revisualizing) the details of the set. It's deceptively simple but deeply charged and evocative; it carries a huge load of emotional and conceptual significance. Something like the eponymous killing fields in the 80's era film of that name, or (much less apocalyptically) the presence and badge of courage implications of the railroad overpass central to Naomi Wallace's The Trestle at Pope Lick Creek. Spare, stark, indelible, haunting: this playwright's imagination is really on to something! (Spacing is playwright's own.)*

The Flying Machine

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CHARACTER NAME BRIEF DESCRIPTION AGE GENDER

Tessie Lynch Rower 20 F Drew Hollis Grad Student 26 M Coach George Rowing  
Coach 50s M

**Time period:** Present

**Location:** Princeton, NJ

NOTES:

1. Please, please, please consider diverse casting!
2. Do not feel obligated to make the set feel super naturalistic. Just make sure you have the boat.

ACT ONE

SCENE 1:

Lake Carnegie in Princeton, New Jersey.

Very, very early morning. So early the autumn light is grayish pink. Part of the stage is the water of the lake, and the remaining third is the shore. There are a few fallen red and orange leaves on the edge of the stage.

TESSIE LYNCH, 20, wears a black and orange spandex uni-suit. She is tall and muscular. Everything about her physicality reads *strong*.

She sits in a single scull, which is slightly suspended above the floor to look as if it is floating on the water. Both oar handles sit in her lap, the back of the blades parallel to the floor. She looks out.

TESSIE

Fucking Wednesdays.

COACH GEORGE, 50s and lanky, rides a bicycle on the edge of the stage that would be the “shore.” In one hand he holds a bullhorn, which he continually shouts through.

COACH GEORGE

Move your ass, Tessie Lynch!

Tessie fully compresses in the boat so that her butt is close to her ankles.

TESSIE

(Yawns)

Up at the catch. At the start. Balance. Balance.

COACH GEORGE

Go!

She drops her oars in “the water” rhythmically.

2. The Flying Machine

TESSIE

Balance. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten. Even in the water, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten. Hands and arms and eyes and blades together, six, seven, eight, nine, ten.

She takes one stroke. She holds the finish of the stroke. She starts popping her oars in and out of the water at the finish of each stroke. She is completely in control of her own body.

COACH GEORGE

Keep it up now.

TESSIE

(Yawns)

One, two, three, four, Holding in my core, seven, eight, nine, ten. (Yawns) Day in. Day out. Five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten. (Yawns) Why the hell am I so tired? Seven, eight, nine, ten.

COACH GEORGE

Okay. Full strokes now.

Tessie begins to row in full, elegant strokes.

COACH GEORGE

Square those blades for now.

TESSIE

Boo...

COACH GEORGE

Why are you bitching?

TESSIE

Because it's booooooring...

Tessie mouths Coach's next line, rolling her eyes.

COACH GEORGE

Come on. Get a move on. Gold medals don't win themselves.

TESSIE

Ugh. Fine. (To herself) That saying is soooo dumb.

3. The Flying Machine

COACH GEORGE

What was that?

TESSIE

Nothing!

COACH GEORGE

Alright then, hustle. Square blades.

She starts to row keeping her oars perpendicular to the "water."

TESSIE

Square. Square. Square. Square. Square. Square...

COACH GEORGE

Nice. Nice. Hands away. Good.

TESSIE

One stroke at a time. And another. And another. Going on. And on. And on.

COACH GEORGE

Okay. Good. Now, feather your blades.

She starts to have the oars run parallel to the water on the way up to each stroke turning perpendicular as they descend into "the water."

TESSIE

A flick of the wrists. Light. Quick. Light. Light. Quick. Flick of the wrists. Flick. Flick. Two. Three. Four. Five. Again and again and again. (Sighs) And again...

COACH GEORGE

Good. And let it run...

She stops rowing. She grips the sides of the hull and lets the oar handles hit against her abdomen.

TESSIE

Alright. Felt good. Feelin' good, Coach!

COACH GEORGE

Nice. You warm?

4. The Flying Machine

TESSIE

Definitely.

COACH GEORGE

Alright. Steady state pieces.

TESSIE

Again?

COACH GEORGE

Did I stutter?

TESSIE

How many?

COACH GEORGE

As many as necessary.

Tessie sighs.

TESSIE

I mean, didn't we do that yesterday?

COACH GEORGE

I am not your damn cruise director. Let's go. Let's move it. Now.

She tries to playfully splash him with her hand.

TESSIE

Coach, if this was a cruise, I'd want a full refund.

COACH GEORGE

Quit wasting time, smartass. That's what lazy people do.

TESSIE

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

COACH GEORGE

And lazy/ people aren't winners.

TESSIE

Lazy people aren't winners. I know.

COACH GEORGE

We'll do sprint pieces then, if you're so into switching it up.

5. The Flying Machine

TESSIE

(Yawns)

Fine.

COACH GEORGE

Get ready. Ready? Tessie, you ready?

TESSIE

Hold on. Let me get pointed.

She adjusts one oar with a stroke, shifting the position of the scull slightly.

COACH GEORGE

You good?

TESSIE

Hold on.

She adjusts with one oar.

COACH GEORGE

There's a little bit of a cross current.

TESSIE

I said hold on! Damn!

COACH GEORGE

Quit screwing around.

TESSIE

I'm not. Okay. I got it. (Beat) What am I doing?

COACH GEORGE

What the hell is the matter with you this morning?

TESSIE

Nothing. I'm just tired. That's all.

COACH GEORGE

Well, this will wake you the hell up. Sprint intervals. Let's go.

6. The Flying Machine

TESSIE

(Sarcastic)

Dope.

COACH GEORGE

We'll do 90 seconds on and 30 off. Okay?

TESSIE

(Yawns)

One minute on. One off.

COACH GEORGE

Hell no. You think you're going to qualify for nationals with a goddamn novice workout like that?

TESSIE

Oh you're no fun!

COACH GEORGE

Well, the entertainment portion of today's sunrise river cruise was cancelled. Now, if you keep being a little brat, I'll train someone else to go to the Olympics.

TESSIE

(Yawns)

Come on, Coach.

COACH GEORGE

No. It's okay. You're tired. Apparently this is all too much for you so... Coach

turns his bike around and starts to pedal.

TESSIE

No. It's not that. I'm just... tired. Aren't I allowed to be tired?

COACH GEORGE

Let's head back to the dock then.

TESSIE

What? No.

COACH GEORGE

Come on. Turn it around. Come on. Let's go.

7. The Flying Machine

TESSIE

I'm not- no. No!

COACH GEORGE

You clearly don't want this. You no longer want to dedicate your precious energy to

TESSIE

Hell no!

COACH GEORGE

You want it?

TESSIE

Yes, Coach.

COACH GEORGE

What are you gonna do to get that gold, kiddo?

TESSIE

Anything, Coach.

COACH GEORGE

What was that?

TESSIE

ANYTHING, COACH!

COACH GEORGE

Great! Do 90 on, 30 off. Now that's

TESSIE

I *have* done this before you know.

COACH GEORGE

Good, smartass. Ready?

TESSIE

Yeah.

COACH GEORGE

Are you ready?

TESSIE

Yes!

8. The Flying Machine

COACH GEORGE

90-30. Ready aaaaaand... BUILD IT.

Tessie starts to row furiously.

TESSIE

Legs slam back. Push. And push. And push. The back of my slide. Knees crunching together. Exploding back. Boom. Again. Boom. Explode. Harder. Boom.

COACH GEORGE

Sit up, Tessie!

TESSIE

I'm up. I'm sitting up. Way the fuck up. And leaning back. And back. And back.

COACH GEORGE

Hold that core in!

TESSIE

And I am slamming my legs then back then arms. Legs. Back. Arms. And Back. Harder. And

COACH GEORGE

AND PADDLE.

Tessie exhales deeply. She rows slowly. Bent over her oars. Panting.

TESSIE

(Panting)

Rest. Rest. Rest. Breathe. Breathe. Rest. Breathe. Catch my breath

COACH GEORGE

AND BUILD IT.

She takes a massive gulp of air and begins to row furiously.

TESSIE

Alright now!

COACH GEORGE

Let's gooooooooooooo.

(Grunts)

TESSIE

9. The Flying Machine

Back. And Back. Faster. Faster. Two to move. One. Two. Back. Blades in the water. I'm pushing. Push. Push. Push. Push.

COACH GEORGE

That's it! Nice! Nice!

TESSIE

I'm a machine. I'm a motherfucking machine. Push. Push. Go back. And back. Trying to just go harder. Legs down. Push. And harder.

COACH GEORGE

Come on, Tessie! How bad do you want it?

TESSIE

Legs back. And harder. Oars croak in their locks. Again Croak. And again. Whoosh as the blades push. Another puddle of water past me. Groan. Whoosh. Groan. Whoosh. Again. And harder. And

COACH GEORGE

PADDLE.

Tessie gasps as she slowly rows, barely moving up and down the slide of her scull.

TESSIE

Whew! I (gasp) slower now. I got this. (Gasp) Oof! My chest. (Gasp) Slower. Slower. Slower. (Gasp) Shit... (To Coach) Hey, how many have I done so far?

COACH GEORGE

Two.

TESSIE

(Groans)

Fuck me.

COACH GEORGE

Stop complaining. What doesn't kill you...

TESSIE

I know, I know... only makes me faster.

COACH GEORGE

Damn right. AND BUILD IT.

Tessie groans.

She rows with fury. She grunts with each stroke.

COACH GEORGE

Row through it! That's it.

TESSIE

Time to fly. Faster and faster. Pushing. Push. Legs. Back. Arms. Arms. Back. Legs. Up to the slide. Through the drive. I push. I push. Push. Push. Rip out the water. Blades pop. Seat back. Push. Legs. Back. Arms. Arms. Back. Legs.

COACH GEORGE

And PADDLE.

She slows to a paddle.

TESSIE

(Gasping)

Whew! Fuck's sake!

COACH GEORGE

You wanna stop?

TESSIE

No.

COACH GEORGE

You wanna fucking stop?

TESSIE

No.

COACH GEORGE

What was that?

TESSIE

No!

11. The Flying Machine

COACH GEORGE

I can't hear youuuu!

TESSIE  
FUCK NO! I WON'T STOP, COACH.

COACH GEORGE  
Damn right. That's what I like to hear! Aaaaaaaaand BUILD IT.

She starts to row with vigor again.

TESSIE  
HERE. I. GOOOO. WHOOOOOOOOO!

SCENE 2:

The dock: long wooden planks that extend out into the "water" downstage. Upstage right lies the boathouse: a tin walled structure with oars lined up on one side, and the bows of three sculls placed on top of each other on steel racks.

It's later in the morning.

Tessie carries her scull over to a set of stands. She flips it off her shoulder and puts it seat-down on the 2 stands.

She rubs her back.

TESSIE

(Grumbles)  
Fucking sprints.

She gets out a bucket with water and a sponge.

DREW HOLLIS, 26, approaches. He looks like he's just woken up. Physically, he's a little doughy.

He watches her scrubbing the hull of the scull, clearly staring at her ass for a solid minute.

DREW  
I had no idea the boathouse was so far away...

12. The Flying Machine

She jumps a little at his presence as she turns to face him.

TESSIE  
Jesus!

DREW

Oh. I'm sorry. I didn't mean to scare you.

TESSIE

No. It's fine. I just... I didn't realize anyone else was here. Hi.

She wipes the suds off of her. She catches him staring.

DREW

(Breaking out of it)

Oh. Yeah. Totally. Sorry.

TESSIE

Not like there's a lot of muggers in the greater Princeton area, but...

DREW

Haha. Yeah. Or like rapists.

Awkward pause.

TESSIE

Yikes... Yeah...

DREW

Oh God. I'm such an idiot. I did not mean that

TESSIE

So what does that mean, you're stalking me?

DREW

Uh. No- I

TESSIE

Relax, dude.

DREW

Relaxed? Pssh. I'm totally relaxed. I'm too relaxed even.

Pause.

13. The Flying Machine

TESSIE

You're staring...

DREW

I'm not.

TESSIE

What? Can you see the track bites?

DREW

I'm sorry. What?

She turns around, pointing to the dark marks on the back of her uni-suit.

TESSIE

It's just grease. I mean, I can't see them, but that must have been what you were looking at. Right?

Drew stares.

DREW

Yes. No. (Beat) I'm sorry, what? (Coughs) That's one hell of an outfit you've got on. I liked you better, you know before you left. I mean, you weren't wearing any clothes before, but this ensemble is... interesting. That's what I was staring at. Definitely not your ass.

TESSIE

Thanks?

DREW

I didn't mean that way. It's just... I've never seen anything like- like what you're... is that a singlet?

TESSIE

Oh you mean my glorious Orange Spandex? Oh yeah... Thanks. It's actually a uni-suit. Wrestlers wear singlets. So...

DREW

Ha ha. It's actually very, flattering. Lots of... lines.

TESSIE

Yeah and it also makes me sweat like a pig. So um that's cool I guess. (Beat)  
Anything else?

14. The Flying Machine

Pause.

DREW

So you really are a rower huh?

TESSIE

I really am. Is that a thing people lie about?

DREW

No. You looked great out there. I saw you. Out there. It was... like you were uh riding an elegant swan.

TESSIE

Uh... I've never heard anyone put it that way before.

DREW

Wait. I mean. It was cool. Really cool. It seems... physical- I mean, physically demanding.

TESSIE

Totally. Cool. Glad you think so... So, um...

DREW

Oh! Right! Yeah. It's just... you left this at my place.

He hands her a cell phone.

TESSIE

Ah thanks.

She reaches for it, but he pulls it out of her reach.

DREW

Yeah. No problem. (Beat) Though I gotta be honest, I'm a little pissed at you...

TESSIE

At me?

DREW

Yeah at you!

TESSIE

Why? Was I- what did I do?

DREW

Well, you left before I even woke up. No note, just your phone.

15. The Flying Machine

TESSIE

Oh... Well, I didn't actually mean to leave my

DREW

And you're fucking alarm, titled "you're late, bitch," went off at 5:15 in the goddamn morning.

TESSIE

Hah. Sorry about that.

DREW

You should be. (Beat) You don't look it.

TESSIE

(Smirking)

Yeah... I'm really not.

DREW

Oh that's nice! (Beat) By the way, I uh put my number in there. (Beat) You should really learn to lock your phone.

She starts looking at her phone.

TESSIE

Oh... cool... (unable to remember his name) Uh... thanks...

DREW

Drew. I'm Drew.

TESSIE

Tessie.

DREW

Yeah. I remember your name.

TESSIE

(Embarrassed)

Oh. Sorry. No. I knew that. I'm just... I...

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DREW

(Sarcastic)

Ah. Well, I'm devastated now.

TESSIE

Hey! I said I was sorry!

DREW

(Playfully)

How can I believe anything you say? You can't even remember my damn name, woman!

TESSIE

I said I was sorry! (Beat) And I mean it this time.

DREW

Sure. Riiiiight. See? I'm all insecure now.

TESSIE

Well, you can go back to sleep and I'm sure you'll forget all about me.

DREW

Nah. Not possible. Thanks to you.

Beat.

TESSIE

Well, that's flattering...

DREW

No... I mean, I've got to get going to work soon, and I've spent the last couple hours figuring out where you were so...

TESSIE

Really? Hours?

DREW

Well, maybe not hours. But you get the idea... And now I've got to get to work. And I'm tired. And it's entirely your fault.

TESSIE

That's pretty early for work...

DREW

Yeah. It's the only time I can fit in my own research at the lab.  
for... For... DREW

17. The Flying Machine TESSIE

TESSIE

Like a chem lab or whatever?

DREW

No. Not a chemist. I'm in a PhD program...

TESSIE

Oh yeah. That's right. You're in grad school

For neuroscience?

For bio- sorry. Neuroscience. DREW

Yeah. I'm doing my dissertation on the brain's relationship to- I-oh God this is boring. Ahem. How about you?

TESSIE

Now you don't remember? Should I be insulted?

DREW

I'm sorry. I knew that. I always say that at the wrong time. Like I'll order something at like Taco Bell, and the window guy will be like "enjoy your meal," and I always go "you too." And then I'm like "what the fuck are you doing? He's not eating!" (Beat) I'm sorry. What were we talking about?

TESSIE

I'm an undergrad.

DREW

Oh. Wow. I guess I must have blocked that out.

TESSIE

What?

DREW

No. Nothing. It was a joke- it's just you don't look like an undergrad.

TESSIE

Are you saying I look old?

DREW

No. You look perfectly young. I mean, you look right. I mean. You know what I mean?

TESSIE

Actually, I don't.

18. The Flying Machine

DREW

Wait... Am I that creepy old guy now?

Tessie giggles.

TESSIE

Well...

DREW

Oh great. Thanks. I'm destroyed now.

TESSIE

I'm sorry.

DREW

You're bad at this. So now you have to buy me a drink to make up for it.

TESSIE

Oh yeah?

DREW

Yeah. It's a rule. It's in the Princeton student manual. You probably skipped over it. Probably. (Beat) Tell you what. Meet me tonight at the Ivy Inn on Nassau. It's the least you can do.

TESSIE

I can do that.

DREW

8:30? Alright. (Beat) Wait. Can you drink?

TESSIE

Dude, we met in a bar.

DREW

Oh. *That* you remember.

TESSIE

Clearly only the important things.

DREW

No, I meant, are you 21?

TESSIE

Not for another 8 months.

19. The Flying Machine

DREW

Oh Jesus.

TESSIE

No. It's cool though. The owner was a lightweight rower back in the 90's, so he looks the other way.

DREW

Well, lucky me I guess.

TESSIE

I guess. 8:30.

DREW

Alright. You're on... 8:30. (Beat) You're really bad at this, you know.

TESSIE

Excuse me? No one talks to me like that!

DREW

Hah. Yeah. You're bad at this. Don't play dumb with me.

TESSIE

I'm not

DREW

Yes, you are. You're an undergrad. You all treat your phone like it's another  
appendage... TESSIE

(Smirks)

Maybe I'm just really thoughtless...

DREW

So thoughtless you added a location pin to your iCal event labeled "Practice at  
Boathouse?" I don't think so.

TESSIE

Oh yeah?

DREW

From what I saw out there, it's not like you'd forget where and when practice was.  
Like ever.

TESSIE

Hey! Sometimes we switch up

20. The Flying Machine

DREW

Yeah. No. You're better than that. You're certainly not that dumb. I  
think. Beat.

TESSIE

Thanks. I guess.

DREW

I'll need some additional data to make a full assessment though.

COACH GEORGE (OFF STAGE)

Tessie!

TESSIE

(Groans)

Coming!

Beat.

Drew steps closer to her.

DREW

I'll see you tonight. (Beat) By the way, I was totally going to ask to see you again this morning. If you had stuck around...

TESSIE

Good.

Drew walks off. She watches him as he goes.

She looks down at her phone. She smiles.

DREW (OFF STAGE)

And change your ring tone. Taylor Swift fucking sucks!

SCENE 3:

The dock. Later in the afternoon.

21. The Flying Machine

At center stage, Tessie sits on her ergometer- a rowing machine. She rows evenly on the machine. Headphones in her ears.

Hip-hop music blares. Something like Jay-Z's "99 Problems."

TESSIE

(With the lyrics)

If you're having girl problems, I feel bad for you son. I got 99 problems, but a bitch ain't one...

Lyrics fade out.

TESSIE

(Loudly over the music)

Fuck yeah. No getting splashed. Awesome music. One. Two. Three. Four. Five. Even. No wind. Just stroke. After stroke. Stroke. Stroke. Stroke. (Singing along to the music). Two. Three. Another thousand meters down. Knocking them DOWN.

Coach walks over. He stares over her shoulder at the ergometer's monitor.

COACH GEORGE

Nice. Sit up.

TESSIE

Moving it back. And back. And back

COACH GEORGE

Great. Last K. Keep it moving.

TESSIE

You're crowding me, Coach.

COACH GEORGE

Better me than those bitches at qualifiers. Focus.

TESSIE

So close. To being done. (Singing along to the music) So close. Ah!

COACH GEORGE

What?

22. The Flying Machine

She does not stop rowing.

TESSIE

I think. I just. Twinged my

COACH GEORGE

Push through. You're tired. Let's go.

TESSIE

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. You're probably right.

Coach goes over to the other side of the dock and picks up a bosu ball. He lays it soft-side down on the ground near Tessie.

COACH GEORGE

Alright. You're good. Get some water.

Coach hands her a bottle of water. She takes a large gulp and spits it out. She gets up off the erg. Shakes out her leg.

TESSIE

I'm not thirsty. Can we just get on with it?

COACH GEORGE

Okay. Ski Squats.

Tessie gets on top of the bosu ball.

TESSIE

Alright. Let's go.

COACH GEORGE

Go.

Tessie does 5 squats on the ball. Holds the fifth squat.

COACH GEORGE

28, 29, 30. Up.

Tessie does 5 squats on the ball. Holds the fifth longer.

COACH GEORGE

43, 44, 45. Up. Keep it level. Don't pause at the top.

23. The Flying Machine

Tessie does 5 squats on the ball. Holds the fifth even longer.

COACH GEORGE

58, 59, 60. Up.

TESSIE

What time is it?

COACH GEORGE

Time for five more squats. Let's go.

Tessie does 5 squats on the ball. Holds the fifth.

TESSIE

(Strained)

Seriously, what time is it?

COACH GEORGE

13, 14, 15. Up. Why do you want to know? It's supplemental workout o'clock. If you quit your yapping, you'd be done by now.

Tessie does 5 squats on the ball. Holds the fifth. She struggles this time.

TESSIE

I have to head out soon.

COACH GEORGE

It's only 6. Don't give me any of that twinge crap. It's in your head. Up!

TESSIE

Yeah. I'll be fine. I just have to go soon. It's important.

COACH GEORGE

Down!

Tessie reluctantly does 5 squats on the ball. Holds the fifth for longer.

COACH GEORGE

Okay. Up.

TESSIE

Oh come on.

24. The Flying Machine

COACH GEORGE

What's your deal, kiddo?

TESSIE

Nothing. I just need to leave on time tonight.

COACH GEORGE

I can barely get you to pay attention to anything today. Down!

5 more squats on the ball. Holds the fifth.

TESSIE

I'm focused! It's fine.

COACH GEORGE

Something with your classes?

TESSIE

No. I'm

COACH GEORGE

Because you know you have to stay eligible.

She does 5 more squats. Holds the fifth.

TESSIE

I know.

COACH GEORGE

You have to do the work. I know it's bullshit, but you have to

TESSIE

I am. I am.

COACH GEORGE

Good. Have you told your professors what you're training for? Maybe they'll understand. Down.

TESSIE

They know. None of them care.

COACH GEORGE

Idiots. Let me tell you something. Princeton or not, those pinheads have no idea what it's like to

25. The Flying Machine

TESSIE

It's fine. My grades are fine. I think.

Five more squats. Holds the fifth.

COACH GEORGE

So, what's the deal?

TESSIE

I just have to go. Jesus. Drop it.

COACH GEORGE

You drop it.

TESSIE

I'm not the one who

COACH GEORGE

No. I mean drop it. 5 more. Down!

He laughs at his own joke.

TESSIE

(Rolls her eyes)

Every God damn time.

She does 5 more squats. She holds the fifth for over a minute. She is really shaky on the bosu ball.

COACH GEORGE

Okay stop. No seriously. You can tell me if there's something really wrong. Okay? Don't ever feel like you can't come to me with a problem. Okay?

She jumps off the bosu ball and shakes out her legs.

TESSIE

(Distracted)

Yeah.

COACH GEORGE

Yeah?

26. The Flying Machine

TESSIE

We done here, Coach?

COACH GEORGE

Yes. Good job. (Beat) Now why don't we sit and talk about what's going on with you

TESSIE

Great! See you tomorrow!

COACH GEORGE

Wait! At least, stretch before you...

Tessie runs out.

SCENE 4:

The bar. Tessie has one empty glass in front of her. Drew has three.

TESSIE

So at the Head of the Schuylkill, I passed 13 other boats in the first 3,000 meters. And I see this girl up ahead. She has to be in the first starting group. Annie... something. She stroked the 8 at Dartmouth, or whatever. Doesn't matter. She's about 5 boat lengths ahead of me. Total open water. And from where I am, I can tell I have about 2,000 meters left in this head race. So basically, I shift into a 2K race plan, which by the way is completely different than the race I had been rowing mentally. In a 5K head race, you pick a stroke rating, and just hold on for as long as you can. A 2K is radically different.

It's all strategy. The first 500 is all about maximum speed. Your stroke rating should go up to somewhere between a 35 and 38 strokes per minute. It's total balls to the wall, right?

DREW

I guess?

TESSIE

Exactly, then there's the second 500, where you settle into a rhythm, still faster than a 5K. And as I approach the thousand meter mark, I realize I am a boat length behind her. Because that's the thing about rowing- you can see the people you're beating, and when they start to beat you. But then I hit the 3rd 500, which is a real bitch.

Drew finishes another beer.

27. The Flying Machine

DREW

(Distracted)

Oh?

TESSIE

Yeah. All the muscles really start to burn. It's a head race, so you're using your slow twitch muscles- the endurance muscles. But because I went from 3,000 meters of using those, to 2,000 meters of using the fast twitch muscles. The sprint muscles, your body has a hard time making the adjustment. That 3rd 500 is where your brain has to take over. It's a mental game. You have to will yourself to make it through that third 500. But physically, you feel like you're going to fucking die. And God help you if you have an injury.

DREW

Do you have an injury?

TESSIE

That's not the point. The 3rd 500. I'm dying. And she's up 2 boat lengths on me now. I'm beat, and she's exhausted. Then I reach 1,500 meters. I'm in the final 500 of the entire race. And I can hear the crowd at the finish line. The thing about that 500 is that you have to empty your tank. All your energy. All your effort. Your sanity. Everything. You go to this place in your brain, where it basically shuts off. It's almost Zen-like, except for the fact that your heart's pounding out of your chest and you feel like you're going to throw up. Or die. So, I'm finally walking through her boat- that means, catching up. And I say to myself, "Tessie, this is your moment." And so I start emptying the tank. Every inch of me is telling me to stop, but then I'm up past her bow ball. I'm ten strokes away from beating her. I can even hear her gasping for air, which is crazy. And the finish line is so close, and I- I

DREW

(Flatly)

You beat her to the finish line?

TESSIE

No. She beat me.

DREW

Oh. That is not how I thought that was going to go.

TESSIE

But here's the best part! It's a head race, so we started at completely different times. So when they adjusted our times, I won anyway! Isn't that crazy?

Silence.

28. The Flying Machine

DREW

28 minutes.

TESSIE

No, I finished like 10 minutes faster than that.

DREW

No. That's how long you've been talking about this.

TESSIE

Oh...

DREW

Yeah.

TESSIE

I didn't realize... I didn't mean to bore you...

DREW

No. It wasn't boring. The first ten minutes weren't. I've never heard anyone talk so passionately about... that. (Beat) But like, what else?

TESSIE

What else?

DREW

Yeah. What else?

TESSIE

Well, I'm training for National qualifiers. And if I kill it there, I'll make the Olympic team. This time, they're going to be in

DREW

No. That's not what I meant. What *else* are you into?

Pause.

TESSIE

Uh...

Pause.

DREW

I didn't mean to put you on the spot.

29. The Flying Machine

TESSIE

What kind of stuff do you mean?

Pause.

DREW

Okay. So for me, I've developed this vinyl collection. I don't know how it got started.

TESSIE

Vinyl?

DREW

Yeah. Like records? The black round things? Before iTunes? I'm kidding. But anyway... I think it stems from watching High Fidelity so many times.

TESSIE

I've seen that movie!

DREW

So good, right?

TESSIE

Yeah! Jack Black is so funny.

DREW

So, I think it started when my Dad finally moved out, and left me his record collection

TESSIE

Your parents are divorced? (Beat) Me too. My mom

DREW

Wait. That's not the point of the story.

TESSIE

Oh. Okay. Go on.

DREW

So, I've finally gotten to a point where they don't fit in any of my shelves anymore. So I had to get this big wall unit, and I'm rearranging the whole thing. But it's a total disaster because I'm OCD. Everything has to have a place. I want it to be broken down by genre and then alphabetized. But I've been so wrapped up in my research that I've got my

Talking Heads album next to The Band, which is insane because it should be with the B's and not the T's

30. The Flying Machine

TESSIE

Are the Talking Heads a rap group?

DREW

No. They're a ... wait, you've never heard of the Talking Heads.

She shakes her head. Sips her beer.

TESSIE

Nope.

DREW

How is that possible!?!?

TESSIE

What? I have never heard of that band.

DREW

The Talking Heads?

TESSIE

Nope.

DREW

That is ridiculous. How is that even possible?

TESSIE

I don't know, maybe they were before my time.

DREW

Yeah. I suppose. They got together in like 1975.

TESSIE

Wait. Doesn't that mean they're before your time too? Wait. How old are you?

DREW

26.

TESSIE

So it was before you're prime too! You're not that old...

DREW

I know. I'm not. I know! Did you think I was?

31. The Flying Machine

TESSIE

Nah. I'm just fucking with you, but I will check them out.

DREW

Good. You should. (Beat) Another?

TESSIE

I will. To checking them out. Not to the beer.

DREW

What about the Fall?

TESSIE

Who?

DREW

The Clash? Tom Waits? Nick Cave?!?

TESSIE

Nope. Nope. Nope. Are these bands also before my time?

DREW

Yeah, but still everyone should like know them.

TESSIE

Well, how did you find out about them?

DREW

Uh... living in the world? (Beat) The internet.

TESSIE

I will check them out.

DREW

You should. They're really good. (Beat) What do you listen to?

TESSIE

Well, I'm on a real Rihanna kick right now.

Drew groans.

TESSIE

What?

32. The Flying Machine

DREW

Sorry. That was just a natural reaction. Go on.

TESSIE

I'm sorry I don't have your highbrow tastes, but she's got an amazing voice. And she's not afraid. In her lyrics. How she looks in videos. Everything about her. She just goes for it, you know? Even her tweets are hilarious. And

DREW

Wait. Wait. Wait, you

TESSIE

What don't you know what Twitter is? Or are you one of those people who says twits instead of tweets?

DREW

I know what Twitter is. Thank you. But wait, can we talk about the fact that you like a musician based on her Twitter account?

TESSIE

Well, we can't all be as interesting as you.

DREW

Apparently, not, which is a shame.

TESSIE

Hmm...

DREW

Hmm...

He stares at her for a couple of moments.

TESSIE

What were we talking about?

DREW

What happened you got distracted?

TESSIE

Yes. You're very distracting...

DREW

I know. I get that a lot.

33. The Flying Machine

TESSIE

Oh reeeaaaaalllllllly?

DREW

Yeah. I am the major cause of traffic accidents in the greater Princeton area when I walk down the street.

TESSIE

Boo...

DREW

What? That was a great joke!

TESSIE

Boooooo. You're the worst.

DREW

Am I?

TESSIE

Yes. No...

DREW

Good. (Beat) Don't you have a curfew? Isn't it a school night?

TESSIE

Excuse me. I am a grown ass lady. I can do what I want. But yeah, we should probably get going. Soon.

DREW

What classes do you have tomorrow?

TESSIE

Uh... my practice is super early. That's why...

DREW

Hah. You can't remember? Your classes? Wait, really?

TESSIE

(Shrugs)

It's programmed into my phone.

34. The Flying Machine

DREW

Wait. Really? Don't you have like, homework or something?

TESSIE

I don't know. I don't think so?

DREW

Hahaha. Wait. Really?

TESSIE

I'm pretty sure.

DREW

Wait. What's your major again?

TESSIE

Uh... Econ?

DREW

It's not a trick question.

TESSIE

I know. Why are you looking at me like that?

DREW

I don't know. It's kind of funny.

TESSIE

It's not that funny.

DREW

It's at least a little funny. Considering school is kind of a big deal, well for me it was, when I was an undergrad here.

TESSIE

Well, it's not a big deal to me. So... let's change the subject.

DREW

Tessie, you're at *Princeton* and you have no interest in your academic career. I think you are the only person I've ever met here who feels like that.

TESSIE

Meh...

DREW

What are you some kind of like genius?

35. The Flying Machine

TESSIE

No.

DREW

So you really just don't care. Wow.

TESSIE

So long as I'm eligible to race, I don't really stress out about

DREW

Oh maybe it's just that everyone treats you differently because of the fact that you're an athlete. I heard they do that for like football players and whatever.

TESSIE

Well, I'm not a football player. And I'm not an idiot either. Thank you very

much. DREW

(Badly flirting)

You know, if you ever need a tutor...

TESSIE

For what?

DREW

For classes and stuff.

TESSIE

Who? You?

DREW

Yeah. I mean if it's like Stat or anything like that I can totally help. Actually, I'm not too terrible at English Lit and even Poly Sci when I was an undergrad

TESSIE

Why would I need your help?

DREW

You don't have to be embarrassed.

TESSIE

I'm not embarrassed. You just don't know me.

DREW

I want to. I mean, come on. The only thing you've talked about is that you have practice twice a day.

36. The Flying Machine

TESSIE

I'm not stupid.

DREW

Wait. No I wasn't implying

TESSIE

I just don't give a shit about that. I had over a 3.0 last semester. That's nothing to sneeze at.

DREW

No, it's just I... wow... I mean... you're pretty damn cavalier with your future,

Tess. She shrugs.

TESSIE

What's so cavalier about winning a gold medal? That's what I want. The rest of this? I'll figure it out later. Besides, most people don't ever do anything remotely related to their college majors anyway.

DREW

I did!

TESSIE

Well neuroscience is different, Drew. Also, why does it matter?

DREW

Don't you think it's pretty strange that you don't think it does? I mean, why go to an Ivy League school if your academics are completely unimportant to you?

TESSIE

Because it's the best program in the country for rowing and they asked me to row here. Duh!

DREW

I know, but there's got to be more

TESSIE

Let's talk about you for a bit.

DREW

Sure. It's one of my favorite subjects.

TESSIE

Explain to me the thing you're working on again.

37. The Flying Machine

DREW

My dissertation?

TESSIE

Yeah. I'm not up on the whole neuroscience thing.

DREW

Well, few are.

TESSIE

Oh good. I was afraid I was going to look like an idiot.

DREW

No you're perfect- I mean. Don't worry about it. I spend all day in a lab with brains. Day in day out. Brains. Brains. Brains. (Coughs) Anyway. It's about pain.

TESSIE

Pain? That's it?

DREW

Yeah. The relationship between your brain and pain.

TESSIE

That's it, Mr. Fancy Pants PhD? So impressive...

DREW

Well, it's a little more complex than that.

TESSIE

Like your brain thinks pain sucks. Mine certainly does, but no matter what, my ass is at practice regardless of what my brain

DREW

So pain is a submodality of somatic sensation, right?

TESSIE

Uh... okay... sure I'll pretend to know what any of those words mean...

DREW

So pain is used to describe a wide range of unpleasant sensory and emotional experiences associated with actual or potential tissue damage. And our brains have made sure that pain is a signal we can't ignore.

TESSIE

As much as we'd like to. God knows.

DREW

Exactly. So I'm studying people with faulty nociceptors, patients who either have insensitivities to pain

TESSIE

Or people who can just withstand it.

DREW

Sort of.

TESSIE

That's cool. Well, if you can figure out a way for my norco-raptors

DREW

Nociceptors.

TESSIE

Right. If you can get those to malfunction in my brain, I'll be thrilled.

DREW

You know that's actually not a good thing, right?

TESSIE

It's all good if it gets me what I want though. Like do you think I can train my body to ignore the messages my brain sends to

DREW

No, not really.

TESSIE

Is there maybe like a pill or an injection that you can give me? God, I'd kick everyone's ass, if I didn't feel

DREW

No.

TESSIE

Well that's a shame. I guess I have no other use for you then...

(Sarcastic)

DREW

Haha. (Beat) Generally, those people who are insensitive to pain tend to get injured easily and die at an early age. So you may want to reconsider

TESSIE

Worth it.

DREW

You don't mean that. If you knew the ramifications of eradicating

TESSIE

No. I do. That sounds totally worth it.

DREW

Hahaha. I have never met anyone like you

TESSIE

A complete fucking weirdo?

DREW

That and just like... intense.

TESSIE

Intense...

She looks down at her glass.

DREW

Yeah. Intense. About all the rowing shit. Really intense.

TESSIE

Great. That's what every girl wants to hear...

DREW

No?

She shrugs.

TESSIE

I dunno.

DREW

I meant- I meant that-*I* think it's kind of cool.

TESSIE

Is it? I don't know... I'm not really great with this sort of thing...

DREW

Wait, you're not understanding me. Usually, I'm always the one who's like really intense. Or at least that's what people say. Yeah... you're like... whoa.

TESSIE

Like whoa?

DREW

I don't know... it's like this insane laser vision, even more than me, which is usually *my* thing. Everyone's like "Drew, all you ever talk about is work work work." And I'm all "shut up this is important." But you

TESSIE

I guess I should have dialed it back 30 minutes ago...

DREW

No. Don't ever do that.

She kisses him. She rests her head on his shoulder.

TESSIE

Ugh God now I'm going to have to keep seeing you aren't I?

DREW

Damn right, Tess.

TESSIE

It's Tessie.

DREW

I like Tess.

TESSIE

But, it's Tessie...

DREW

Come on, Tess. You want to get together again on Friday? Go see some Fellini at Princeton Gardens?

TESSIE

Tessie. Fellini's like a director right?

41. The Flying Machine

DREW

Well, it ain't a pasta.

TESSIE

I never thought that, you dick! And it's Tessie.

DREW

What do you think, *Tess*? Friday?

He kisses her.

TESSIE

Good.

42. The Flying Machine

ACT TWO:

SCENE 1:

Lake Carnegie. The "water" looks iced over. It's a snowy dark morning.

The snow falls on Tessie, who wears an orange long-sleeve UnderArmor shirt and a black wool cap with an orange pom pom. Her face shows no discomfort.

Coach rides his bicycle on the snow-covered "shore" part of the stage. He's wearing a brown parka so large that he barely fits on the bike. He looks completely miserable. He looks as if he's pedaling in slow motion, compared to the speed of her rowing.

COACH GEORGE

Very nice!

She rows a bit faster.

TESSIE

You got this. Push. Two. Three. Four.

COACH GEORGE

(Shivering)

Don't rush your slide, Tessie!

TESSIE

Push. You're the only one out here. Push. Drive. Slide. Drive. Slide. Drive it back.

PUsh. Coach stops pedalling-- too cold to move.

COACH GEORGE

(Chattering)

That's it! Crushing it!

TESSIE

Moving. Keep moving. Just keep moving. This is temporary. Temporary. You. Just. Need. Need. To. Keep. Moving. Temporary. Everything is temporary.

43. The Flying Machine

COACH GEORGE

Beautiful! V-v-v-very good! (Beat) God damn it.

He fumbles with the bullhorn in between his massive over gloved hands.

TESSIE

Just one more. One more. One more piece. One more stroke.

COACH GEORGE

(Through cupped hands)

Okay! Let it run!

She slows she starts to shake as she glides past him.

TESSIE

(Shivering)

Hoooooooly shit.

COACH GEORGE

Ice! ICE! Check it down!

TESSIE

What?

COACH GEORGE

CHECK IT DOWN! AND HEAD BACK.

She suddenly stops by jamming her blades below the surface of the water.

TESSIE

What was that?

COACH GEORGE

Alright. Let's head back. I said, I s-s-s-said LET'S HEAD BACK.

TESSIE

Okay. Let's go.

She starts to turn the boat in the other direction with her oars.

44. The Flying Machine

COACH GEORGE

Everything was great on that last steady state.

TESSIE

It's March 1st. It fucking s-s-s-should be by now. (Pause) What was that? What? Yo, I can't hear you.

The wind howls.

COACH GEORGE

Head back. Watch your ratio.

TESSIE

What?

COACH GEORGE

YOUR RATIO.

She glides over to him.

TESSIE

That's it?

COACH GEORGE

(More audible)

Yeah. Watch your ratio.

TESSIE

That's it?!? It's 32 fucking degrees out here and you stopped me to talk about my ratio??? Coach shakes violently.

COACH GEORGE

Well, I can't hold the bull

TESSIE

For fuck's sake. (To herself) What a little bitch.

She rows away from him.

COACH GEORGE

I heard that.

TESSIE

Good! If my hair breaks off again like Monday, I'm gonna kill you.

45. The Flying Machine

She rows offstage.

Coach tremors. He gets back on the bike.

COACH GEORGE

I'm getting too old for this shit.

*(Looks at bullhorn lying in the snow)*

Ah screw it.

He slowly pedals offstage in the same direction.

SCENE 2:

The same dive bar from Act I.

Drew arranges four tequila shots. Two for him. Two for Tessie. He grabs the salt.

DREW

You sure?

TESSIE

Yeah. I'm sure.

DREW

You sure you're sure?

TESSIE

Yeah. I'll just be a little late to practice. (Beat) It's not too big of a thing. It's just me out there anyway tomorrow morning.

DREW

Okay. Let's try this again. So. Lick.

Tessie licks his hand.

DREW

Ugh!

He wipes his hand.

TESSIE

Excuse me? My mouth has been on worse places.

46. The Flying Machine

DREW

That I did not need to know.

TESSIE

Uh. I'm sorry. Am I offending your delicate sensibilities?

DREW

Well...

TESSIE

Hey!

She punches him in the arm.

DREW

Ow! You punch hard!

He rubs his arm.

TESSIE

(Baby Talk)

Awe... I'm so sowwy, Dwew...

DREW

Don't do that. It's always so creepy when you

TESSIE

(Baby Talk)

Lemme kiss it and make it bettewww...

She kisses his arm. He pulls her up to his face and kisses her.

DREW

You're pretty great. You know that?

TESSIE

I know.

DREW

Hey!

TESSIE

It's kind of true...

47. The Flying Machine

DREW

And?

TESSIE

And what?

He gestures to himself.

TESSIE

Oh yeah. You're alright.

DREW

Oh... Thanks soooo much.

TESSIE

You know how I feel about you.

DREW

Oh yeah?

TESSIE

Yeah.

DREW

Yeah? You sure?

She kisses him.

TESSIE

Of course... Can we get out of here now?

DREW

Your place?

TESSIE

Yeah. Fine. Pay the man, Drew.

DREW

And then what?

TESSIE

Then... we go back to my place... and... you know...

And stay over?  
DREW

So it's: lick. Salt. Lime? Tequila?  
TESSIE

Tess!  
DREW

What?  
TESSIE

Why won't you ever let me stay over?  
DREW

It's not a good idea. Lick. Lime. Tequila?  
TESSIE

Why not?  
DREW

It just isn't. Okay? So, Salt. Then lick?  
TESSIE

But why?  
DREW

Come on. These shots are gonna go bad.  
TESSIE

Shots can't go bad.  
DREW

We should still drink them. Like now.  
TESSIE

She reaches for one shot.

Stop.  
DREW

Well, if I wanted to just have one drink I would go to Communion...  
TESSIE

Yeah. Hysterical. Wait, stop avoiding the question.  
DREW

TESSIE

I'm not sure I know what you want me to say.

49. The Flying Machine

DREW

Wait, we've been seeing each other for what? 5 months? You let me come over, but I'm not allowed to sleep over. After 5 months? That's kind of screwed up, no?

TESSIE

You sound like a girl. Jesus. Isn't this the arrangement every guy dreams of?

DREW

No.

TESSIE

Is it?

DREW

Yeah. That's bullshit.

TESSIE

I've never found that to be bullshit before.

DREW

No?

TESSIE

No. (Beat) All of the other guys I've ever been with have never wanted

DREW

How many?

TESSIE

A lot.

DREW

How many is "a lot?"

TESSIE

Like... like...

DREW

Like how many?

Beat.

TESSIE

Several.

50. The Flying Machine

DREW

Oookay. That's *really* specific.

TESSIE

Shut up.

DREW

Look. Just because the little boys you used to run around with would throw that trite bullshit at you- that's not every guy. Those boys are idiots. All "several" of them. That's not me, Tess. I'm a nice guy.

TESSIE

Sure, it's not. Every time someone's a self-proclaimed 'nice guy' that's code for "secret raging asshole."

DREW

You trying to piss me off?

TESSIE

No, but you certainly fucking are.

DREW

And why is that?

TESSIE

Because you're lying to me.

DREW

Wait. Wait. Wait. How?

TESSIE

We have what everyone wants! It's clean. It's painless. We go out. We fuck. You go home. I get a full night's sleep.

DREW

Well, that's not enough.

TESSIE

Ugh God. Don't do that!

DREW

No. I want more. And so do you, or else you would have left

TESSIE

Come on. Let's just have a nice evening. You're ruining it.

DREW

Too bad.

TESSIE

Let's go.

DREW

No.

TESSIE

We can stay at your place, if that will shut you up. I mean, I'll have to get up

DREW

Stop changing the subject.

TESSIE

Fine. I'm going.

She gets up. He pulls her back down on the bar stool.

DREW

No. I like you. And that's what people do when they like each other. They spend the night.

TESSIE

Why?!?

DREW

Wait. Who asks that?

TESSIE

I do. (Exasperated) Why? Why do you like me? Why do you *need* to sleep over? Why do you need so much of my time? When I've never had to ever

DREW

Because I like spending time with you. With clothes on. And also off. That's what people do in functional relationships.

Silence.

TESSIE

This is stupid. Let's change the subj

DREW

Wait, really? (Beat) OK. Since you *need* to hear this. So... I've never been with anyone who looks like you. No, wait. I didn't mean it- if someone saw the two of us walking down the street, they'd ask: "how'd he get someone like *her*?" (Beat) You're really hot. You get that right?

TESSIE

So if it's that, then what's with all the

DREW

Wait. I didn't mean it like that. I mean, when I talk to you- it's like... it's like... you're from another planet. No one- no girl- talks, like you. Acts like- and there's just so many things you give no fucks about, you know?

TESSIE

Right. (Signals bartender) Can we have two more tequilas, please?

DREW

Tess, come on.

TESSIE

If I'm getting through this conversation, I will need to drink about it. (Beat) Because Apparently there are so few fucks I give out in a day. Thanks for that.

DREW

Wait, listen. Here's what I really like about you. You let me be who I am. I can like what I like. And you don't... We get to do all the things that I think are fun. There's no pressure to... And you're like totally unconcerned about whether we're moving forward fast enough or whatever it is most women seem to be completely obsessed with- is this enough? Is this a satisfactory enough answer for you?

Silence.

She takes a shot.

TESSIE

I don't know...

She can't look at him.

DREW

Wait, I just bared my fucking soul to you. And- and you don't know?

TESSIE

I don't know. Okay? Why do you dissect everything I

53. The Flying Machine

DREW

You don't know.

TESSIE

I don't know. I don't know. I don't know. Because- because- I'm... God, I've never... it's never gotten this far. Okay?

DREW

Now I don't know.

TESSIE

I don't know

DREW

If you say that phrase again, I swear to God I will

TESSIE

I don't know what I'm doing okay? Satisfied? (Pause) Now that that's over. Can we just get out of here now? Please?

Pause.

DREW

Why me then? Huh? Why me? If "several" other guys are so down with what you really want, why stay with me?

Silence.

She takes the second shot.

TESSIE

(Sighs)

Because some-something... some other part of me... like, I don't know... woke up. With you. Something... Whatever. It's dumb. Can we go? Please can we go? Drew. Please. (Pause) In the end, it's going to- we're just going to wind up hurting each

DREW

How do you know?

TESSIE

I know.

DREW

You fucking don't.

54. The Flying Machine

TESSIE

I do.

DREW

Oh wait, that's right. I forgot. You're such a badass. You're soooo fucking tough. And I don't have a single fucking clue what it's like to be you.

TESSIE

Fuck you.

DREW

Fuck you! You're not from some privileged class that has the premium on suffering. I should know. It's my literal fucking job.

TESSIE

You want to know what it's like?

DREW

Enlighten me. I'm a pretty smart guy. I think I can handle it.

TESSIE

Fine. I'll show you. (Beat) You'll find this intellectually stimulating probably...

She grabs the salt. Grabs Drew's hand. She licks his palm and licks her own.

DREW

What are you

TESSIE

Shut up.

She sprinkles the salt on their palms.

DREW

I said no shots!

TESSIE

I'm not. Shut up.

DREW

What are you doing?

55. The Flying Machine

TESSIE

Proving my point.

She grabs two ice cubes from her water glass. Puts it in her salted palm.

She grabs his salted palm with her hand. They look like they're about to arm wrestle.

DREW

What are you- OW!

TESSIE

Yeah.

DREW

What are you doing? Let me

He tries to let go. She won't let him.

TESSIE

You feel this?

DREW

Yeah. It's-it's burning the shit out of my skin!

TESSIE

This? This is what it's like.

DREW

Stop being such a

TESSIE

No. You stop. This is- this is

DREW

Okay. We can stop

He struggles to let go again. She holds on to his hand.

DREW

Okay. It's starting to

TESSIE

This? This is what my fucking life is like. Multiply it by ten. By a hundred.

56. The Flying Machine

DREW

Okay. You made your point.

He tries to pull his hand away. She pulls him closer to her.

TESSIE

The more I hold on to something, the more it's like this. Why would you want more of this? (Beat) You get it now? So frankly, nothing is worth more of this. There's no running away from it.

DREW

That's not always true.

TESSIE

It is.

DREW

It isn't.

TESSIE

And you won't be able to take it. You won't. It's true!

He holds on to her hand, pulls it towards his chest. Kisses her.

DREW

It isn't.

TESSIE

We'll see about that...

She kisses him. Lets go of his hand. He rubs where the salt has burned his skin.

DREW

And I'm sleeping over.

TESSIE

(Smiles)

No you're not...

They kiss.

melted. There are buds on some trees on the side of the boathouse.

SCENE 3:  
57. The Flying Machine

A sweaty Tessie tries to stretch.

COACH GEORGE

The Dock. Still wintry, but the snow has  
You got weight training with the team at four.

TESSIE

(Distracted)

Oh right.

COACH GEORGE

Do you not want to?

TESSIE

No. I... of course I do.

COACH GEORGE

You could get a little more training in with the other girls, if you want to. It's fine if you don't.

TESSIE

Fine.

COACH GEORGE

You've got to be prepared.

TESSIE

I hear you.

COACH GEORGE

I mean it. You have to be prepared.

TESSIE

I hear you! Damn.

COACH GEORGE

Alright. I'm going to go get the trailer ready. You put the boat up when you're ready.

TESSIE

Okay.

58. The Flying Machine

Coach exits.

She tries to extend her leg. It doesn't straighten.

Drew enters. She suddenly stops trying to extend her leg and stands casually.

DREW

Hey!

TESSIE

Hey you!

They kiss.

DREW

You ready? I'm hankering for some waffles. I went right back to sleep when you left, and so now I'm STARVING.

TESSIE

Yeah. Sounds good, babe. (Beat) Oh hey! I got something for you.

DREW

You did? What is it athlete's foot?

Tessie punches him. She then kisses him again.

TESSIE

Screw you, I'm thoughtful. It's in my bag.

DREW

Nice.

He goes over and roots in her bag.

She limps over to the orange cooler on the other side of the dock unseen.

TESSIE

In the side pocket.

Drew rummages. He pulls out a book.

DREW

Awakenings...

59. The Flying Machine

TESSIE

Oliver Sacks. He's some neurologist. You know him?

DREW

I do! What made you

TESSIE

I just finished reading it.

DREW

Wow. Really?

TESSIE

Yeah.

DREW

What'd you think?

TESSIE

Sad. (Pause) It made me think.

DREW

About...

TESSIE

Trapped. Being trapped like that. Reading that. Scared the shit out of me. One illness and bam! You can't smile. Laugh. Move. Jesus, if I couldn't move, I don't know *what* I'd do if I couldn't... I don't want to turn you off of it. I thought it was cool. You should check it out.

DREW

I will. I will. Thank you, babe.

He moves to her and kisses her on the forehead.

TESSIE

I know there's a movie too, but I know how you are about turning books into movies or plays into movies so I figured...

DREW

You're the best.

TESSIE

I- I didn't want to give it to you before.

60. The Flying Machine

DREW

Why not?

TESSIE

I wasn't sure you'd like it. Or worse if you've read it before.

Drew faces away from her and tucks the book into his messenger bag.

DREW

What? No. Nooo... I didn't. I never read it. I love it. I mean, I'll love it. Great. Let's go. Waffles.

TESSIE

In a minute. I need to wrap up. Help me?

She tosses him an ice pack and some saran wrap from a cooler.

Drew helps Tessie wrap an ice pack around her back by wrapping saran wrap around her waist, as she holds the ice pack in place.

TESSIE

You can go tighter.

DREW

Like this?

He runs around her pulling the wrap really tight.

TESSIE

Whoa!

DREW

What do you need this all for anyway? This some kind of bondage thing? Kinky. Considering we're in broad daylight.

TESSIE

Oh shut up. It's just... my back acts up. Usually after practice number two is when it gets worse. But today... I don't really get it

DREW

Bad?

61. The Flying Machine

TESSIE

Not always.

DREW

Isn't that, like not good?

TESSIE

Wow. You must be like a scientist or something...

DREW

Are you in pain right now?

TESSIE

No. I'm great. See...

Tessie does a little tap dance. Her left knee gives out a little, she starts to fall. Drew catches her, as she catches herself.

DREW

Whoa!

TESSIE

I'm fine.

DREW

That looks bad.

She shrugs.

TESSIE

It happens. Whatever. It's fine.

DREW

That's happened before?

He pokes her knee.

TESSIE

Ow!

DREW

Your knee looks like it's pregnant with another knee.

62. The Flying Machine

TESSIE

Nah. It's not too bad.

She bends her knee. He jumps a little.

DREW

Holy shit! What the fuck was that sound?

TESSIE

I dunno. It just started doing that.

DREW

That was your knee?

TESSIE

Yeah. It's not that big of a deal.

She bends it again. He jumps again. He covers his mouth.

DREW

Oh my God. I think I'm gonna

TESSIE

Will you relax? God, you'd think it was happening to you...

DREW

Doesn't it hurt?

She shrugs.

TESSIE

Yeah, but I still have to practice so...

DREW

Uh... you should get that looked at.

TESSIE

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

DREW

Don't yeah me like that.

TESSIE

Like what?

63. The Flying Machine

DREW

You know.

TESSIE

Yeah. I do know. *Yeah.*

DREW

Funny. You're a regular

TESSIE

YEAH. I know.

He playfully shoves her. She staggers a little. He catches her. Once she's steady, she shoves him back. Hard.

DREW

You brute!

She sticks her tongue out at him.

TESSIE

You don't need to take care of me so much.

DREW

Someone has to. You won't.

TESSIE

I will. Eventually. After the Games.

Coach re-enters.

COACH GEORGE

Alright. The trailer's all set up.

TESSIE

Oh. Hey.

COACH GEORGE

Well, who's this?

TESSIE

Drew.

Drew extends his hand, and Coach does not shake it.

64. The Flying Machine

DREW

How are you, sir? Tess has told me all about you

COACH GEORGE

Uh huh. (Beat) Tessie, get a move on.

She starts to zip up her sweatshirt.

DREW

Have you seen her knee?

COACH GEORGE

What about it?

TESSIE

I'm fine. (To Coach) I'm fine.

DREW

She should see someone.

TESSIE

I'm fine.

COACH GEORGE

Boy, are you a doctor?

DREW

No.

COACH GEORGE

Okay then. Well, if she has a problem, she'll say something. She's a big girl. She doesn't need you to speak for her.

DREW

Tessie, say something

TESSIE

Why don't you go wait in the car, Drew?

DREW

Wait. But

TESSIE

Go. It's fine.

65. The Flying Machine

DREW

Fine. I'll be right over there.

He kisses her, and starts to walk off.

COACH GEORGE

Go on. (Beat) Nice guy.

TESSIE

He was just picking me up.

COACH GEORGE

You've got a fan. Spending a lot of time with him?

She shrugs.

TESSIE

I dunno. What's a lot? Anyway

COACH GEORGE

Jesus Christ, Tessie.

TESSIE

What does it matter?

COACH GEORGE

What does it matter? You're unfocused.

TESSIE

I am not.

COACH GEORGE

You sucked this morning.

TESSIE

I did not.

COACH GEORGE

Really?

TESSIE

You're just saying that to- to

66. The Flying Machine

COACH GEORGE

Come on, kiddo. You're better than this.

TESSIE

Fine. When?

COACH GEORGE

During that 10K steady-state piece, you checked out for most of it.

TESSIE

I did not.

COACH GEORGE

Oh yeah? Your stroke rate crept up to a 26, and it's not like you were clearing your puddles any faster.

TESSIE

There was a crosswind. I had to deal with the wake from the lightweights.

COACH GEORGE

Oh. And now you're making excuses? You've got a huge race coming up.

TESSIE

I know that.

COACH GEORGE

If you want to win, you have to

TESSIE

I know what I have to do thank you very much.

COACH GEORGE

Then what the hell are you doing? You're slipping. You're starting to spin your wheels. And what's worse, Tessie, is you don't even realize it.

TESSIE

Jesus Christ. Do you honestly think this is helping? Screaming at me like I'm-I'm some kind of novice? I have a few weeks of training left. I got this.

COACH GEORGE

Look. I'm just concerned.

TESSIE

No need.

67. The Flying Machine

COACH GEORGE

Now, you are something special. You could do amazing things. (Beat) You *will* do amazing things.

TESSIE

I know that. I know that!

She moves to leave. He grabs her by the arm. Her knee gives out slightly.

COACH GEORGE

Now listen, this is important, okay? Now that guy, I'll admit it, I don't know him that well

TESSIE

You don't.

COACH GEORGE

And why is that? Huh? Why have I never heard of this Drew person before? Huh?

TESSIE

Since when do you need to know where I am or who I am every second of every day?!?

COACH GEORGE

SINCE YOU STARTED RACING LIKE SHIT, TESSIE! (Long pause) All I'm saying is... you shouldn't let any man get in the way of what you want.

TESSIE

He won't. He's not

COACH GEORGE

And- and I don't want someone else's agenda to derail everything you've been killing yourself for because he is just... average. A guy like that? Look at him. He wouldn't know a burpee if it kicked him in the balls. Tessie. Tessie! He will always be average.

TESSIE

Well, that's not Drew. (Beat) Can I go now?

She takes two steps. Staggeres for two more. She stops for a moment. Sighs.

COACH GEORGE

What's the problem then? Your back?

TESSIE

No. It's fine.

68. The Flying Machine

COACH GEORGE

You wanna see the tape of today's practice?

TESSIE

No.

COACH GEORGE

Do you even want this anymore?

TESSIE

What kind of a question is that, Coach?

COACH GEORGE

Well then get your head out of your ass and PERFORM.

TESSIE

I'm fucking trying, okay?

COACH GEORGE

When has trying ever been enough?

It's not

TESSIE

Then what?

COACH GEORGE

I'm just- I gotta go.

TESSIE

Tessie! You're not leaving until you answer.

COACH GEORGE

She tries to side-step him. He blocks her. She shifts uncomfortably to try again and loses her balance.

Fine! It's my knee.

TESSIE

What?

COACH GEORGE

Silence.

It's my knee, okay?

TESSIE

69. The Flying Machine

What? What happened?

COACH GEORGE

I dunno.

TESSIE

Well, what's wrong with it?

COACH GEORGE

It just started clicking.

TESSIE

When? Up at the catch? When you're at full compression?

COACH GEORGE

That and at the finish. Look, whatever. I have to go.

TESSIE

Whoa. Whoa. Whoa. When did this start?

COACH GEORGE

TESSIE

Like a little while ago. I thought it would go away, but... but it's getting worse.

COACH GEORGE

Why didn't you say anything? How come that idiot knew before I did? We should take you to the trainer.

TESSIE

I did already. I apparently should see an orthopedic surgeon. Or whatever.

COACH GEORGE

Surgeon? You should have told me. I would have went with you.

TESSIE

She said I should see

COACH GEORGE

Well, do you need a break? Should we take you out of the Princeton 8? Just have you row singles for a while? Maybe doing two practices everyday is

TESSIE

No.

70. The Flying Machine

COACH GEORGE

The single's what's going to get you to the Games. The 8 isn't as important. It's just a college race. Might be better for you to just focus on racing in your single.

TESSIE

I don't want that

COACH GEORGE

Because you should really take care of yourself. Think about how important these qualifiers

TESSIE

I know they are.

COACH GEORGE

I'll have Coach Bettancourt take you out of the first 8 by Monday.

TESSIE

No. I

COACH GEORGE

Don't worry. They can figure out seat racing before the Yale race

TESSIE

You can't take this away from me!

COACH GEORGE

What?

TESSIE

I won't let you. I want to- I need to race with them. I don't want to be alone all the time. I like racing with them

COACH GEORGE

You need to get your priorities straight.

TESSIE

I'm doing both. I know being an elite rower requires sacrifice. But, I'm- I refuse to give this up. I can't just be alone all the time. I'm

COACH GEORGE

You sure?

TESSIE

Yes. I don't want to leave the team over something like this. It's stupid.

71. The Flying Machine

COACH GEORGE

Okay.

TESSIE

Okay.

Pause.

COACH GEORGE

What's the matter?

TESSIE

Nothing.

COACH GEORGE

You're gonna be fine. It's mind over matter.

TESSIE

Yeah I know.

COACH GEORGE

Remember the cracked rib?

TESSIE

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. I still won.

COACH GEORGE

Exactly! This too shall pass.

TESSIE

Thanks.

COACH GEORGE

You got this, Tessie.

TESSIE

Yeah. I gotta go.

COACH GEORGE

Make sure you roll out your IT bands after you clean the boat.

TESSIE

Ok. Ok. Ok. I'll do it later.

COACH GEORGE

The black foam roller. Not the white one. Too soft.

72. The Flying Machine

TESSIE

I will.

COACH GEORGE

You know...

He puts his arm around her.

TESSIE

What?

Pause.

COACH GEORGE

There's this thing I've heard people do. People with knee problems.

TESSIE

Oh?

COACH GEORGE

It's just an idea, kiddo. Might help. Tessie, have you ever heard of cortisone shots? It's this thing. Pretty cool. They inject it into the knee or whatever. And it makes the pain go away.

TESSIE

Really?

COACH GEORGE

Yeah. They're not that big of a deal- lots of athletes get them. All the time.

TESSIE

Huh.

COACH GEORGE

Something to think about. Later. If this keeps acting up. But if this is what's been distracting you... I don't know. You might want to deal with this sooner.

TESSIE

Yeah.

COACH GEORGE

But I don't want to put any pressure on you...

Pause.

TESSIE

No. I know. Are there any, like side effects?

73. The Flying Machine

COACH GEORGE

It's not like it's steroids or anything. I just know how much you want to win, so I...

TESSIE

Of course.

COACH GEORGE

Up to you. I just want you to get what *you* want. You're too good

to... Pause.

She tries to extend her leg. She can't.

TESSIE

No, you're right. Let's do it.

COACH GEORGE

Okay. I'll make the phone call.

Car honks.

DREW (OFF STAGE)

Tess!

TESSIE

I'm gonna go. Let me know when they want me to come in.

COACH GEORGE

Smart decision. You feel better?

TESSIE

I know. (Beat) Yeah. I feel better. Sort of.

Car honks.

DREW (OFF STAGE)

Tess! Hurry up! I'm starving.

TESSIE

(Shouts)

Oh my God! All right! (To Coach) I've got to

COACH GEORGE

I don't like that boy.

74. The Flying Machine

TESSIE

Oh come on, Coach.

COACH GEORGE

Just do me a favor: try and get some rest, okay? Think about what we talked about?

TESSIE

Yeah. Sure. Rest. Fine.

She slowly walks off, attempting to conceal her limp.

SCENE 4:

The Dock. Very early in the morning.

Tessie, in sweatpants and a sweatshirt, rushes on stage--slightly limping. Drew follows after her.

TESSIE

Oh my God. I can't believe we're so late.

DREW

Relax. He's not even here yet. (Beat) How is it still this cold out?

TESSIE

(Distracted)

I knew we shouldn't have

DREW

Wait, what?

TESSIE

Nothing. It doesn't matter. We're here now.

DREW

You're five minutes late. Relax. It's not like there's a lot of traffic at 5:30. You don't need to be so irrational about

TESSIE

You're right. (Beat) Thanks for driving me, babe. I'll see you later.

She kisses him. He starts to head out. Pauses.

75. The Flying Machine

DREW

Hey. What did you think about that book I gave you?

TESSIE

Infinite Jest? Well, I started it...

DREW

You didn't like it.

TESSIE

No, it's not that I don't like it. It's just kind of... dense.

DREW

I thought you'd like it. (Beat) I don't know, I'd figure you'd dig it. Regardless. It's one of those books everyone should read. You know?

TESSIE

I will. I've just had some other shit going on. I've been to the trainer a lot, getting these I'm fine.

DREW

Your knee okay?

TESSIE

Yeah. It's nothing.

DREW

Wait. I wasn't hurting you when we

TESSIE

Don't be ridiculous. (Beat) It was great.

DREW

Well, should we maybe not... maybe cool it for a while?

TESSIE

No! I'm going to be perfectly fine. I told you.

DREW

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. You're hard-core and whatever.

TESSIE

I am, damn it.

She starts to take off her sweats, folding them neatly.

76. The Flying Machine

DREW

Are you sure you're okay? You're waddling.

TESSIE

Stop. I am not waddling.

DREW

Waddle waddle waddle...

He smiles, staring at her.

TESSIE

(Playfully)

Shut up. (Beat) What?

DREW

I... nah. We'll do this later.

He smiles like a total fucking goofball.

TESSIE

You should go back to bed. You're totally fucking out of it. (Beat) I mean it!

DREW

Maybe I will...

TESSIE

Stop doing that thing with your face.

Drew pulls out his phone. Starts scrolling.

DREW

See? I'm not even looking at you. I'm looking at my phone. Okay? (Scrolls) OH SHIT!

Drew gasps and then starts laughing. He frantically scrolls.

TESSIE

Jesus! What the

DREW

Oh my fucking God.

TESSIE

What, Drew???

(Reading)

DREW

77. The Flying Machine

Congratulations. On behalf of the Gruber Foundation, we would like to offer you this year's Gruber Prize for your research advances the field of neuroscience with respect to the nervous system. We invite you to our gala reception on May 11th at the Society of Neuroscientists at 7 o'clock in the evening, where the President of the Gruber Foundation will present your award and \$500,000 in celebration of your efforts. Congratulations again. WHAAAAAAT?!?

TESSIE

Wow. Wow...

DREW

OH MY GOD!

He dances around a little bit, waving his phone in the air.

TESSIE

That's so cool.

DREW

You have no clue how big this is.

TESSIE

Um, I think I get how big half a million dollars is. Amazing.

She hugs him.

DREW

Right?? I can't wait to call my parents. I mean, it's 4:30 in Chicago. But whatever, I should call them anyway? Ahhh! I'm just so excited!

TESSIE

(Quietly)

It's really great.

DREW

It is! I can't wait for you to meet them. They'll drive down for the gala next Thursday, of course.

78. The Flying Machine

TESSIE

(Distracted)

Huh?

DREW

Well, I'd like them to meet my girlfriend.

TESSIE

That's nice. Who's that?

DREW

Idiot!

He gives her a playful shove. She staggers for two steps and then regains her balance.

TESSIE

Hmm... girlfriend... You've told them about me?

DREW

Uh yeah. And they're going to be so excited to meet you at the gala

dinner! Pause.

TESSIE

Drew. You know I can't.

DREW

Wait. Since we met, I've never seen you even take a sick day. Even when you've actually been sick. Can't you just take off? It's for a good cause. (Beat) I bet you'll look sexy as hell in a dress. Or anything that's not Tiger black and orange.

TESSIE

Uh no. I can't just take off I'm skipping morning practice that day to get an MRI

DREW

Finally.

She starts stretching, in her movements she no longer faces him.

TESSIE

I know. I know. I know. But I have qualifiers coming up. You know that it was any other time...

**THE PLAYWRIGHT SPEAKS:** *When you think of sports plays, you think: Rocky the Musical, Lombardi, Magic/Bird, That Championship Season, and Damn Yankees. There are many sports plays featuring characters that must endure the harrowing trials of what it takes to win, but I've noticed that there are absolutely no plays featuring a female athlete enduring this same struggle. Why is that? I feel that there is actually more at stake for a female athlete attempting to reach the pinnacle of success than for her male counterparts. Perhaps a play concerning top level female athletes just hasn't been written before. So, I've written one. Yes, The Wolves is a wonderful play (I wrote this before its debut), but it's about high school girls and their team dynamics. They're children. Girlish amateurs at best. It's important to show women of strength: both physically and mentally. We always see women, particularly younger women, struggling with their identity or who are beautiful losers having an existential crisis. I feel that there is something more dramatically interesting with a woman who is GOOD at something. Actually, screw good- she's Excellent. And as the audience follows Tessie's journey, we learn Excellence COSTS.*

*I myself am a recovering rower. It's like a drug addiction. You're never fully over it. It nearly killed me. The playwright Eduardo Machado once told me to write about what you're obsessed with (I'm paraphrasing). Suffice it to say, I am obsessed with the sport. You sort of have to be in order to be competitive. I rowed at Columbia University. It broke me and yet somehow, I absolutely loved it. It is a play about pain and sacrifice. It's about loving a thing that ruins your life. Each character loves something in this play until it breaks or breaks them. At the end, we realize that Tessie's knee will heal, but she'll never recover as a person from her injury. It's closer to Gruesome Playground Injuries than The Wolves.*

*In terms of influences, Rajiv Joseph has been a major inspiration to my work. I love reading and seeing his wonderful body of work. I must give credit to the influences that you can't see direct ties to in my work, those who have challenged me and made me a better writer IRL so*

*to speak. I want to thank the mentors who helped me develop this play: Eduardo Machado and Suzan-Lori Parks at NYU. I also want to thank Dan O'Brien and the inimitable Paula Vogel for your insights at the workshop during the Sewanee Writers' Conference... and for the delightful excursions to Waffle House down there in deep Tennessee.*

**AUTHOR BIO:** Siobhan Gilbert is a 2015 MFA graduate in Dramatic Writing from NYU's Tisch School of the Arts, where she was awarded the Department Full-tuition Fellowship. She is a playwright and screenwriter with dual citizenship in the US and Ireland. She produces, writes, and directs branded content for companies like Wisecrack, Inc. She has been an artist in residence for playwriting and screenwriting at Creede Repertory Theater in Colorado, Arts Letters & Numbers in upstate New York, Listhús Artist Residency Program in Iceland, FORGE theater company in Connecticut, and at the Tyrone Guthrie Centre in Ireland. Her short film, Westward Expansion, was featured at the 2014 New York 48 Hour Film Festival. Her script, Alsos, was a 2017 Austin Film Festival and Slamdance Semi-Finalist. Her 1/2 hour pilot Ivy League A-holes was a finalist for the Fusion Film Festival Best 1/2 hour Pilot Category and the WGAE Made in NY Writers Room Initiative. Her feature horror script, The Maddening Filth, was on the 2017 Bloodlist.

Her plays have been featured in Primary Stages' Detention series, Columbia University, the Davenport Theatre, John DeSotelle Studio, New York University, the Classical Theater of Harlem, the Last Frontier Theater Conference in Alaska, Dixon Place, HERE Arts Center, the Tank Theater, Theatre 54, Shetler Studios, and the Old Globe in San Diego. Her ten minute play, The Interview, which she directed, has been published by Indie Theater Now. Her play Spotlight was a semi-finalist at the Bay Area Playwrights Festival. Her play, The Flying Machine, was a finalist for the Princess Grace Award and a finalist for the Henley Rose Playwriting Competition for Women. Her plays, Memorare and Uncertainty, were both semi-finalists for the O'Neill National Playwrights Conference and the Bay Area Playwrights Festival. She was the recipient of the 2015 MFA fellowship to the Sewanee Writer's Conference in Tennessee where her play was workshopped under the guidance of Pulitzer Prize winning playwright, Paula Vogel.--  
Siobhan Marielle Gilbert

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