

PERUSAL SCRIPT

CHAMPION

by
Joanna H. Kraus



Newport, Maine

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CHAMPION

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ORDER #3363

This script is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents are either products of the author's imagination or, if real, are used fictitiously. The idea for *Champion* was triggered by the account of a young girl, who had been bullied and then went on to achieve international acclaim.

Champion was a winner in the 2021 Old Miner Children's Playwriting Contest. Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic Utah Valley University was not able to have a live production. However, students did give a Zoom reading under the direction of Dr. John D. Newman.

The premiere production was produced by Clarks Summit University Kindred HeARTs Players in 2022 under the direction of Dr. Dawn A. Schluetz with the following designers: Technical Director: Rich Fuchs; Athletic Skills Specialist, Rick Harrison; Guest Lighting and Sound, Rich Fuchs; Costumes, Krysta Nordland; Promotional Design, Katie Leonard. Plus Dramaturge, Sue Cagley; and Stage Manager, Emily Johnston.

CAST

ROBIN	Rachel Haines
FRANCINE	Reannah Weiss
PAT	Everett Pilbeam
MIMI	Ashley Sensenig
BRENDA	Olivia Campbell
ALYSSA	Alysa Walker
CLAIRE	Makayla Peltz
REFEREE	Cassia Hinkle

CHARACTERS — (6f, 1m)

FRANCINE — Robin's mother. Warm and supportive. New owner of a gift shop. 35.

PAT — he is fair, firm, compassionate. Starbirds water-polo coach and a high school guidance counselor. 44

ROBIN — Unusually tall for her age and sensitive about her height. Wants friends and determined to do something astonishing. Almost 14

ALYSSA — Right winger on the Starbirds team. Kind, but not part of the clique. 14.

MIMI — The Queen Bee of the Starbirds team. A natural leader, a strong player but with a devious mean streak and a troubled home. 14.

BRENDA — Submissive. At first Mimi's devoted follower. 14.

CLAIRE — The Starbirds goalie. Easy-going. 14.

Note:

As our nation is multi-cultural, it is desirable that the casting reflect this diversity.

The typical youth team has six players plus goalie. But five players can give the effect of the choreographed games. However, the cast can easily be expanded to include more players or subs, who are suited up,

waiting on the bench. Or you can use luan cutouts in action poses. Also, spectators can be added either with additional actors or via luan cutouts or a photo mural of a crowd adding recorded sound for cheers, boos, shouts, referee's whistle etc.

There is absolutely NO necessity for a real pool on stage.

Instead. Simply use lighting effects that resemble rippling water. Then, the team's movements can be choreographed to simulate the brief moments of a game or practice.

Costume Note: If a more modest appearance for the team members is desired, instead of the standard water polo swimsuit, use board swim shorts over a swimsuit OR use a long sleeve swim shirt with board swim shorts. The Starbirds logo should be visible. After pool practice a sweatshirt and jeans can be tossed on quickly plus sandals and possibly a sports towel thrown across the shoulder.

For information on the Olympic Development Program (ODP) go to www.usawaterpolo.org.

TIME: The present.

THE PLACE: The action takes place over a year and a half in: Francine's gift shop. Robin's home, a parking lot, and a variety of pool areas.

Scenic design is non-realistic and minimal: levels, blocks, a door frame and an area in which lighting can give the effect of rippling water ending in the suggestion of a goalie cage. The action flows freely.

ACT I

Scene 1: Francine's gift shop. November.

Scene 2: A high school pool, East Bay, California. January.

Scene 3: Robin's home. February.

Scene 4: A high school pool, East Bay, California. Late March.

Scene 5: Robin's home. Immediately after.

Scene 6: A high school pool East Bay, California. April.

Scene 7: Robin's home. Immediately after.

ACT II

Scene 1: A high school pool, East Bay, California. May.

Scene 2: Robin's home. June.

Scene 3: A high school pool area, East Bay, California. July.

Scene 4: A high school pool area, East Bay, California. Late July.

Scene 5: A pool area in San Diego, California. October.

Scene 6: Robin's home. October.

Scene 7: A parking lot where the ODP is held. December.

Scene 8: The ODP tournament in mid-March and Memorial Day weekend in Orange County, California.
May.

Scene 9: Robin's home Immediately after.

CHAMPION by Joanna H. Kraus • 6f, 1m. about 75 minutes. **Can Robin do something that will amaze everyone, so her family is proud of her?** When a water polo club coach sees her unusual height and strength, he encourages her to join the club and insists he can make her a champion. Intrigued, she joins but she is inexperienced as an athlete and unprepared for the bullying and hostility she encounters. Her mother and Robin's new friend, Alyssa, convince her to fight back. Persisting, she practices daily and finally scores

her first goal. Team members congratulate her – except for Mimi – who viciously attempts to get rid of her. One day at an out-of-town game, Robin plays the position of goalie and helps her team win. She’s surrounded by the praise and hugs of her teammates with the one jealous exception. The coach calls her a “natural” and encourages her to attend the Olympic Development Program in her age group, which is the first of many steps to the international team. Throughout the year goalie training is rough and rigorous, but she is continually promoted to the next step – and the next, each one more difficult than the previous. Friendships are explored and some surprises are in store. At the conclusion of a fierce three-day competition, the names of the National Team rosters are announced. Just as Robin’s about to admit defeat, she unexpectedly hears her own name called. Thrilled, she is now in the top three per cent of the nation, on track for that year’s international team. **ORDER #3363**

JOANNA H. KRAUS — is an award-winning playwright of twenty produced and published plays. *THE ICE WOLF* (Dramatic Publishing), and *REMEMBER MY NAME* (Samuel French, now Concord Theatricals)) were both produced off-off Broadway. The former appears in several anthologies and has a Spanish version. Short plays *Me2*, *THE DRAGON HAMMER*, *THE TALE OF ONIROKU*, and *TAMALES AND ROSES* are included in *Five Plays for Young Audiences* (Leicester Bay Theatricals.) Kraus received the Charlotte Chorpenning Cup and the Distinguished Play Award from the American Alliance for Theatre and Education. In addition, she’s received commissions to dramatize history, among them, *SUNDAY GOLD* and *ANGEL IN THE NIGHT*. (Dramatic Publishing.) Picture books include *A NIGHT OF TAMALES AND ROSES* (Shenanigan Books) listed in the Bank Street College of Education edition of *Best Children’s Books*, *BLUE TOBOGGAN* (Mascot Books) *BRAVO, BENNY* (Mirror Publishing) *OH, LITTLE HAM OF BUFFALO*, a Korean Adoption Memoir (Mirror Publishing), *THE BLUE JEANS REBELLION* (Leicester Bay Books) and *DOG ON TRIAL* (Mirror Publishing.) Her latest play *CHAMPION* was a winner in the 2021 Old Miner Children’s Playwriting contest. For more than twenty years she was the children’s book reviewer, for the Bay Area News Group and is a member of The Dramatists Guild and SCBWI. Kraus is Professor Emerita of the State University of New York Brockport, a graduate of Sarah Lawrence College and holds an M.A. from U.C. L.A. and an Ed.D. from Columbia University. She lives in California. Her website is: www.joannakraus.com

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Secondary Research included:

- *Sydney's Silver Lining* (Kyle Utsumi)
- *Program and Work of the Youth Water Polo Clubs* by Zoran Kacic and Ivan Vranjes, translated and adapted by Ivan Vranjes
- The Olympic Development Program website
- Varied video and news articles on water polo training and game excerpts.

CHAMPION

ACT I

SCENE: A non-realistic set with levels, blocks, a door frame, and an area in which lighting can give the effect of rippling water. Late fall.

AT RISE: a group of the water-polo club Starbirds members are warming up: stretching, lifting weights, some in pairs, some individually. The STARBIRDS also serve as ENSEMBLE.

Prologue — ENSEMBLE freezes as lights dim on them and come up on ROBIN.

ROBIN: *(to audience)* Champion! He said he'd make me a champion.

ENSEMBLE: *(a whisper that gets louder and louder)* Champion. Champion. **Champion.**

ROBIN: No one ever said that before. Not to me. When my dad was alive, he used to say, "Kid you can do anything you want, as long as you set your mind to it. You're going to make me proud." He's gone now. Died a year and a half ago. But I still want to make him proud.

ENSEMBLE: Champion, Champion. Champion.

ROBIN: It all began on a cloudy afternoon in November.

(ROBIN exits.)

Scene One — LIGHTING: comes up on gift shop

PAT: This is the best gift shop around, Francine.

FRANCINE: *(wrapping his purchases)* Glad you like it, Pat. Spread the word.

PAT: Glad to.

FRANCINE: When the opportunity came to buy the place, I had to grab it.

(Handing Pat his packages)

But not so easy on my daughter.

I told her we were going to start a new life, but she misses her dad a lot. They were best buddies.

PAT: Losing your dad, your old home, your old friends isn't easy.

FRANCINE: Yes, but now it's time to let the world in. Time to give our new home a chance.

(Looks up and sees ROBIN behind a large box.)

Here's my favorite daughter now.

(ROBIN enters carrying a huge box.)

PAT: *(taking it from her)* Hey, let me help you.

FRANCINE: Hi, honey, where was that?

ROBIN: Outside the door.

FRANCINE: They should have brought it in. I'll call and complain.

ROBIN: No. don't do that. I said I'd bring it in.

PAT: Man, this is heavy. What's in it? Bricks? Where do you want it?

FRANCINE: *(points to a corner)* Over there is fine. It's gifts for the holidays. I'll unpack it later.

ROBIN: I'll help.

FRANCINE: *(with a light laugh)* My daughter just wants to pick out her birthday gift.

PAT: We haven't met. But happy birthday in advance.

FRANCINE: Sorry, I didn't introduce you. Pat, this is Robin. Robin this is Mr. Morrison. He's a guidance counselor at the high school.

PAT: And when I'm not doing that, I coach water-polo. What sports do you play?

ROBIN: I used to play pickle ball with my dad. And at my old school I was the fastest runner.

PAT: Any team sports?

ROBIN: I tried softball. But there's a lot of waiting around.

PAT: *(laughs)* Anyway, softball's seasonal. Our water-polo club's all-year-long.

ROBIN: I never saw a game. What's it like?

PAT: Sort of a cross between basketball and soccer. But in the water.

ROBIN: I don't like swimming much.

FRANCINE: We used to live right near the ocean

PAT: We never use the ocean. Too unpredictable. All our games are in the pool.

FRANCINE: Our new condo has a small one.

ROBIN: It does look friendlier than the ocean.

PAT: I wouldn't exactly call water-polo friendly. It's challenging. Demanding. Fast and furious. And once you're in in the water, believe me, there's no waiting around.

ROBIN: Sounds exciting.

PAT: You bet. That's why we use a pool. No tides, undertows, currents or rogue waves.

FRANCINE: *(a little worried)* How deep a pool?

PAT: Seven feet—when we're lucky.

FRANCINE: Seven feet!

PAT: Usually less. We take what we can get for practice and when we travel.

ROBIN: *(intrigued)* Travel?

FRANCINE: How far?

PAT: To the moon and back—if they've got a team.

(To Robin)

Interested?

FRANCINE: Pat, she barely knows how to swim.

ROBIN: I never really tried. The waves kept knocking me down. Mom said she'd teach me though, whenever I want.

PAT: Go for it. Everyone should know how to swim.

ROBIN: Why?

PAT: Survival. You don't know when you might need it.

ROBIN: I never thought about that.

PAT: *(idea perking)* You're strong, Robin. I just saw that. And if you're a fast runner you've got speed and endurance. Plus, you're tall for your age.

ROBIN: I know.

PAT: That's a plus, Robin. A plus. With some work, some dedication, some determination, I bet I could make you a champion.

ENSEMBLE: Champion, champion, champion.

PAT: I played in the Olympic games. Silver medal. I know what it takes. Skill, strength, speed, and grit.

FRANCINE: Pat, she's never been keen on swimming.

PAT: That means I wouldn't have to undo bad habits. But Robin, it's hard work. Are you ready for that?

ROBIN: I'm not afraid of hard work.

PAT: And commitment. Hours and hours of practice and a lot of weekend games. Besides school there's no time for anything else. Any social life would be with the club.

FRANCINE: She's going to a new school. I don't want her to miss all those after-school activities and—

ROBIN: *(breaks in)* That's okay, Mom. So far, I haven't done much of that anyway.

PAT: The club would give you a chance to make new friends.

ENSEMBLE: *(again, an escalating whisper)* Champion. Champion. **Champion.**

ROBIN: Mom, I want to try.

PAT: I'd need at least a year. But why don't you both talk it over and let me know next week.

ENSEMBLE: *(a whisper)* Champion, Champion. Champion.

ROBIN: Yes.

FRANCINE: Yes, what?

ROBIN: Yes. Now. Not next week. Now. Something I can belong to. A team. And travel. Somewhere where it's...where it's okay to be the tallest girl in town.

(Hesitates and turns to PAT.)

Can you really....

PAT: Make you a champion? You do your best, and I'll promise to do mine.

ROBIN: That would make my dad proud.

(Tears in her eyes, FRANCINE hugs ROBIN.)

FRANCINE: Put that way how can I refuse. Pat, you'll look after her, won't you? She's all I've got.

PAT: I won't coddle her. My end is to teach her. Hers is to practice. Agreed?

ROBIN: When do we start?

PAT: Show up right after winter break. Meantime, make friends with that condo pool.

FRANCINE: I'll make sure she can stay afloat. A long time ago I was a good swimmer. But this is the first time we've ever had a pool practically outside our door.

PAT: I'll e-mail you the necessary forms to sign and a list of what to buy.

FRANCINE: Pat, this is very generous of you, but---

PAT: No "but's." Once she can swim, your job will be to watch and wait. And if I'm right, and I'm rarely wrong, I get to choose any gift here that's under fifty dollars.

(THEY laugh and shake hands. LIGHTING fades on FRANCINE and PAT as THEY exit.)

ROBIN: So, Mom began to teach me. And there were no waves in the pool. Gradually, I went from a dog paddle to a slow free-style—a very slow free style. Mom was a stickler on form, on my doing it right. "Speed can come later," she said. And I kept hearing Dad's voice saying, "You can do anything you want as long as you set your mind to it." Then, one day, after a tough lesson, we were relaxing, floating, and I burst out laughing. "This feels great," I said. Mom kept smiling all through supper as we shared our Saturday night pizza.

Scene Two — *Lighting: fades and comes up on STARBIRDS warming up on pool deck. They are in logo t-shirts and shorts with swim suits underneath. (See costume note.)*

SCENE: January; Early evening.

The team members are exercising (choreographed) stretches, weight lifting, some individual, some in pairs. Upbeat popular music in the background.

MIMI: Okay, everyone, time for a circle. OUR circle.

(Obediently, THEY form one.)

Who are we?

STARBIRDS: The best! The best!

MIMI: Can we do it?

STARBIRDS: Yes, we can.

MIMI: Are we sure?

STARBIRDS: You bet we are.

MIMI: Let's hear it. Let's shout it. Who's the star?

STARBIRDS: *(exuberant)* We are. We are. Starbirds. Starbirds. Yea. Yea. Yea.

(PAT and ROBIN enter. STARBIRDS stop abruptly and stare at ROBIN.)

PAT: We have a new person joining our club. Say “hello” to Robin Goodman.

(ROBIN smiles hesitantly. ALYSSA smiles back. OTHERS give a half-hearted “Hi.”)

All right everyone, time for the pool. Alyssa, would you give Robin a three-minute tour?

ALYSSA: Sure, Coach.

(OTHERS rapidly toss t-shirts and shorts aside and are already out with swim caps on, when ALYSSA and ROBIN come into change area.)

ALYSSA: Put everything here. It’s safe. If you come earlier you can warm up with us.

ROBIN: Doesn’t the coach do the training?

ALYSSA: Sure. This is just extra for anyone who wants it. Pretty cold in January to swim outside.

ROBIN: Do you all know each other well?

ALYSSA: They’ve been together for years. I came in last year. The newbie. So, I get to put away gear. Always the newest. Or the youngest. So now it’ll be you. Don’t worry. I’ll show you. C’mon.

(THEY enter the pool area with caps on.)

MIMI: It’s about time.

PAT: Okay, in you go. For 200.

ROBIN: 200 what?

MIMI: Oh, boy.

ALYSSA: Meters.

PAT: And no one stops until Robin finishes.

(Swimming is choreographed.)

Good job, Claire. Faster than last time.

(As BRENDA stops.)

Keep going, Brenda. No one leaves until Robin’s done.

(SHE continues. Finally, ROBIN finishes.)

Okay, everyone out. Robin, need to see you for a minute.

(OTHERS go to changing area.)

MIMI: What a waste. Bet right now he’s telling her to leave.

BRENDA: I had to swim five extra laps before she finished. Five.

MIMI: And we never got to practice passing the way we usually do.

ALYSSA: It was her first time.

MIMI: And I hope it's her last.

CLAIRE: One thing's certain. They'll never name an aquatic center after her.

(THEY laugh.)

MIMI: Listen, if she plays, we'll look lousy. We could lose every game.

ALYSSA: So, she was slow. Maybe she was nervous.

MIMI: Starbirds don't need losers.

ALYSSA: She seemed nice.

MIMI: *(a put down)*. You like everyone.

ALYSSA: *(softly)* Not everyone.

CLAIRE: Bet you're tired of being the gopher, right?

ALYSSA: Sure, but everyone deserves a second chance.

MIMI: The only reason the coach put YOU on our team is we needed someone left handed to be right winger. And we don't need advice from a newbie. The rest of us have been together for years.

BRENDA: And I never had to swim five extra laps for anyone!

ALYSSA: What if it were you, Mimi?

MIMI: Me! I've been playing since I was eight. My goal is the Olympics, not babysitting.

BRENDA: You're the star of Starbirds.

MIMI: Thanks, Brenda. Let her go back to Splash Ball.

ALYSSA: That's for the six-year-olds.

MIMI: You said it

BRENDA: She's coming.

MIMI: Quick. I have an idea.

(Gathers them in a huddle. As ROBIN enters, THEY file out.)

ROBIN: HI...Sorry about...

(But they're gone. Only ALYSSA at the end of the line, waves. STARBIRDS wait outside in a friendly circle, talking, giggling. When ROBIN exits, they ignore her as cars honk and girls fly off to their rides. ALYSSA still stands there uncertainly. ROBIN sits alone on the bleacher.)

PAT: Alyssa. I saw your underwater turns. Good job.

ALYSSA: Thanks, Coach.

PAT: I have a question.

(Pulls out clipboard.)

Is this your current address.

ALYSSA: Yes. Why?

PAT: I have a favor.

(THEY confer.)

ALYSSA: Sure. Oh, there's my dad, Bye.

(Waves to ROBIN still sitting on the bleacher and exits.)

PAT: Your Mom running late?

ROBIN: I guess.

PAT: I'll wait 'til she comes.

ROBIN: You don't need to.

PAT: I don't leave until everyone's picked up. At this hour it's too dark and deserted.

ROBIN: *(relieved)* There she is.

PAT: I need to talk to her for a minute.

FRANCINE: *(dashing in)* Sorry I'm a few minutes late. It won't happen again. A last-minute customer who couldn't make up her mind.

(to ROBIN)

How'd you do, Honey?

ROBIN: So-so.

PAT: For a first time it was okay. You have good basic form and you showed stamina. But...

ROBIN: I was too slow.

PAT: Francine, she needs some extra coaching on those underwater turns. Would you allow one of the girls who's good at it to coach her privately—in your pool?

ROBIN: Who?

PAT: Alyssa

ROBIN: Okay with me.

FRANCINE: When?

PAT: Right after school. She lives near you.

FRANCINE: That'll work.

(As they walk out.)

I'm glad you're making new friends.

(ROBIN doesn't answer.)

Aren't you?

ROBIN: Let's go, Mom. I'm freezing.

(LIGHTING: fades as they exit.)

Scene Three — *Three weeks later at Robin's condo. Late afternoon. February.*

AT RISE: ALYSSA and ROBIN have their water bottles and snacks.

ALYSSA: The last time it looked really good.

ROBIN: Only took three weeks. But it sure makes a difference in the pool.

ALYSSA: And practicing every day helped.

ROBIN: Thanks, Alyssa.

(Takes out a small package.)

This is for you.

ALYSSA: For me?

(Opens it and removes a bracelet.)

Oh, Robin, these are my favorite colors. Is it from your mom's store?

ROBIN: Yes, but I made it. She sells some of my things.

ALYSSA: You made it? You make jewelry?

ROBIN: It's fun. I call it a good luck bracelet. I love mixing the colors.

ALYSSA: *(with a smile)* I'm going to call it a friend bracelet

ROBIN: Friend. I like that.

ALYSSA: Can you show me how?

ROBIN: Just beads and imagination. And time. Not much of that anymore. Not with school, and water-polo.

ALYSSA: Watch out for Mimi.

ROBIN: She ignores me. They all do. Except you.

ALYSSA: She can be mean underwater.

ROBIN: Last week she kicked me just when I was about to catch the ball.

ALYSSA: Last summer she grabbed someone on the other team and the girl's ear drum burst. She left the pool crying. Mimi called it an accident.

ROBIN: What about the referee?

ALYSSA: There's plenty they don't see. They watch the ball. Not us. Especially underwater. Mimi's determined to make it to the US Olympics team.

ROBIN: That's years away.

ALYSSA: We're one of the best teams in the west. So, she wants the Scouts to see her. First step, the Olympic Development Program. Then up-up-up. Sure, she wants everyone on Starbirds to look good, but not as good as she does.

ROBIN: Do you all want to be Olympians?

ALYSSA: I just want to be able to get a college scholarship. Now that women's water polo is part of the Olympics, colleges are trying to build up their teams. So, I might have a chance.

ROBIN: And then what?

ALYSSA: My mom wants me to be a teacher. Like she is. In a good school.

ROBIN: You're a born teacher. You'd be terrific.

ALYSSA: But that's not what I want. Oh, the teaching part's okay. But I want to be where I can help kids. Those kids that get forgotten. Make a difference in their lives. My mom teaches in a private school that

has picnic tables under a weeping willow tree. When it's warm enough they hold classes outside. The students bring her fancy perfumes and gifts at the end of the year.

ROBIN: Sounds nice.

ALYSSA: It is for her. Not for me. What about you?

ROBIN: I don't know yet. But I like what you said. Somehow, I want to make a difference too. Pull people together—instead of apart.

ALYSSA: So, right now, this spring, what do you want?

ENSEMBLE: Champion, champion, champion.

ROBIN: That's easy. To score a goal.

Scene Four — *the pool deck. Late March.*

AT RISE: COACH is leading players in squats and lunges on dry land. After a few minutes he switches.

PAT: Let's shoot some balls.

(This is pantomimed. THEY do a series: chest pass, overhead slam. PAT watches and comments.)

Nice going, Mimi. Brenda, don't hesitate. In the water you've got 30 seconds to shoot that ball.

(Pauses as ALYSSA throws with left hand.)

Nice throw, Alyssa.

MIMI: *(to BRENDA, gesturing to ROBIN)* She's terrible.

BRENDA: She's learning.

MIMI: She'll ruin us.

(ROBIN overhears and fumbles.)

PAT: Focus, Robin, Focus. Okay, let's try pairs. Mimi, work with Robin. Brenda, toss to Alyssa.

(STARBIRDS have spread out.)

MIMI: *(taunts)* You know, you suck.. That's why no one likes you. You should quit.

(Slams the ball at her.)

ROBIN: Why don't you just leave me alone?

PAT: All right, everyone, gather round. In two weeks we go to Stanford, so get ready.

CLAIRE: Who are we playing?

PAT: The Sharks.

MIMI: That's the toughest team there is. Are we all going?

PAT: Remember we've got a fund raiser Friday.

(Rips off sheet from clipboard.)

Brenda, make a list of what each of you is bringing. I'll be right back.

(Exits. BRENDA writes as they tell her.)

ALYSSIA: Banana bread with walnuts

MIMI: I'll bring honey lemon cake and lemon bars. Everyone loves my lemon bars.

BRENDA : I'll add cookies.

(If more players, get items from them.)

ROBIN: Cupcakes, I guess, Maybe with a star on top.

ALYSSA: For Starbirds. They'll sell right away.

MIMI: *(slyly)* Are you going to use the eggbeater?

ROBIN: *(puzzled)* No. I never use the eggbeater.

MIMI : *(nudging Brenda)* Especially in the pool.

ROBIN: I don't know what you're talking about.

MIMI: You don't have a clue, do you? You don't belong here. You're ruining our team. That's why no one talks to you. No one likes you.

BRENDA: Psst, Mimi, Coach coming.

(PAT re-enters.)

PAT: Everyone ready for some exciting news? Brenda, got the list for me?

BRENDA: *(handing it to Pat)* Just finishing, Coach.

CLAIRE: What's the news?

PAT: It's definite. Just got the e-mail. We're going to Missouri this summer.

(THEY applaud. PAT studies Brenda's list.)

Looks good. And be sure to invite parents and friends to buy. Remember it's for them, not for you. So, don't gain any weight.

BRENDA: Any advice?

PAT: No pillow fights after nine o'clock.

(THEY laugh.)

Alyssa, just for today, would you put the balls away.

MIMI: That's Robin's job.

PAT: I need to speak to Robin.

ALYSSA: Sure, Coach.

MIMI: *(as she exits with others)* Finally.

PAT: Robin, we need parental permission for you to go out of state, so would you get this signed and back to me?

ROBIN: Okay.

(Starts to leave.)

PAT: You don't usually mess up with the ball. How come?

ROBIN: It's ...nothing.

PAT: I want you to come to Missouri. Not to play. To watch. It'll be good for you to go on tour. See what it's like. Get the experience. There might be a few scouts there. They're always looking. Now, why are you still treading water?

ROBIN: What do you mean?

PAT: It's a lot easier if you use the egg beater. I told Mimi to show you. Didn't she?

ROBIN: Egg beater? We were talking about food, about the fundraiser. I thought...

PAT: Never mind. I'm going to show you. It's the oddest movement in any sport but crucial in water polo, because it keeps your hips high in the water. You're not bobbing up and down, and your hands are free. Watch.

(Sits and demonstrates.)

Do this first. One leg at a time. One leg goes clockwise. The other counter clockwise Both at the same time going opposite directions. Keep your legs wide for stability. Now let me see you do it. First one leg Then the other.

(SHE does.)

Again.

(SHE repeats.)

That's it. More or less. Now, Put them together. Go slow until you have the knack of it. Practice on dry land first.

(PAT goes to rippling water.)

In the water put your knees up to your armpits. Keep the space between your feet wide like the knees. Kick out and around so the foot stays sideways. Don't point your toes. Remember it's not ballet. Flex the foot. Got it?

ROBIN: I think so.

PAT: Go home and practice until it's automatic. Until you can do it without thinking. I want to see you score a goal.

ROBIN: You think I can?

PAT: I know you can.

ROBIN: Mimi said—

PAT: Look Robin, Most of the Starbirds, except Alyssa, have been together since they were eight years old. Just watch and learn. Mimi's a strong player. And Starbirds is a top team. You just need to prove yourself.

ROBIN: You mean ...gain admission.

PAT: In a way. Now when I see you at the next game, I want to see you use the eggbeater.

(With a smile.)

In the pool, not the kitchen.

(Looks at list.)

Well, both's okay. I like the sound of your cupcakes.

ROBIN: Thanks coach. I'll put an extra star on yours.

Scene Five — *Robin's home. March.*

AT RISE: ROBIN is hunting through a box of recipes.

FRANCINE: *(entering)* Hi, how's my favorite water polo player?

ROBIN: Okay.

FRANCINE: What are you looking for?

ROBIN: A cupcake recipe for the team fundraiser.

FRANCINE: Your dad used to love my chocolate cupcakes. The ones with vanilla frosting.

ROBIN: And sprinkles on top. I remember those. They were terrific. You haven't made those in a long time.

FRANCINE: No. Not since—

ROBIN: Want to help me?

FRANCINE: Sure.

ROBIN: How come they were the best chocolate cupcakes I've ever had.

FRANCINE: Secret ingredients.

(ROBIN looks at her expectantly.)

Can you keep it a secret?

ROBIN: Promise.

FRANCINE: It's some dark roast coffee... and a dash of cinnamon.

ROBIN: Ummm. No wonder. And I want to put a gold star on top. An edible one.

FRANCINE: That's easy. Use sugar sheets and cut out star shapes.

(Picks up papers)

What's this?

ROBIN: Permission slip. Coach needs you to sign. So, I can travel with the team to Missouri. Not to play. Just to see what touring is like. Only....I'm not sure I want to go.

FRANCINE: Why not? How's my resident Starbird?

ROBIN: Not so good. It's about the eggbeater.

FRANCINE: It's in the kitchen drawer. Where it always is.

ROBIN: Not that one. The one in water polo.

FRANCINE: I don't understand. I know Alyssa was working with you on the underwater turns. So, what's the problem now?

ROBIN: Alyssa's the only one on the team who talks to me. No one else.

FRANCINE: No one?

ROBIN: And today Mimi made fun of me about the eggbeater.

FRANCINE: Sorry. I still don't understand.

ROBIN: She had the whole team laughing at me

FRANCINE: What's this "eggbeater.?"

ROBIN: It's a way of kicking so that you can stay high in the water and keep your arms free. Coach says it's crucial for water polo. He wanted to know why I wasn't using it, when he'd told Mimi to show me. But, Mom, she never did. So, today he taught me how. I have to perfect it before the next game.

FRANCINE: You're a fast learner and you work hard. But there's something else, isn't there? What? Tell me.

ROBIN: (*pours out*) See, we were practicing throwing the ball and I overheard her tell Brenda, "She's terrible," so I flubbed it. When I didn't catch it Mimi said, "You know you suck. That's why no one likes you. You should quit."

FRANCINE: She has no right to talk to you that way. I don't care if her mom is the team mother.

ROBIN: They all ignore me. Except Alyssa.

FRANCINE: Is that why you're always sitting by yourself when I come to get you.

ROBIN: I'm always the last one to use the shower. They won't let me in, while they're there. They act like I have something contagious. Mimi says I'm ruining the team.

FRANCINE: Did you talk to the coach about this?

ROBIN: No.

FRANCINE: Do you want me to?

ROBIN: That will make it worse. I have to solve it myself.

FRANCINE: Did you ever hear of Shirley Chisholm?

ROBIN: Sure. We learned about her in school last year. The first black woman to serve in Congress.

FRANCINE: When she got to Washington and no one, I mean no one, in the room looked like her. All she could see was a sea of white faces and some of them definitely didn't want her there. So, how do you think she felt?

ROBIN: Pretty lonely, I'll bet.

FRANCINE: And?

ROBIN: And angry.

FRANCINE: But she was elected to do a job. So, she said, “If they don’t give you a seat at the table, bring a folding chair.”

ROBIN: Mom, I wasn’t Elected.

FRANCINE: No. You were SElected.

ROBIN: Anyway, I don’t think I even want to sit at their table.

FRANCINE: Why not?

ROBIN: I thought I’d make new friends. But I don’t want to go where I’m not wanted.

FRANCINE: Robin, what’s this all about?

ROBIN: They’re a clique. They follow Mimi like little ducks. Except Alyssa, And even she’s kind of afraid of her. Some of them even call me “Giant.”

FRANCINE: In my book, that’s called bullying. When they say things like that, what do you do?

ROBIN: Most of the time pretend I don’t hear. See, I thought if I didn’t react it would stop.

FRANCINE: That usually works.

ROBIN: It didn’t.

FRANCINE: Robin, if something’s not working out, it’s okay to leave. You have choices.

ROBIN: Mom, I like water polo. It’s a great sport. And I like the coach. And I like Alyssa, and I was excited about traveling. But now, I don’t know.

FRANCINE: So, what do you want to do?

ROBIN: I’m confused. What about all the money you paid. The membership, the travel, the uniform?

FRANCINE: Honey, you are way more important than a uniform.

ROBIN: Part of me wants to prove her wrong. The other part wants to go through a hole in the floor.

FRANCINE: No hole in the floor. No way. Then, I couldn’t hug you! But Robin don’t quit because one girl is mean.

ROBIN: She leads the pack.

FRANCINE: Maybe she’s the one who should leave.

ROBIN: Never happen. Coach told me she’s a strong player, that I can learn from watching.

FRANCINE: You’re brand new at this, and Pat wouldn’t have invited you to join the team unless he recognized potential. Look how much you’ve accomplished so far.

ENSEMBLE: Champion. Champion. Champion.

ROBIN: But would you be disappointed if I left?

FRANCINE: I'm on your team. Always have been and always will be. But before you break away, try fighting back.

ROBIN: Fighting back?

FRANCINE: What you said before. Prove her wrong. Then make your decision. Deal?

ROBIN: *(thinks)* DEAL.

FRANCINE: *(a triumphant fist in the air)* Here's to egg beaters.

ROBIN: *(echoing the gesture)* Both of them!

(THEY hug.)

Scene Six — *Outside the pool area. April. Off stage the bake sale is being set up.*

AT RISE: MIMI and BRENDA are putting up signs for the Starbirds fund raiser with arrows pointing to direct people. ALYSSA and CLAIRE enter with their contributions.)

BRENDA: *(points)* It's that way.

ALYSSA and CLAIRE: Thanks.

(THEY exit.)

MIMI: It's good that my mom's there to put out everything. She'll put ours in front.

BRENDA: Yours anyway. Think we have a chance to win tonight?

MIMI: Just keep throwing the ball to me.

(ROBIN enters with boxes of cupcakes, hardly able to see over the top of them and a sales sign.)

BRENDA: Wow, Robin's got too much to carry. I'll go...

MIMI: *(screaming)* Wait. Watch out. Look behind you. **Look.**

(Startled ROBIN tries to turn, stumbles and the boxes tumble.)

ROBIN: My cupcakes!

MIMI: Didn't you see it?

ROBIN: What?

MIMI: The snake.

ROBIN: Where?

(Looking.)

I don't see anything.

MIMI: Guess it's gone. It's lucky I warned you. Too bad about your cupcakes.

ROBIN: *(inspecting)* I think some are okay. I better go to deliver these before anything else happens and I'll get something to clean up this mess.

(Exits.)

BRENDA: *(to Mimi)* I didn't see one.

MIMI: Didn't you?

BRENDA: You made that up, Mimi, didn't you? Didn't you?

MIMI: I thought you were on my side.

PAT: *(runs on)* What's wrong? Are you all right? I heard you screaming.

MIMI: I saw one of those snakes.

(PAT looks at her, sees mess.)

PAT: Are those cupcakes for the fundraiser?

BRENDA: They were.

PAT: Whose?

BRENDA: Robin's. But she saved some.

PAT: *(slowly)* Mimi, what did this snake look like?

MIMI: Uh-uh, you know.

PAT: No. That's why I'm asking.

MIMI: It had those diamond things.

PAT: You mean a rattler?

MIMI: Yuh. One of those.

PAT: But this isn't the usual season for them. Too early. Usually they're only out in the heat of the day. But it could happen, I suppose. Did you hear anything? Rattlers usually make a sound before they strike.

(MIMI shrugs.)

Did you, Brenda?

BRENDA: I didn't hear anything.

(Slowly.)

And I didn't see anything either.

(MIMI glares at her.)

PAT: You scared me and who knows who else.

BRENDA: Robin.

MIMI: It was slithering towards her, so, I warned her, and she tripped and fell with her cupcakes.

PAT: Brenda, go get the caps and balls out.

MIMI: That's supposed to be Robin's job.

(ROBIN has re-entered with paper towels, a garbage bag etc. and starts to clean up the mess.)

PAT: As you can see, she's busy. Now, did you really see something in the grass, Mimi? The truth. Yes or no?

MIMI: I thought I did.

PAT: Because if you really did, we have to clear the area. Maybe cancel the game.

MIMI: Cancel? Maybe I made a mistake.

PAT: Something wrong with your eyes?

MIMI: No.

PAT: You know there's more to water polo than shooting a ball well. There's teamwork. One player can make a difference.

MIMI: What if one player is awful?

PAT: No one is awful. Sure, some need some catching up. You were a beginner once. Remember?

MIMI: You said I had natural ability.

PAT: Now, I'm not sure what kind.

MIMI: What does that mean?

PAT: You're a part of a team, Mimi. An important part. But the whole idea is to help each other.

MIMI: I thought it was to win.

PAT: By following the rules and playing fair. It's called sportsmanship. Now, go help Robin clean up that mess.

MIMI: But it's nearly game time.

PAT: Unless you want to forfeit playing tonight.

MIMI: You can't do that. My dad came to see me play!

PAT: And while you're at it, apologize to Robin for the "mistake."

MIMI: You can't be serious.

PAT: That's not a request, Mimi. That's an order.

(As MIMI goes to the scene of the crime, scene fades. LIGHTING: comes up on team in a huddle.)

Okay, Starbirds. The visiting team is going to give you some keen competition tonight. So, show them your strength, your skill and your sportsmanship. Remember you're one of the best teams in the county. Work together. No prima donnas. Now go play.

(Option: if you want to have spectators, you can use other actors or luan cutouts.)

(STARBIRDS mime jumping in the pool and suggest a choreographed game with the coach on the sidelines.)PAT punctuates the ensuing game shouting)

C'mon. You gotta help. Nice job, Brenda. Claire, get your arms up. Lookout, Alyssa. NOW! Fifteen seconds. Alright, let's push it up...Look for the shot.

(SOUND: whistle blows.)

Last quarter everyone, and I want to give everyone a chance to play. And if we win, my treat for ice cream. So, Alyssa out, Robin, in.

(Option: if more players, substitute someone else instead of Alyssa.)

MIMI: Now, we'll lose for sure.

(STARBIRDS jump in.)

PAT: *(watching)* Spread out. Play hard. Go for the ice cream. Spread out. Claire, get your arms up. Let's go, Starbirds. Robin, your ball. Looking good. Set it up. Look for the pass. She's open. Shoot!

(ROBIN shoots and makes a goal.)

(SOUND: Cheers from spectators.)

Nice going, Robin! Alright, let's focus. Ball's in. Watch it, Claire. Just swim up, C'mon, throw, Brenda. Throw. Set it up again. Look for that pass.

(BRENDA throws to ROBIN.)

Shoot!

(ROBIN shoots and makes a second goal.)

(Applause from PLAYERS and spectators.)

PAT: Awesome.

MIMI: Show off.

(STARBIRDS come out of pool, crowd around Robin and some hug her.)

STARBIRDS: We won! We won.

ALYSSA: Robin you did it. You got your wish. Your first goal.

CLAIRE: Two of them, but the second was spectacular.

MIMI: That last ball should have been mine.

PAT: All right, everyone. Good work, team. The volunteers said the food sold out by the third quarter. So, think Missouri. Congratulations. Tonight, ice cream's my treat. See you in ten.

CLAIRE: You coming, Robin?

ALYSSA: Of course, she is. Aren't you?

ROBIN: I never say "no" to ice cream.

Scene Seven — Robin's home. After the game.

AT RISE: ROBIN bursts through the door and hugs her mother.

ROBIN: I did it. I did it. I DID IT!!! TWICE.

FRANCINE: Congratulations. Oh, Honey, I wish I could have been there.

ROBIN: *(bubbling)* We had ice cream after and the coach congratulated me – in front of everyone. And they all cheered. Well, most of them.

FRANCINE: Let me guess. Mimi?

ROBIN: She was sore.

FRANCINE: Because you won the game for the team?

ROBIN: Because she wanted to make the winning goal. Mom, for the first time I felt part of the team. Included.

FRANCINE: Now you've proved that you can do it. What's next?

ROBIN: To be the best player I can be. Mom, did you save one of those chocolate cupcakes?

FRANCINE: You want to eat more after ice cream?

ROBIN: I GOTTA CELEBRATE.

FRANCINE: It just so happens that I did.

ROBIN: Then, let's split it. With sparkling water.

(FRANCINE gets it out and ROBIN gets the water and glasses.)

FRANCINE: *(raising her glass in a toast)* To my daughter, the best Starbird I know.

ROBIN: *(raising her glass in a toast)* To the best cupcake coach I know. Mom, I lost some of them. Mimi screamed there was a snake right behind me. Anyway, I tripped and some of the cupcakes fell in the dirt. Later, she apologized, said it was a mistake.

FRANCINE: Watch out. That girl spells trouble with a capital "T".

End of Act I

24 more pages in act 2