



IN  
TROUBLED  
WATERS

WRITTEN &  
ILLUSTRATED  
BY  
ASHWINI  
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“Quit bothering me, man!” Johnny yelled at George with an irritated look on his face.

“You’re gonna lose this competition, Johnny Loserseed,” teased George. The swimmers, surrounding the two, giggled and snickered at Johnny Appleseed. Johnny’s face turned pale. I had watched this whole scene from the cool waters of the pool and couldn’t help feeling sympathy for Johnny. I spotted him walking towards me. I continued swimming free-style. As long as I can remember, I have always wanted to win a swimming competition. This was MY chance. The semifinals were tomorrow to select the two who would go to the finals on Saturday. The winner of the finals would get ten grand and would proceed to the regionals.

Today, Coach Billy wanted me to practice hard till noon. As I started swimming, I could hear a voice shouting, “Stacy, we have to win this thing, c’mon, go faster!” I knew it was Coach Billy. My stomach was aching. I hadn’t eaten anything for breakfast. Three hours had already passed and suddenly, I craved some snack. I decided to take a little break. I pulled myself out of the pool, shivering. Coach Billy dashed up to me.

“You better get into that pool right now, Stacy girl; you really need to practice, and I am counting on you!” he urged.

I pleaded, “But, coach, I haven’t eaten any...” Before I could finish, he interrupted me.

“No excuses. Get back in. No ‘buts’, semifinals are tomorrow.” Deciding it was futile to argue, I dived back in. As I swam, my stomach lurched. My arms and legs were sore. But, Coach Billy wouldn’t let me stop, even for a second. As minutes passed, I resented Coach Billy even more. I had thirty more meters to go. Even if I finished it, Coach Billy would probably make me do more laps afterwards. I was beginning to feel a little nauseous. My head spun, and a sickening feeling crept over me. I couldn’t breathe, as the surface appeared smaller and smaller. Everything went dark.

When I opened my eyes, I gazed around. I was lying on a lounge near the pool. But, as I looked up, I saw pairs of eyes staring at me. Why were these people staring at me? Why was I even here in the first place? I was confused. As I got up, I overheard some girls murmuring something-----something about Johnny. My mind raced. What's with Johnny? I ran to Coach Billy.

"Coach Billy, what happened?" I demanded curiously.

"I can't believe...you...," he stuttered.

Dismayed, I didn't know what to say. "Why?"

"You were about to drown...very disappointing, but luckily ya' got saved by that boy," Coach Billy replied. The only thing I remembered about this morning was swimming on my empty stomach. That was all...

"Which boy?" I inquired.

"That Johnny boy. It doesn't make any sense to me---semifinals are around the corner, and this is how you swim!" he screamed.

I retorted, "Humph, I wouldn't have been in this situation if you had let me have a little break to eat something!"

"Unbelievable! Don't you dare talk to your coach like that! If this happens again, I am afraid I'll have to take you out of the team," Coach Billy threatened. My eyes popped out of my head. What coach would say that to his swimmer one day before the semifinals!

Furious, I stomped away. But things were about to become worse. I tried to avoid Johnny and, of course, George. It was TOO late. George had already spotted me.

"Look at what we've got here---Johnny's girlfriend," he sneered.

"Cut it out, will you? I've already gone through a lot today!" I hollered back at him.

George, not even having a hint of sympathy in his eye, mocked, "Well, speaking of what happened today, I'm sure you're gonna lose this competition like Johnny. You guys have so much in..." Before he could finish his sentence, Johnny cut in.

"Stop teasing her; because of her stupid coach, this happened!" Johnny yelled loudly. All eyes were fixed upon him. Coach Billy dashed towards him.

He stormed angrily, "Did you just call me 'stupid', you useless, good for nothing boy?" Everyone, on Coach Billy's side--all of the swimmers except Johnny and me--laughed at Johnny. Johnny just walked away. I couldn't bear to see this.

"Don't you guys have any sense of decency?" I shouted. Those were my final words of the day. With that, I hurried out of the swim meet. I wished I had NEVER been involved in this--  
---NEVER joined this competition.

During dinner, my plate was still full with pasta even after an hour had passed. I was not in the mood. I had left poor Johnny out there to suffer the wrath of Coach Billy. My mom knew something was up.

"Stacy, what's the matter, honey?---You can tell me anything," she asked me, curiously.

I knew Mom would comfort me, so I spilled out everything that had happened today. How I was about to drown. Coach Billy's attitude. Johnny. Tomorrow semifinals.

Mom gaped at me when I had told her the story. Sighing in relief, she assured, "I'll make sure you eat a snack before you go. Just be careful."

In the morning of the semifinals, my palms were wet. Beads of sweat formed on my forehead. My heart pulsed. But, by the evening, I couldn't help smiling. I could hardly conceal my joy. Racing out of the swim meet, I couldn't wait to tell Mom. She would be so happy. I had made it.

In the distance, I could hear two voices coming towards me. They seemed to be arguing. I hid behind the bushes, hoping not to be seen.



“...Rent by tomorrow,” a voice uttered. I didn’t know who that person was, but it sounded like a boy.

“How ‘bout Saturday evening after...competition...no money till.....?” I could only hear bits and pieces. But I knew the person who said them. It was Johnny! Bewildered, I moved. The bush rustled. The two boys turned around towards my direction. I crouched down, crossing my fingers. They continued talking.

“If...no money, kick...family out,” the other boy threatened.

“I will try...money...Saturday evening,” Johnny replied, depressed. But the other boy trotted away gleefully.

Johnny spun around unexpectedly. I stooped even lower. My back ached. He stared at my

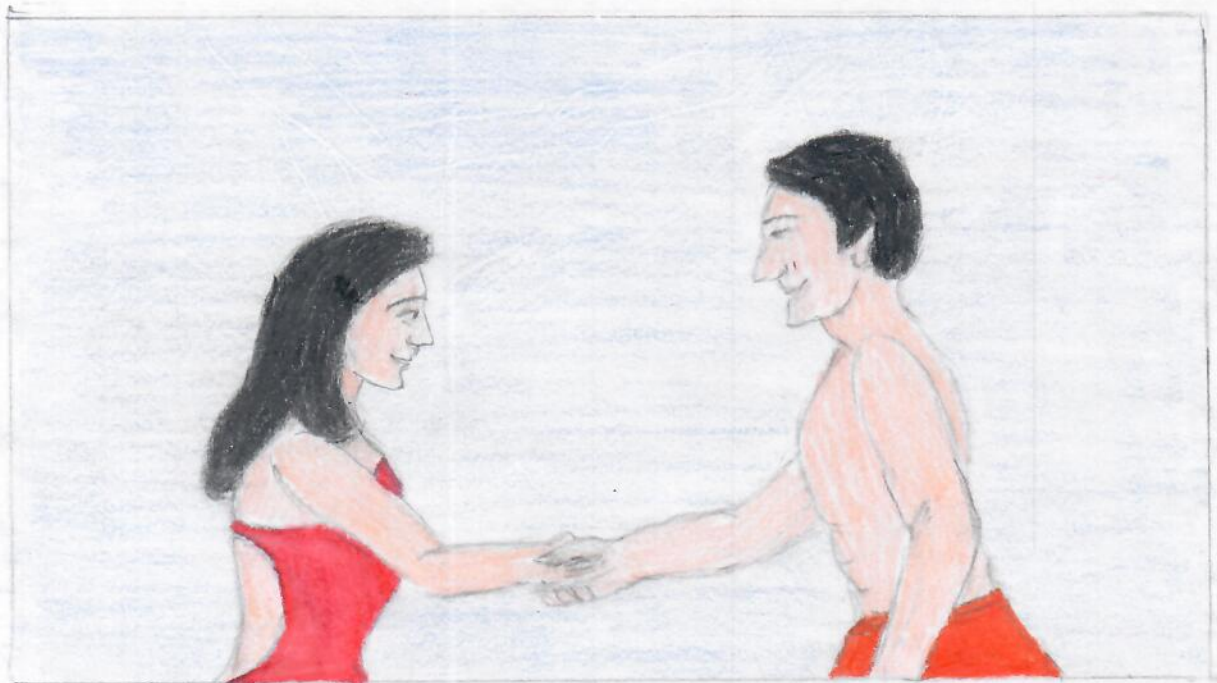
hiding spot for a while. Sighing, he trudged up the hill to his house.

I was speechless. Saturday evening? That was right after the final competition! I totally forgot! He was the other finalist. We would be competing against each other. I crept out of the bush. Thorns scratched my legs. As I made my way home, thoughts filled my mind. I figured that Johnny was in deep trouble.

A few days passed. It was back to normal. I practiced while Coach Billy screamed his head off. Johnny and I never talked to each other. Time passed by, and soon the big day--- Saturday---had arrived at our doorstep.

Saturday afternoon----Mom drove me to the swim meet and left. This was special because this was MY big day. It had always been my dream to win one of these big events. Banners flew in the air, in red and blue. Most of the swimmers made faces at Johnny. Some of them "booed" him. Some applauded for me.

After changing into our swimsuits, Johnny came over to me and wished me good luck. I shook his hand and also wished him back.



With that, we took our positions on the diving boards. Coach Billy waved a red flag with blue stripes in the air multiple times and yelled at the top of his lungs, “READY SET.....GO!!!!!”

Johnny and I dove into the water, causing a splash the size of a car. It sprayed everyone near the pool, including Coach Billy.

Meanwhile, in the pool, I was kicking as fast as I could. I heard a medley of voices. Coach Billy yelled, “Kick harder.” It echoed through the pool. His voice rang in my ears. Johnny’s coach never said a word but glanced nervously at me. Swimmers frequently “booed” Johnny. I could only hear cheers yelling, “Stacy, Stacy, you can do this!” Just before I swam over the finish line, I glanced back. Johnny was still trailing behind. My eyes became misty and fogged up my goggles. I couldn’t take it ANYMORE. I had made my decision.

As I lifted my hand to finish the last stroke, I grasped my ankle and went down. One of the swimmers in the audience gasped, “Cramp! She has a cramp!”

Coach Billy shook his head. “Ah, she can’t make it, get her out!” he ordered. By that time, Johnny had crossed the finish line.

The announcer exclaimed, “We have a winner—Johnny Appleseed!”

Just after, in a small room, a doctor examined my leg and massaged it for a while. After she completed her work, I hollered, “All better now!” I hopped off the bed and dashed out of the room after quickly changing my clothes. I felt good after a long time. I wondered what Mom would say. She may never put me in this competition EVER AGAIN. I ran towards home. I loved swimming. Doing this was my dream. I didn’t want Mom to take me out of future competitions because of this.

“I appreciate what you did,” I heard a voice.



“Johnny, I don’t want to talk.”

“You’re a great swimmer, Stacy, but I can’t believe you would fake a cramp for me,” his voice quivered.

“Cramp, what cramp?” I muttered.

“C’mon, Stacy!” Johnny replied, “so that was YOU behind the bushes.”

I sheepishly denied, “Uh...I have no clue what you are talking about!”

“I am grateful to you. Thanks for everything,” he said. Then he skipped away.

I strolled home, feeling happier than ever. But Mom? What would she say? As I approached, Mom stood on the doorstep. I could see her expectant eyes.

“Mom, I’m very happy today. Let’s go for dinner, and I’ll tell you all about it.”

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Ashwini Suriyaprakash was born in Los Gatos, California. She attends Challenger School and is in sixth grade. During school, Ashwini enjoys doing P.E. and literature. At home, Ashwini loves reading adventure books such as *Percy Jackson* and *The Lord of the Rings* and finds fun in performing card tricks for her family members. She plays football with her family and the piano during her spare time. Future plans may involve her in either engineering or politics.