

28 Plays Later

Challenge #8

Let's be all sporty.

Find your inspiration from a sportical event, or from the culture of sportiality or from observing sportition. Don't sport with people's feelings though, but do feel free to sport at sportspeople who sport their sports-gear.

Win or Luge

(a play in one act)

By

Melissa A. Bartell

Scene 1

Lights up on a stage designed to depict the starting point of an Olympic sledding track as if we're looking at side on, with the downstage wall missing. There are grab bars (used for pushing off) at stage right, and the track disappears into the wings at stage left.

SASHA is dressed in the helmet, unitard, and ice shoes typical of a luge sledder. He takes his position on the sled and grabs the push bars at either side of start.

ANNOUNCER (V/O): Now making his second run on this, the first day of the luge event here at the Olympic Sliding Center is Alejandro 'Sasha' Nowatovski. His time on his first run was an extremely competitive 0.81.09 seconds, but as you know, in single-slide luge, each competitor takes four runs and we total the times of all four.

There is a single beep and then SASHA primes his run. Pushing back and forward.

There are three beeps and he pushes off.

The lights begin to dim as soon as he's offstage. There's the sound of a crash, and a scream, and then a crowd screaming.

ANNOUNCER (V/O) (alarmed): Nowatovski has lost control of his sled. He's jumped the track. Medics are on scene... We're returning you to studio...

Blackout

Scene 2

White scrim, otherwise empty stage. SASHA enters still in his luge uniform.

SASHA: When you're sliding down the track at ninety-five, a hundred and ten, a hundred and thirty-five miles per hour, you're not thinking about the argument you had with your girlfriend, or what your coach is gonna say about your form. You're not really *thinking* at all. Instead, you're just in this zen space, riding the ice like you'd surf a killer wave. You're feeling each turn. You know them as intimately as you do the curve of your lover's breast or hip or ass...

Fade to black.

Scene 3

Lights up on an empty stage, save for three stools, spaced across downstage center. All are empty at the start of the scene.

EUGENIA (*pr. in Spanish: oo-ben-ya*) enters and sits on the stage right stool. She is SASHA's mother, and she has a southern California accent. Though she's obviously old enough to be the mother of a man in his early 30s, she still has the toned figure of an athlete. The lights fade out, except for a spotlight just on her. As she speaks, we see video projected behind her, of SASHA's childhood.

EUGENIA: I never expected my son to choose a winter sport. I mean, yes, my husband was a former member of the USSR's bobsled team – that was back when there *was* a USSR, you know? But he'd already moved to America by the time we met, and for most of Sasha's childhood we lived in California, because I'm a competitive swimmer. (She laughs) Honestly, I was pretty sure he was going to be a surfer when he grew up – I was on the beach the day before he was born. He could swim before he could walk. And then Viktor got the job as the assistant coach to the US bobsled team and we moved to Colorado...

The lights fade out on EUGENIA and a single follow-spot tracks MATTHEW as he walks out of the wings (stage left) and takes the center stool. Video playing behind him should be training exercises and team bonding.

MATTHEW is buff and blonde, muscular. Athletic. He's wearing a TEAM USA track suit with the Olympic rings on it.

MATTHEW: SASHA and I came up in sliding together. Actually, I think I got him into it. I was on a ski vacation in Aspen during spring break of my junior year at Stanford, and my sister was dating one of the bobsledders, and arranged for me to watch some of their practice runs. Late one night, after dinner, some of the guys on the team let me take a run, and at the bottom of the track there was this scrawny kid – about four years younger than me. He told me he was the coach's son and we struck up a friendship. Turns out we both loved surfing and snowboarding. But man, that bobsled ride had me hooked... I went back home, and found a club and a coach – not easy in Northern California – and then two years later there was this scrawny kid again – less scrawny – competing against me at a regional competition.

Lights fade out on MATTHEW and a spotlight focuses on the third stool, which is already occupied by KATRINA.

KATRINA is petite, but still athletic. She's dressed in a figure skating costume, and is even still wearing her skates, with guards on the blades. Her accent is distinctly Russian. Video playing behind her is a combination of her skating history, and her relationship with SASHA. Holding hands, running together along a waterfront, a montage of cute, coupley, pictures in a variety of international locales.

KATRINA: Most of time, skaters, skiers and sliders don't mix. Is always skaters with skaters, skiers with skiers, sliders with people who don't do sport at all. But my father and Sasha's father, they are friends from chills, yes? So, we met at Olympic Village four years ago when I was junior skater and he was in first Olympics. At first, we fight like cats and dogs. Why he so American? Why I so Russian? Skating is just pretty. Luge is stupid, dangerous sport. Eventually, we realize our fighting is... what you call it? Foreplay? Da! Foreplay! And we start dating. Four years later, we still together, and (she blushes here) SASHA propose before Opening Ceremonies. I say 'yes' of course.

Lights and video fade out.

Scene 4

Lights come up on all three stools which remain occupied by the same three people, but are now closer together, representing waiting room chairs.

DOCTOR enters talking with VIKTOR. VIKTOR is the epitome of an athletic male, but he's also got something haunted about him. Doctor can be either male or female. His accent has mere hints of Russian-ness.

DOCTOR: Perhaps it would be better if I speak to you and your wife alone?

VIKTOR: That is not necessary. Matthew and Katrina are like family to him – to us.

VIKTOR goes to stand behind EUGENIA, kissing the top of her head and putting his hands on her shoulders. EUGENIA reaches up to grip one of his hands with her own.

DOCTOR: I'm sorry to keep you all waiting. Your son hit his head on an exposed beam at the side of the track, and there was injury to his brain and to his spinal cord. We've intubated him and put him on a ventilator to help him breathe, and given him medicine to support his blood pressure. He was bleeding internally, and we've stopped that, but he's in a coma.

There is reaction walla from the family and friends.

VIKTOR: A coma is bad. Will he come out of it?

EUGENIA: I thought comas weren't *always* bad, though?

DOCTOR: Ms. Nowatovski is correct. A coma is really just a sort of deep sleep that the body uses when it has extensive healing to do. At this point the only thing we can do is wait and see. But Alejandro –

VIKTOR (correcting the DOCTOR): *Sasha.*

DOCTOR: Sorry, Sasha. Sasha is an athlete. He's strong, and from what I've been told, he's a fighter.

EUGENIA: Can we see him.

DOCTOR: Yes, you can. It's unlikely he'll respond, but studies have shown that coma patients are often somewhat aware of what's being said to them. So, yes, speak to him. Touch him, gently. He needs your support. Let me prepare you for what you're going to see....

Fade to black.

Scene 5

A hospital room.

As before the set is minimal – SASHA is in a bed, but he isn't flat, so that the audience can see him. There is a single stool near the side of the bed. While we can't see monitors, the soft beeping and the whirring of the ventilator set the scene.

As the lights come up, MATTHEW enters the room, and sits on the stool. He takes SASHA's hand, but he's a bit awkward about it.

MATTHEW: Hey bro. I know you said you were jet-lagged, but really? Skipping out in the middle of your run? Lazy, my friend, really lazy. Listen, I've talked to the rest of the team, and we're dedicating these Games to you. God, the room at Olympic Village is gonna be so quiet without your snoring. Listen, I've only got a minute, but I want you to know, I'm rooting for you, man. Come back to us.

MATTHEW exits and KATRINA comes in. She's carrying flowers and a balloon that she sets down at the foot of the bed. She doesn't sit on the stool, she perches on the side of the bed, and pulls SASHA's hand into her own. She's changed to a baggy sweater, leggings, and Ugg boots.

KATRINA: Hi, baby. I just finished phone call with my mother, and she says you must wake up and get better because she has heart set on wedding in early summer. Me, I think winter wedding is better. You slider, I a skater. It makes sense, nyet? But really, I don't care as long as we get married. You promised me, Sashenko. You promised me forever. Not all gold medals in world are better than life with you. I love you.

KATRINA kisses SASHA, then curls up with him in the bed. She remains there until EUGENIA enters. EUGENIA touches KATRINA on the shoulder, and the younger woman sits up, then slides off the bed. Both women embrace, and then EUGENIA smooths KATRINA's hair back from her face. They share a long look, and then KATRINA exits and EUGENIA takes her place on the bed. She holds his hand and pets his head in a motherly fashion while she speaks.

EUGENIA: You look so pale and still, Alejandro, so unlike the active little boy I raised. You were always asking, "Mama, can I surf? Mama, can I swim with you?" Maybe I should have pushed you more toward swimming. I worried about the surfing. It's dangerous. You could drown or be eaten

by sharks. But once you saw the sliding, I knew you'd follow your father into another dangerous sport.

Katrina was here all night. Poor girl. They've agreed to delay the free skate to give her - to give everyone - time to adjust to you not being part of the Games - but it's only a delay. She'll be skating for you, but I guess you know that.

Now, listen, your father will be in here in a minute, and I know he's worried about the team. But you... you don't worry about that. You worry about coming back to us. If you don't compete again, it's okay. If you do... that's okay, too. As long as you come back.

Please, *mijo*, come back to us.

EUGENIA leaves the bed, but moves to a second stool on the opposite side of where everyone was sitting. VIKTOR enters and goes to the bed, touching his son's hair, then goes to the stool and sits.

VIKTOR: Son. Sasha. Your mother is sleeping, finally, so I think I'll keep this short. I love you. I'm proud of you. I know the media was certain this was your year for a medal, and maybe that was true, and as your coach, I should want you to win. But as your father, Sasha, as your father, all I want is for you to be happy. So, you're going to sleep a little longer. You're going to get better. And then you're going to wake up, and you're going to marry Katrina. Are we clear.

VIKTOR breaks down into quiet sobs.

Blackout.

Scene 6

White scrim, otherwise empty stage. SASHA enters still in his luge uniform.

I never really thought about what heaven might be like, but I think, now, it must be one endless luge track, and on either side of it are all the people you love cheering for you. For me, that would be my parents, Matthew and the rest of the guys from my team, and Katrina. God... Katrina. They say skaters and sliders never work out, that so much time on ice makes us too cold for each other, but she... she's like my other half, and I'm so much better with her in my life.

I keep hearing people telling me to come back or wake up, and I'm scared. What if I can't slide again? What if I'm hurt so bad Katrina doesn't want me?

But this... this is just a dream right?

It has to be a dream.

Because in reality I'm racing down the track on my sled, and - as my Abuelita used to joke - win or luge - I'm having the ride of my life.

The sound of a luge racing down the track fades in until it's a dull roar. The lights fade down to black.

ANNOUNCER (V/O): An update on American luge slider Alejandro 'Sasha' Nowatovski: his father, Viktor Nowatovski, who is also the bobsled, luge, and skeleton coach for Team USA tells us

that Sasha is awake and out of danger, though he will have a significant recovery time. We here at the network, join friends and fans in wishing him well.

SILENCE.

BLACKOUT.

The End.