

GOD ON A BICYCLE

STUDENT EDITION – INTERMEDIATE

PART ONE

1 THE CRAB AND THE HORSES

The man walked along the river in the cold night. The moonlight shone off the water. He stopped at the iron fence. The horse was on the other side. He reached through and offered her pieces of apple to eat.

The man tied the horse to the fence. Talking to her softly, he climbed over the fence. He touched her neck softly with his fingers. Breathing slowly, he took a long knife from his belt and gently held it against her neck. He closed his eyes and heard her breathing, felt that connection to another life.

With a quick action, he pushed the knife deep and downwards.

The horse screamed and she knocked the man sideways across the ground. She pulled against the rope with her head going left and right. Thick blood came from her neck and she was panicking.

The man sat a small distance away watching with his back against the fence.

She fell forward on her face, then on her side and lay with her legs straight out. For a while she moved and made strange sounds. Finally, she was still.

The man stood up. Everything was peaceful again by the river.

It was dawn and nine men sat into the long, narrow boat. From the bow end of the boat forward, they called out their numbers.

“Five ready,” said Evan.

The men pushed the boat out into the middle of the river. Evan looked back towards the car by the side of the *Fianna* boathouse where the new girl who had said hello to him was. He then looked to the south bank and the Memorial Gardens, which were dirty and full of rubbish. On the top of the hill in the Gardens, Evan saw the horses that always stood there at this time. He didn’t notice that today there were only two horses instead of three.

The rowers started slowly, firstly in pairs, then fours and then all eight. Evan copied the movements of Six-man in front of him. Evan wondered how many oar strokes he’d pulled in his life since his father first brought him out in a boat as an eight-year-old boy. Less than two months after his mother was killed. It was probably millions of oar strokes. It was impossible for Evan to know that soon one oar stroke in the water would change everything.

The men rowed as far as the green fence on the south bank. They all looked to the bank where their coach Rocky O’Gorman, Evan’s father, should be. He would follow them on his bicycle. This morning, he was late. Evan felt anxious.

“A FIVE-MINUTE PIECE,” said the Cox and they rowed away.

The eight oars pushed hard the water of the River Liffey.

“ONE MINUTE GONE. THERE!”

The sound of eight rowers together.

Tch- aaaarrgh. Vrum. Tch- aaaarrgh. Vrum.

“THREE MINUTES GONE. THERE!”

Evan was out of breath and in pain but in a small part of his mind, he thought of the girl.

“Hello Evan,” she had smiled at him through the car window.

Her black hair was pushed behind her ears and her dark eyes seemed large through the window.

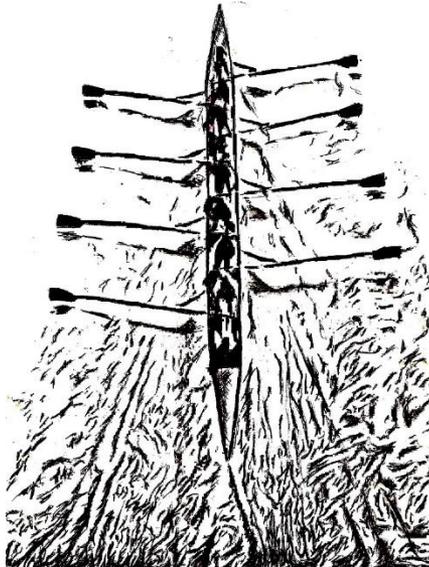
“LAST TWENTY STROKES,” shouted the Cox.

Evan's attention returned to rowing.

Low winter sunshine came through the clouds into Evan's eyes and he moved his head towards the north bank. There he saw the girl watching.

'Oh,' he thought. 'She's pretty.'

Zuriñe, the girl, was drawing quickly in her notepad as the boat passed. She was concentrating and she didn't notice the man coming up behind her. When, finally, she turned and saw him, it felt for her like that bad moment when you realise a dream has changed to a nightmare.



"WATCH YOUR COURSE, COX!" Evan heard someone shout.

Evan turned towards the south bank and saw his father Rocky on his bicycle. In that moment, Evan also saw a horse running towards his father.

Rocky fell off his bicycle, under the horse.

"WATCH YOUR OARS!" shouted the Cox.

CLUD!

Evan's oar hit something hard in the water. It caused him to 'crab'. The oar handle pushed up strongly under Evan's right arm and lifted him out of the boat. Evan turned in the air and saw for a moment that the girl, Zuriñe, was talking to a man.

Zuriñe's shock at seeing Aiert again was equal to Evan's shock as he fell into the freezing water of the river.