

Making Dad Proud

Maggie Connolly walked into her new school, Holy Spirit High, for the first time. She had just moved to Michigan from Minnesota because of her mom's work and she was dreading the thought of having to be new at school. Maggie had never wanted to move, all of her friends were back home. Now she had to make new friends, and learn to make her way in this new place. It didn't help that she moved at the start of the second semester which was going to make it harder for her to make friends. Maggie slowly maneuvered her way down the hallway for her first class when a flyer by the gym door caught her eye. It was advertising girls' basketball tryouts right after school. Maggie had been the star point-guard and MVP at her old school and brightened up at the opportunity to do something she loved. Feeling just a little lighter, Maggie lifted her chin and again started to make her way to her classroom.

That afternoon, after Maggie had changed from her school uniform into her shorts and t-shirt, she called her mom to let her know that there were tryouts so she'd be late coming home. Then she made her way to the gym. There were a bunch of other girls standing around talking, but, despite Maggie's efforts not one of them made any effort to include her in their conversations.

"Alright ladies," A young blond woman said walking toward them. "Welcome to our JV tryouts, I'm Lexi Burke and I'll be your coach this year. We have many young girls who are interested in playing basketball this year and a limited number of places on our roster. So I will be choosing out team members based on skill, talent, and effort, and *not* on popularity." Lexi spun a basketball on her finger and moved her gaze toward some of the more popular looking girls. They rolled their eyes and whispered to each other glancing at Maggie.

"All of you need to find a partner and line up on the half court line." Lexi said looking around the room again. All the girls paired up pretty quickly leaving Maggie alone and without a partner. Lexi ran her hand down her long ponytail as she watched the transactions take place. She watched as Maggie tried to partner up with the other girls unsuccessfully. Sighing she walked over to Maggie,

"Hey, I'm Lexi. What's your name?"

"Maggie," She said quietly ducking her head, but shaking her coach's offered hand.

"Well Maggie, I haven't seen you here before, are you new to the school?"

"Yeah, I just moved here from Minnesota." Maggie replied quietly.

“Maggie, it’s okay.” Lexi knelt down to be on Maggie’s level “We’re all new sometime. I moved here a year and a half ago for work and this is only my second season coaching, so you could still say I’m more of a rookie.” Lexi smiled at Maggie, who smiled back “I see you don’t have a partner, do you want to pair up with me?”

“Yeah, that would be great!” Maggie felt relieved. Maybe she’d have a friend in her new coach.

They ran drills and Maggie was focused on doing her best and working hard to try and make the team. She tried not to worry about what the other girls thought of her and how they watched her and then whispered among themselves. After the tryouts Maggie gathered her things, thanked her coach and left without saying a word to anybody else.

That night when Maggie and her mom were having dinner Mrs. Connolly asked, “So Maggie how was school today?”

“It was fine,” Maggie responded shrugging her shoulders.

“What about the basketball tryouts you told me about? How were they?”

“Mom, all the other girls did was whisper about me, but never actually talked to me, it’s really hard to just stand there while they do all that. It just feels like at this rate, I’ll never have friends.”

“Oh Maggie, I know. I have to cope with the same thing, having to make friends in a new place.” Mrs. Connolly smoothed out her daughter’s hair, “God knows what He’s doing, and He’s doing it for a reason. We just have to have hope and trust in His will.”

Maggie nodded and hugged her mom. “Thanks mom for always being here to help me.”

“That’s my job, and I love it!” Mrs. Connolly said smiling and giving her daughter a kiss.

The next morning at school the basketball roster was posted outside the gym door. Maggie scanned it and got very excited when she saw her name, her hard work had paid off, and she had made the team. During the next few days Maggie noticed that a certain group of girls, who had all made the team, made a very conscious effort to ignore her and made a big show of talking about her while she was in the room.

“Did you see that Maggie-girl during practice today? Oh my gosh- she is *so* Coach’s favorite. Wouldn’t you agree with me?” A girl on the team whose name was Alice, told her friends.

They nodded and murmured in agreement.

“She doesn’t even deserve a spot on this team. I mean we’ve all been playing together since middle school. She can’t just come and steal my starting position. I mean, really!”

“Alice! Maggie’s over there, do you think she just heard everything you said?” Another girl on the team named Jenna said.

“I don’t really care. Let her hear. It might knock some sense into her.”

Maggie quickly passed them and walked out the door to her mom who was waiting in the car. “Mom, I can’t do this anymore!” She cried tears streaming down her cheeks.

“What Maggie?” Mrs. Connolly said putting her hand in her daughter’s shoulder.

Maggie, through her tears proceeded to tell her mother about the conversation. “Mom, maybe I shouldn’t be on the team anymore.”

“Maggie! Don’t be so quick to leave something you love so much. Give those girls time. Let them say what they want to say, and you can always remember that God has a plan, and you’re part of His plan. He never does anything that is not for your own good. You just have to trust him.” Mrs. Connolly leaned over to the passenger seat of the car and gave Maggie a hug. “Things will get better, you wait and see.”

During the next few weeks, basketball season went on and Maggie very faithfully put her heart and soul into practicing and games. Her talents blossomed with every game and she was constantly on the court making most of the baskets for her team. The other girls still hated her for taking the place of their former starting point-guard who was now usually sitting on the bench during games. Maggie remembered what her mom said about how everything God does is for His perfect plan and she always tried to remember that when things got tough.

The JV girls basketball team, Holy Spirit’s Warriors successfully made it to the playoffs and then to the championship game. The score was tied with one minute left to go in the fourth period. The clock was ticking down, Maggie called the play and seeing that no one was open, she ducked to the right and gracefully moved around the defense and started made her way toward the basket. Suddenly, she was pushed from behind and the ball was taken from her, all her teammates looked at her and gave her mean looks as they ran down the court. The other team scored and Lexi called a time-out.

“Thanks a lot Maggie,” one of the girls said jeeringly as they came in.

Tears filled Maggie’s eyes and Lexi stopped her. “What’s wrong Maggs?” The coach asked her hands on Maggie’s shoulders.

“I messed up. I messed up and now those girls won’t let me forget about it.” Maggie said through her tears.

“Maggie, don’t worry about them. Go out there and do your best, that’s all that matters.”

“Lexi, you don’t understand, I *need* to win this game. My dad passed away recently, that’s way we moved here. He taught me everything I know about basketball and he came to all of my games to cheer me on. This is how I can make him proud Lexi, and I’m ruining that chance!” Maggie cried desperately.

“You are making him proud, Maggie. Just by going out there and doing your best despite what those other girls said about you. By pushing through, you are making him proud that he got to be your Daddy. You’re making me proud too, Maggie. Now, there’s only 30 seconds left, you can do this. I know you can.”

Lexi sent everybody back into the game and said a prayer for the strength of her team as she anxiously watched.

Maggie called the play and everything fell into place. She passed it to the girl on her right then ran past the defensive player who was guarding her and got the ball again. She shot the ball from the three point line and it went in. The crowd went crazy and hope blossomed inside of her, maybe they could win after all. With only 10 seconds remaining and leading by one point, the girls began to play hard defense. The clock started to tick down 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, 0 and the buzzer rang. Despite all the other teams efforts they had not made another basket, and the Holy Spirit’s Warriors won.

All her teammates came over, but Alice approached her and gave a very surprised Maggie a hug. “I’m really sorry about saying all those mean things about you, Maggie. I was just really jealous of you and that was the wrong way to act. I see now what a great person you are, will you forgive me?”

Maggie’s eyes filled with tears as she hugged her new friend again and said, “Of course I forgive you, Alice. I always hoped that we could be friends and work this out.” Then turning to the rest of her team, Maggie said, “Now since we’re all friends we can go and celebrate together!”

As they lifted her up in the air and carried her around the court, cheering happily. Maggie could almost see her father smiling down from Heaven. Something inside of her knew she had truly made her Daddy proud.