



THIRD PLACE RECIPIENT

The Hard Choices

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What do you do when the truth saves others, but it hurts your friend? The answer seems obvious, but doing the right thing isn't always so simple. Last year, one of my teammates and I visited a coach regarding an upcoming game. We walked up to her window, which was still and silent; she wasn't there. For good measure, we knocked, and the door creaked open, revealing a pack of Gatorade on her desk. I turned to leave when I heard plastic rustling behind me. My friend caught up to me with Gatorade in her hand. I made a remark questioning if she was allowed to take one. She reassured me that she had previously spoken with this coach and had permission to take Gatorade. I shrugged it off and went about my day.

Later that day, we received a message in our team group chat, our coach announced that the coach from earlier had asked him if anyone on our team had taken a Gatorade from her office. My heart sank when I saw that my friend was the first to respond no. I privately messaged her asking why she didn't come forward. She stuck to her earlier story and was confused about why it's being made into a big deal. This time, I didn't believe her, especially when she begged me not to say anything. At first, I agreed, no one asked any more questions, and it was brushed under the rug.

Until one day, I walked into the gym; the boys' basketball team was practicing. They were breathing heavily, hands on their knees, as their coach shouted, "We'll stop running once I know

who took the Gatorade." My stomach felt heavy, my chest tightened, and my heart was beating so loud I was shocked no one heard. After what felt like hours of just standing there, I was able to pick up my feet and get where I needed to go. I was by myself, reminded of the still, silent office where this began. I had to say something. I knew it was the right thing to do, but why couldn't I? Through shaky hands, I managed to type the message to my coach. I stared at it for 45 minutes, contemplating sending it. I knew that my friend would be in serious trouble, not only that, but she would feel I betrayed her. But in the end, it was the right thing to do despite how hard it was to hit send.

Telling the truth didn't feel good; everything I was worried about ended up happening. But looking back, instead of being filled with guilt, I'm filled with pride knowing that I did the right thing. The right choice is never the easy one; life is filled with difficult decisions. Our ability to make these hard choices shows who we are as people. In the end, protecting yourself or others isn't what matters, but being able to live with the choices you make.