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A new team

Madison Munroe sat at the kitchen table and put butter on her toast. Her twin brother Daniel walked in, smiled at her and said, 'Hi. Is it your first training session today?'

'Yes,' sighed Madison. 'My first session with the Colby Raiders.'

'How are you feeling?' asked Daniel.

Madison sighed again and put down her knife. 'Okay, I think. It's hard to join a new team. I loved my old team.'

'Oh, you always make friends easily,' he said.

'Well, I used to think that,' she said slowly, 'but now...'

'What's wrong?' Daniel asked. 'Is school okay?'

Madison shrugged her shoulders and smiled at her brother. 'Yes, it's okay. It's just hard to start at a new school. And I don't like being at an all-girls school – I miss going to school with you!' She finished her toast and stood up. 'I must go. I don't want to be late.'

'Good luck at the training session,' said Daniel.

Madison opened the gate and stepped onto the street. She turned to close the gate and looked up at the house.

It's a nice house, she thought. And Colby is a nice town. I am going to like it one day. I have to!

But it was hard. Madison loved her old town, her old school and her old friends.

I have to stop thinking about the old things, she thought. I don't want Mum and Dad to see me feeling sad. They have a lot to worry about. They didn't want to move here.

After school that afternoon Madison pushed open the door



of the Colby Sports Centre and went inside. She was early. She went to the changing rooms and got ready. Then she came out and picked up a basketball. She bounced it around the court. She threw it into the hoop and smiled to herself.

Now I feel better, she thought. *Basketball always makes me feel better.* She threw the ball into the hoop again.

Some girls came in, all in white jerseys.

My new team, thought Madison. *The Colby Raiders A Team. Will they like me?*

Then a tall man came in and said, 'Okay, girls! Come over here, please.'

That's Mr Roberts, the coach, thought Madison.

He saw Madison and asked, 'Are you Madison Munroe?'

Madison nodded and tried to smile at everyone.

'Okay, girls! This is your new teammate, Madison,' said Mr Roberts. 'She's just moved here. She used to play for the Jesmond Jets. I've spoken to their coach about her. She was their best player! We're lucky to have her.'

Madison felt her face go red. *Oh great*, she thought. *Now they're really going to love me!*

The coach gave her a white jersey with the number nine on it. 'Quickly go and put that on and then we can start.'

Madison ran to the changing rooms and put the jersey on. She felt her stomach turn. *Oh, stop it, Madison!* she said to herself. *You don't usually get nervous.*

She walked out and saw the girls look at her jersey. One of the girls said something quietly to another girl. The two of them smiled at each other, and it wasn't a friendly smile.

What's wrong with them? thought Madison. Then she told herself, *Remember – you were the Jesmond Jets' best player. Okay, here we go.*

And she ran onto the basketball court.



An hour later she walked unhappily back to the changing rooms with the other girls and got changed.

I played really badly, she thought. What was wrong with me?

The girl next to her smiled and said, 'Hi, I'm Bella, and this is my friend Christine.'

Madison smiled at them. 'Hi. Have you played in the team for long?'

'This is our second year,' said Christine. 'Some girls have played in the team for three or four years.'

Madison looked across at the other girls. *They've all played together for a long time, she thought. Now they have a new teammate, and she isn't very good.*

'I played really badly,' she said to Bella and Christine.

'Don't worry,' Bella said kindly. 'It's hard to join a new team in the middle of the year.'

Just then some of the girls walked past them. 'Maybe it's the number nine jersey working its magic again,' said one girl nastily. Her friends laughed and they left the room.

'Oh, don't worry about Eva,' said Christine. 'She likes to be the best player. She's Coach Roberts's daughter.'

'Yes, and she always likes to tell us that!' said Bella.

'But what did she say about the number nine jersey?' asked Madison. 'It's working its magic? What magic?'

'Oh, don't listen to those stories,' said Bella.

'What stories?' asked Madison.

Bella looked at Christine, and Christine looked at Bella. Then Bella said quietly, 'Well, a girl from this school disappeared. She played in this team.'

'She disappeared?' asked Madison.

'It was a long time ago,' said Bella.

'But what happened to her?'



‘Well, the story isn’t very nice,’ said Christine. ‘It was a murder.’

‘Someone killed her?’ asked Madison. ‘Is that true?’

‘No, Christine,’ said Bella. ‘It wasn’t a murder. Someone kidnapped her and then no one saw her ever again.’

Madison looked at Bella and then at Christine. 'But which story is true?' she asked.

'Well, I don't know,' said Christine. 'It was a long time ago. I only heard a story about it.'

'But...what has this got to do with me?' asked Madison.

'It's the jersey,' said Bella. 'You see, she wore the number nine jersey. And since that time, unlucky things have happened to every player in the number nine jersey.'

'What kind of things?'

'Well, two years ago, Pauline had to stop playing basketball. She got very bad asthma,' said Christine. 'And the girl before her fell off her bike and broke her arm.'

'And then there was the girl who had a car accident,' said Bella. 'And last year there was Claire.'

'Goodness, what happened to Claire?' asked Madison.

'Well, nothing really bad,' said Bella, 'but she had lots of little things go wrong. Things disappeared from her school locker. And just before the big match of the year, she broke her finger.'

'But that's just bad luck. Anyone can have bad luck,' said Madison.

'The coach always gives out the number nine jersey last,' said Christine. 'That's because it's unlucky.'

'I'm not superstitious,' said Madison. 'I'm happy to wear the number nine jersey.'

'Well,' said Bella slowly, 'you didn't play very well today. But you were the best player in your old team, weren't you? Isn't that a bit strange?'

'Not really,' said Madison. 'It's just hard to join a new team.' She picked up her bag and smiled at the girls. 'I think number nine is going to be lucky for me,' she said, and left the room.