

Take A Shot!

The minute I was born, yes, even before I had a name, my destiny was cut out for me. My destiny was to be a ballerina, not just any ballerina, but a prima ballerina, following in my mother's footsteps. The problem is, I don't want to be a ballerina, my true (secret) love is field hockey, a sport I know my mom would never allow me to play.

Dear Diary,

Today is day 78 of Louise moving to Arizona. I miss our secret field hockey practices on the way home from dance so much, it made it much more bearable. If I were to quit dancing and tell Mom, here is how I imagine how the conversation would go: me: "Mom I want to quit dancing and play field hockey" Mom: "Quit? But you have danced your whole life Sydney! You love it!" me: "no I don't love it" (but in my head, I would say: "I don't love it, YOU love it") except then she would look crestfallen and might cry. Just because she fell 2 days before she would have premiered as the Black Swan (and also because I fall out of a single pirouette) should not mean I have to give up my passion for hers. I want to feel the sun on my face, the wind in my hair, and hear the cheers of my team as we win in the last seconds of the game! I just don't want to disappoint my mom, what should I do?

Sincerely, Syd

I pulled out the Eagles Field Hockey picture album Louise gave me before she moved; I wish she was still here so we could have practiced dribbling and taking shots past each other on the walk home from ballet.

"Rrrring! Rrrringg!" I was shaken from my daydream by Louise calling for our nightly chat:

"Hey Syd! Guess what?!" she asked, her voice high-pitched and full of excitement.

"What is it?!" I asked excitedly, picking up on her energy.

"I made the Jr. Eagles field hockey team!" she squealed. I could practically feel her bouncing up and down, smiling ear to ear, and flipping her hair in the weird way she always did when she was super happy.

I felt mixed feelings as I listened to all the details of the tryouts and about her new friends and teammates. I was, of course, happy for her and shared her excitement while we talked, but it

made me realize I had to find a way to play field hockey too, Louise can't be an Eagle without me!

As I was lying In bed, I got the best idea ever: what if I gathered my friends and we made a secret field hockey team and then we won a tournament to show Mom how good I am, how much I love to play, and to show her I'm not her (or a ballerina) but I'm me?!

My face feels hot from excitement, I pull my blanket off and tiptoe over to my desk, grabbing my phone I click on Ella's number:

Me: Ella! Wanna join my secret field hockey team?! My mom still has me in her ballerina dreams but I wanna prove FH is awesome!

She replies: 'course! I would do anything to get away from my little brother!

Me: LOL! I'll see if Livi wants to be goalie! See you tomorrow!

Me: Hey Liv! Wanna be a goalie on a secret field hockey team?!

Livi: Secret FH? What about ballet?!"

Me: I want to show my mom I want to play FH instead!

Livi: Sweet! I'm in! GTG- mom coming! Gotta pretend to sleep now! C ya tomorrow!

I laughed so loud at Livi that I thought Louise could hear me from Arizona, I slapped my hand in front of my mouth so I wouldn't make my mom suspicious too!

First thing in the morning, the girls and I meet at the park to decide the most important part of our team, our name!

Tapping my finger against the wood of the picnic table looking at Livi twirling her blond hair around her finger and Ella twisting her Korean knot bracelet it suddenly comes to me, "I got it guys! The Underdogs!"

Ella smiles and Livi whoops, "The Underdogs? That's brilliant!" I hold my hand out in the center of the picnic table and Ella and Liv put their hands in too, "Underdogs on three! 1...2...3!" "UNDERDOGS!" we yell in unison.

We discuss how we are going to hide The Underdogs from my mom and who else we can recruit to play on our team. We decide on a few other girls that live by the park so we can meet

and practice in the afternoons and then we will tell our parents we are doing a project for school on “dogs” that requires a lot of studying to keep them from getting suspicious! The inside joke of us studying “dogs” as “The Underdogs” makes us giggle.

Dear Diary,

Today I started to achieve my dream! I met up with Ella and Livi and we started finding teammates for our SECRET FIELD HOCKEY TEAM: THE UNDERDOGS!!! Livi is going to ask Kira to be a forward and Ella has a couple of cool neighbors she will ask, I can feel it, our team is going to be the best team ever! I saw my mom looking at Louise's mom's Instagram page Louise was holding hands with a ginger-haired girl and they were holding their field hockey sticks up. To be honest, I'm jealous of her getting on the Jr Eagles and having her mom be so excited and sharing pictures with everyone. I also wonder how my mom is going to react when she finds out I'm playing FH and I don't share her dream of becoming a ballerina like she wanted. I'm nervous, but maybe she will be happy for me? I just really hope we can win and my new friends on The Underdogs help me show my mom how awesome my favorite sport is!

Sincerely, Syd

I, again, woke up out of my daydream to the ping of my phone; this time it was Livi texting,

Livi: Kira is IN + Ella told me the twins are too! Meet @park to study dogs @3?

Me: LOL! Ya! This is going to be awesome!

We only text in code to keep our secret park practices under the radar of our parents (and especially my mom) and I got so used to calling field hockey practice a “dog study sesh” that we started thinking of other dog-like things to call the rest of our training. Our runs became “walking the dogs” and shooting practice was “playing fetch” because we had to go get all the balls that Livi blocked from her goal so well that we ended those days panting like a pile of tired playful puppies!

Dear Diary,

During our last “dog study sesh” Levi, Livi's older brother, came with her and told us that he found out we have a team (was he spying on us?) First, it is amazing he kept our secret,

but then he said that through his summer job as a camp counselor, he scored us one of the last spots at the summer FH championship! The problem is, it's TOMORROW! I'm so nervous about this being our first real game as a team and I feel like we have to win, especially because our name is The Underdogs, and like in the movies, the underdog always manages to win. We don't have a coach, or a mascot, note this as reason 33 I need a puppy, MOM (if you ever read this) and instead of uniforms, we decided we would wear any pink tank top we can find. We have been practicing all summer, I think we are good. I feel like we are fast and strong and our team cheer is going to be the loudest for sure, but I don't know what to expect because, well, we have only played each other. I don't know if I should tell Lou or keep it a secret, we don't talk like we did and she is so experienced now on her travel team, she would think our park team is lame I bet. As for Mom, and finally letting our secret out, should I tell her only if we win? I just don't know.

Sincerely, Syd

“GUYS WE DID IT! WE WON!” Livi shouted running out of the goal towards me, I stood in excited and unbelieving shock in the middle of the field surrounded by my teammates and having just locked eyes with none other than...my very own mother.

Mom was standing on the sideline, blond hair in her signature bun, blue eyes sparkling in the sunlight, cheering louder than any other person in the crowd. She looked so proud of me, of us, of The Underdogs. I don't know if it was my nerves, or just from feeling so happy and confident after our win, but before she could say anything I blurted out all of my feelings in one breathless confession:

“Mom! I'm so sorry that I didn't tell you sooner but all summer when I said I was studying dogs I was coming to the park to play field hockey and we made this secret team called The Underdogs and Levi spied on us and thought it would be cool if we could play for real and so he got us into this tournament and we thought that we could win because we were called the Underdogs and the underdog always wins in the movies and also we had worked really hard and we really wanted to win so I could prove to you that I am really good at field hockey and then maybe you would not be so disappointed when I told you that I don't want to be a ballerina anymore, or at all actually, and then you would let me quit dance to follow my dream!”

She responded with the last thing I could have imagined her saying, but also in a way that was so typical of my mom's dreamy way of looking at life, “Oh Syd! I wish you would have told me that you wanted to follow in Great Grandma Verna's footsteps to become a Field Hockey player! She was the team captain, and a mean striker when she was at Vassar College and I believe

she always had dreams of going to the Olympics. I always wanted her story to have an underdog ending but they just did not have the wins..." she trailed off and my mouth dropped open having never heard of Great Grandma Verna's history playing the sport I loved! I only knew her for her love of afternoon tea and weird poetry, I made a mental note to ask more about her later as Mom continued, "Honey, I'm proud of you no matter what, I want you to be happy and to do what you love, even if it's not dance! You girls have formed quite the team, I was pulled out of the house to come to find out what all the cheering was about and I was surprised and so excited to see it was you!" She kissed me on the cheek and smiled at the other girls who were still dancing in celebration.

"Mom! Bleagh!" I said wiping her lipstick off my cheek, "will you take a picture of us so I can send it to Louise?" I was suddenly really excited to spill my secret to her too.

"UNDERDOGS! on three!" Ella exclaimed smiling for the photo.

I turned, smirking more than smiling, and replied, "You don't have to call us The Underdogs anymore, we are on top of the world!"