

HOOPS TRYOUTS

by Anina Robb

- “Brian! Breakfast!” Brian’s mom was knocking at his locked bedroom door. “Why is this door locked, young man?” 1
- “I’ll be out in a second, Mom.” Brian leapt down from the top bar of his bunkbed from where he’d been hanging, stretching, his toes dangling, his white pajama pants flapping like a flag of surrender. 2
- And, in fact, today that was all that Brian wanted to do—give up. He’d been stretching from his bunk for the last month and he was still the shortest boy in seventh grade. He was shorter than most of the girls. 3
- Heck, he was shorter than the sixth graders. Basketball tryouts were today, and if he didn’t make the team, he’d disgrace his family. 4
- “Finally,” his mom sighed as Brian slid into his chair at the kitchen table. She piled a heaping serving of scrambled eggs on his plate. “Eat up, you have a big day!” His big brother, Jonas, had already finished breakfast. 5
- “A kiss good-bye for your mama?” Mom joked, and Jonas turned to bend down to kiss her. Then he smacked Brian on the head. Brian thought this could mean one of two things: I love you or you are an idiot. 6
- Jonas was a sophomore in high school and almost six feet tall. He’d been a starter on the basketball team since junior high. Everyone knew he’d get a basketball college scholarship. Brian shoved the eggs in his mouth. 7
- “Alex is here. Don’t forget your lunch money!” Mom called as Brian slid his plate into the sink and grabbed the coins from the bowl. Alex knocked on the screen door like a trusty alarm at 8:05. The two friends had been walking to school together since the second grade. But Alex only cared about basketball because his friend liked it—he was more interested in computers. 8
- “Ready for tryouts?” 9
- “I guess, ready as I’ll ever be.” Brian shrugged. 10

“What you gonna do about Lesh?” Matt Lesh thought he was the best basketball player in seventh grade because he was five feet ten. He’d been picking on Brian for being short for so long that Brian couldn’t remember a time that he hadn’t. In fact, it was Lesh who had inspired Brian to try to stretch himself out. Of course, Brian didn’t tell anyone he was trying it. 11

BRRRRING. The first bell was ringing, which meant five minutes to get to class. Brian fumbled at his locker. When he finally opened it, Matt Lesh darted around the corner and slammed his locker door shut, “Oops, my bad!” and he was gone. Brian didn’t have time to react or say anything. He had to get his locker open again so he could get to first block on time. 12

At lunch things just got worse. In the lunch line Matt was full of put-downs: “How about some shrimp today? No, maybe a small fry? Would you like some peanuts with that?” Brian was getting hot; he could feel his face flushing red like the roses in his grandmother’s garden. 13

“Just ignore him, Brian,” Alex elbowed his friend along in line. “He’s not worth it.” 14

After school, the gym was bustling with boys trying out for the basketball team. The coaches lined everyone up in order from tallest to shortest, and wouldn’t you know? Brian was dead last. 15

“End of the line, huh, Brian?” Coach Peters chuckled. For a moment, Brian thought of splitting, just hightailing it out of there and not looking back. Geez, even the coaches were making fun of him. But he’d been practicing for weeks to get on this team, and he knew that being tall was not the end-all, be-all for junior high basketball. Besides, he was bound to grow sometime soon, and then everyone would need someone else to sneer at. 16

“All right,” Coach Peters boomed. “This tryout is made up of four different stations: a dribbling through cones drill, jump shooting, passing, and an agility drill. Let’s pair up and get started! Front of the line—you are with the back of the line and so on!” 17

Brian froze. It couldn’t be. This was his worst nightmare ever. He was paired with Matt Lesh. Matt jogged over, “You better make me look good, short stuff.” 18

And in that moment, Brian decided the thing to do was to make himself look good—to take all the work that he had put in over the last few weeks and show it off—not for Matt or his brother or his mom but for himself. He deserved a spot on this team because he was good and he worked hard and he was a team player. Brian took off to the first station, leaving Matt in his shadow. “Hey, wait up!” And that is how each station went—Brian dribbled by Matt, he out-passed him, he threw more jump shots, and his feet were lighter on the basketball court during the agility drills. 19

Sweaty and hot, the boys slumped onto the bleachers when the coaches blew the whistles. 20

“All right, good work out there today. Good hustle. A team roster will be posted tomorrow morning by the gym.” 21

As everyone started shuffling out of the double doors, Brian spotted Alex waiting for him across the street. Just as he turned to slip on his jacket, there was Matt Lesh behind him. He braced himself for the coming insult. Instead Matt raised his hand for a high-five. Brian reluctantly raised his, too. “Nice,” Matt nodded his head, and jogged away. 22

“What the heck was that?” Alex asked as they fell into step together. 23

Brian shrugged his shoulders. Even if he didn’t make the team tomorrow, he was hoping things would be different from here on out. 24

Source: Courtesy of Anina Robb.