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### Guilty by Association

“May it please the court, counsel. Today, it will become clear that the defendant is guilty on all counts.”

My love for law first began in my Freshman year when I auditioned for Mock Trial. It was daunting, with its intricacies and complex rules of evidence, but there was also a limitless possibility that inspired me. From cold-blooded murder to tax evasion, each case was entirely unique. And, with the correct evidence and persuasion, there is always a way to bring justice. I was hooked.

My Freshman year had been a learning opportunity, but Sophomore year meant getting serious. As a member of the prosecution, my heart was set on delivering the opening statement that would condemn the guilty. I read books on court strategies, poured over evidence, and watched recordings of real trials, analyzing speech and themes.

When the case was assigned, my team discussed who would play the defendant, the witnesses, and the attorneys. My hard work had paid off as we made the agreement that the opening role would be mine. In a cruel twist of fate, however, the night before the final decision was made, I came down with a nasty case of the flu. My teammates knew how much I wanted to be the opener, but when I could finally return to school I was devastated to learn that one of them, a good friend, had snagged the role.

While upset, I set my resentment aside and supported the team as best as I could. Then, just weeks before the competition, the chosen opener asked if I would write the statement for him. He



would memorize and deliver the opening I wrote at the competition, as it would be “best for the team”. I was shocked, realizing his actions may jeopardize our team’s success. How could he go against his word by taking my role, and then not follow through on it?

I was faced with true dilemmas: Should I ignore his request but risk our team’s success? Or should I write the part to ensure a chance in the competition? Should I exact revenge and expose him? Or should I swallow my pride and preserve what was left of our friendship?

I pondered my choices, but none of them felt right. If I wrote it, I would lack integrity and reward his, but letting down the team didn’t feel right either. In the end, I declined to write the opening. Instead, I offered to coach him. We met twice a week, writing and editing until he finally felt confident in his work. I no longer resented him for double-crossing me and realized that where I originally saw betrayal, was instead a learning opportunity for us both. We discovered that working together authentically actually turned a wrong into a right and preserved our once-strained friendship. From then on, I understood the value of integrity, especially in the face of betrayal. Taking the high road, while often difficult, has always proved more fulfilling.