

Growing Pains: Kendras Diaries

As soon as I stepped onto the school yard about 30 minutes later, Katrina came rushing up to me. She stopped in front of me and was trying to catch her breath.

“Guess what?” she exclaimed, and before I could ask, “Melanie Meyers is also trying out for cheerleading. I just found out.”

What? “Good for her.” I tried to keep the sarcasm out of my voice. I was fighting to think positive thoughts and that was the last thing I wanted to hear.

“At least we found out, so you won’t freak out when you see her at practice.”

“Yeah, I’m already close to freaking out, and it won’t take much to push me over the edge.”

“Don’t worry about her, focus on you.”

Don’t worry about her? All the eighth grade girls have been worrying since she got here. The problem was she hadn’t done anything to any of us—unless you counted being born, being born beautiful, coming to school at St. Peter, Paul & Mary, and capturing every boy’s attention. Now she was trying out for cheerleaders.

Melanie Meyers captured all of our attention the first day of school. I noticed her instantly—tall, graceful, beautiful; long, straight hair; flawless skin—and instantly I disliked her. I knew from looking at her she had to be in at least seventh grade. She stood there on the first day of school, all by herself. She stood confidently, as if she was oblivious to all the stares she was getting from both boys and girls. The boys were more gawking at her than staring. Everyone wanted to know who she was, where she came from, and whose class she was going to be in. My eighth grade class was the lucky one.

Melanie had barely made a friend. We were all green with envy. We knew it, and Melanie knew it, too. She knew we wouldn’t accept her, and she kept her distance. Girls were like that—catty, competitive, and jealous.

“Are you listening to me?” Katrina asked.

“Yeah, I’m sorry, my mind wandered off for a second. Katrina, are you applying to any school other than The Academy?” I asked her, changing the conversation. My

conversation with my mom that morning still lingered on my mind. She looked confused by my question, which seemed to appear out of the blue.

“No,” she replied slowly trying to figure out where this was coming from.

“Have you changed your mind?” I could hear alarm in her voice.

Katrina and I never discussed the fact that her family had money and mine did not. There was no need for her to apply to anywhere else. She definitely had the grades to get in. Her grades were better than mine, but they didn’t need to be. She didn’t need a scholarship. Her parents could afford it. She was going to The Academy, and that was that.

“No, it’s that my mom was giving me the ‘if I don’t get a scholarship I won’t be able to go’ speech this morning. My mom and Ms. Marina are both singing the same song: ‘I have to keep my options open.’”

Her face changed from alarm to genuine concern.

“You will get it.” She squeezed my arm.

I smiled at her. I still remembered the first day we met here in first grade. I was already seated in my seat. Katrina was walking around the class, looking for her name on a desk. A few minutes later, she found her name on the desk next to mine. She smiled at me. I smiled back at her, and we had been inseparable since.

In the fifth grade we went on a field trip to see a live production of “Annie.” The play was performed at The Academy. When the bus stopped in front of the school, my eyes grew wide. I had never seen a school like this. It was so big. As we walked from the bus to the school grounds, I took it all in. The buildings were all white, with gold trim. The grass was a deep rich green. It looked like something out of a movie.

We were given a tour of the school before the play. The inside was even better. The floors were sparkling, the walls freshly painted, and the classrooms were modern and new. They had a gym, an auditorium, a soccer field, and a cafeteria that looked like a restaurant. The name fit perfectly, it was: *The Academy*. That day, Katrina and I fell in love with the school. We made a pact that day: We were going to The Academy for high school.

I smiled up at my best friend. Our family’s finances were not our only differences. I am short. She is tall. I am curvy. She is slender. I am fair skinned. She is dark skinned. My hair is long and wavy. Hers is short, with a perm. Standing next to each other, we looked like “the odd couple.” But inside, we were kindred spirits.

“You are right. I will get the scholarship,” I replied, linking my arm through hers as the school bell rang.

“Of course I am. We are going to The Academy and you will make cheerleading,” Katrina said, and we headed to class.