

Laurel Hill: Abundant Blessings

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Chapter 1 – Major Changes

It's the first week back to school and there's already drama. Ms. Schaffer just announced that they're holding an election for various class positions like President and Treasurer and as she handed out the forms to fill out, to the girls' surprise, they see that Kristi is running for class President.

Kristi's always been a bully to Amy, Jennifer, Morgan, Kate, and Nikki, and when Maggie joined their group after moving to Laurel Hill, she received the same treatment from her. But lately, Morgan has suggested they try to be nicer to Kristi. She has a hard family life and Morgan pointed out that it's what God would want them to do, so the girls have gone out of their way to be nicer and not give Kristi a hard time back.

Instead, any time Kristi's been nasty to them or tried to pick a fight, the girls just try to be as nice to Kristi as they can and complement her on something, which seems to throw her off-balance and she stops being so nasty to them.

In fact, the girls admit that they've seen some changes in Kristi and she's been nicer to them than before, so they're hoping that their new attitudes will help make the change permanent. But there's an enormous difference between being nicer and being class President.

"I just can't imagine Kristi in charge of our class!" Nikki whispers harshly to the other girls as Ms. Schaffer collects all the pamphlets from the interested students and sits down at her desk to sort them out.

"Should one of us run against her?" Amy asks the group.

Morgan quickly replies, "No, I think Kristi would take that as a slap in the face if one of us ran against her. Besides, there's a lot that goes into being class President, and it takes up a lot of your time."

"That's true," Jennifer agrees, "You have to attend meetings and make decisions on things for the whole class. You can never please everyone so even though the position has some power, it's definitely not a popularity contest."

"Let's just wait and see who else is running against Kristi," Morgan suggests, "Besides, she would only get the position if she's meant to, right?"

Maggie response, "You're right Morgan, we can't change what the outcome will be, God has it under control."

“Man, giving control over to God is so tough sometimes!” Nikki mumbles. “But you’re right Maggie, it’s not up to us.”

After several minutes of sorting the pamphlets at her desk, Ms. Schaffer stands back up in front of the class and announces, “Okay everybody, we have had a lot of people sign up for the class officer positions. I’m going to announce who is running for each position so you can make an educated decision on Election Day. For Secretary we have Mary Adams and Amelia White running. For Treasurer we have Mark Radner, Scott Miller, and Beth Schuman running. For Vice President we have Terri Mallory, Rob Henson, Peter Quinn, and Lauren Carey running.”

Ms. Schaffer pauses for a moment before continuing, “And for the position of class President we have two candidates running: Kristi Lucas and Robin Reynolds.”

The girls all let out a deep breath of relief that Kristi won’t be running unopposed for the position of class President.

“Now remember, you’ll want to promote yourself for your position. You’ll be able to hand out flyers and hang banners in the school. The election will be held on September 11th so you will have just over a week to promote yourself. In addition to promoting yourself by flyers and banners, we will be holding a debate on the 10th so everyone can clearly outline why they feel they are the best candidate for their position as well as what changes they may be bringing to the class,” Ms. Schaffer adds.

The class murmurs over the excitement of the election for several minutes as Ms. Schaffer prepares to begin teaching the next lesson.

“A debate, which means they’ll have to stand up in front of the class. I can’t wait to hear what Kristi says about becoming class President,” Katie adds as she pulls her books out of her bag.

Morgan sighs, “I know she’s been rotten in the past guys, but let’s give her the benefit of the doubt. I really want to hear why she decided to run for class President.”

Everyone gets their books out and turns their attention to the front as Ms. Schaffer starts her lesson. When lunchtime rolls around, you can tell by the buzz in the cafeteria that the upcoming election is a big topic of discussion. Kristi sits with her friends at a table and as the girls walk toward their usual table for lunch, Morgan stops beside Kristi and says, “Kristi, good luck on running for class President.”

Kristi looks annoyed at first, thinking Morgan is being sarcastic, but one look at Morgan’s face shows Kristi that she’s being genuine. She softens and gruffly replies, “Thanks,” before turning back around to her friends.

As the girls walk over to their table and sit down, they all watch Morgan waiting for her reaction to the encounter. After a few minutes, Morgan looks up and sees them all staring at her, so she chuckles and responds, "Well, I guess its baby steps with changes."

The girls laugh in response as they pull out their lunches and start eating.

"I'm interested in what Kristi will propose to do as class President," Maggie adds after a few minutes. "I don't think she just wants to boss everyone around in the role, so there has to be something she has in mind to suggest as changes."

"Yeah, I can't wait to see what she says during the debate," Nikki agrees.

A couple of days later, the girls see Kristi putting up some flyers in the halls at school and her friends are handing out flyers. Morgan goes over and takes a flyer and the girls all gather around to read it.

"Look at that," Jennifer points out, "She's suggesting we get vending machines with healthy options in the school. That's a fabulous change to suggest!"

Maggie adds, "Wow! Robin's flyers just said, 'Vote for Robin Reynolds.' She didn't put any of her suggestions on them. I like that Kristi's being proactive with her self-promotion."

"If this is her first suggestion then I **really** can't wait to hear what she brings up during the debate," Nikki responds.

Amy stands thoughtfully for several seconds before pulling the girls off to the side of the hallway. "I have an idea, but you might not like it," she announces to the group.

"What's your idea Amy?" Katie asks.

"Well, I was standing here reading Kristi's flyer and noticed that it's just Kristi, Heather, and Joanna giving them out and hanging the banners. I'm thinking maybe we should offer to help," Amy replies quietly.

The girls are all pensive as they think about helping Kristi with promoting herself for the election. After a couple of minutes of silence Nikki asks, "Does that mean that we're supporting Kristi over Robin if we help her? I mean, that's what it's going to look like if we help in her campaign."

"I agree, it would definitely show us supporting Kristi in the election," Jennifer points out.

Morgan speaks up, "Would that be so bad? At least we know that Kristi's thinking about some good changes for our class. We don't even know what Robin is thinking about as she runs for president."

"Isn't that what the debate is for though?" Jennifer asks. "In the debate they'll each go over why they're the better candidate for the position so they would tell us what changes they want to make."

Maggie hesitates but then adds, "I don't know. I thought it was kind of shallow to just hand out flyers saying vote for me. I would want to know before the debate why I should at least consider voting for Robin and Kristi. A lot of the other candidates have been at least telling everyone why they should vote for them, but it's like Robin's keeping everything a secret until the debate. She just says, 'Vote for Robin Reynolds' as she hands out her flyers."

"You're right Maggie," Morgan agrees, "Unless something major comes out during the debate that would change my mind, I think I would vote for Kristi. She's shown a lot of growth and change in her attitude over this last month or so."

As Jennifer glances down at her watch, she announces, "Guys, it's almost time for class. I think we should all think about this and discuss it more on the walk home today."

"Good idea Jennifer," Amy replies as the girls turn and start to head down the hall towards their classroom.

Over the next couple of hours Nikki tries to concentrate on the lessons being taught, but one thought keeps running through her mind – *am I really going to vote for Kristi for class President?* She decides that she's going to have to just pray about this decision and see what God wants her to do. She prays, *God, please show me if we're supposed to help Kristi with her campaign. You know how awful she's been to us in the past, but she **has** been nicer lately. Am I supposed to forgive her for how she's always behaved and move past it? Please show me what You want me to do.* After praying, Nikki feels a peace come over her and she isn't as worried about the decision. She knows that God will show her what she's supposed to do.

Once the final bell has rung and the girls go to their lockers to grab the books they'll need for their homework, they're all incredibly quiet – quite unusual for this group. They start walking down the hallway and out the door on their way home.

Once they've separated themselves from the other kids walking home, they start discussing the problem at hand. "Okay, let's hear what everyone is thinking," Morgan announces to the group.

The girls all hesitate for a minute, but then Nikki speaks up, "I can't believe that I'm saying this, but I think it's a good idea to help Kristi."

All the girls stop walking and turn to stare at Nikki, shocked at her declaration. "Really?" Jennifer asks. "I was honestly still on the fence. What swayed you, Nikki?"

Nikki shrugs and replies, "I was thinking about it all afternoon but then I decided I just needed to pray about it and ask God to show me what I was supposed to do. As we were walking down the street, I felt Him telling me that we should help her. I really still don't want to, but I think we're supposed to so I'm in."

"I felt the same way Nikki," Amy adds, "That's why I brought it up before. I felt God leading me to suggest we help Kristi from the beginning."

Maggie replies, "I guess we really can't argue with that, can we? I mean, if God's leading both Nikki and Amy to help Kristi with her campaign, then we should definitely do it."

"I agree Maggie," Morgan responds. "As long as everyone agrees, we can ask her tomorrow what we can help with," she adds as she looks around the group.

"I'm in," Katie agrees.

Jennifer replies, "Okay, I guess I'm in. I can't believe I just said that," she adds as they all start walking towards home again.

The next day when the girls arrive at school, Morgan walks over to Kristi's desk before the morning starts. "Hi Kristi," she says brightly. "I wanted to ask if we could help you with your campaigning at all?"

Kristi looks up at Morgan stunned. She sits there staring at her for several seconds before replying, "You guys would actually help me?"

Amy steps up beside Morgan and adds, "Of course we would help. We really liked your idea on your flyers and can't wait to hear what other suggestions you would have as class president."

The other girls walk over to Kristi's desk as well and she looks around the group. "Well, thanks. I could really use the help. Robin got a bunch of underclassmen to help her with handing out flyers and hanging signs up and it's just been Heather and Joanna and I doing everything."

"Perfect," Morgan responds. "So, what can we do?"

Kristi thinks about it for a minute and answers, "Well, I'm allowed to have a table set up in the hallway during lunchtime where people can come up and ask me questions, but I wasn't able to do that while I had to hang the posters. Would you guys be able to hang them so I can sit at the table? Heather and Joanna are good with handing out the flyers during lunch."

"We could do that," Maggie responds eagerly.

The girls talk a few more minutes about meeting up after class during the lunch hour before heading back to their own desks.

Once the lunch hour rolls around, the girls meet Kristi, Heather, and Joanna in the hallway to figure out the plan. Heather and Joanna look doubtful at the girls, unable to believe they'd help them.

"Okay, where do we start?" Nikki asks.

Kristi pulls a stack of posters over and hands them to the girls along with a couple of rolls of tape. "I was going to try to hang these along the hallway where the 7th grade lockers are, if you could do that for me?"

"Sure, that's no problem at all." Jennifer responds. The girls take the supplies and head off towards the lockers to start hanging the posters.

After several minutes of working in the hallway, they see Robin walking around handing out flyers. Robin stops and stares at the girls. "I can't **believe** that you're helping her! Hasn't she always been awful to you guys?"

"Well, things change," Nikki replies defensively.

"You guys are crazy!" Robin exclaims before walking further down the hallway.

"Okay, so I really don't want to vote for Robin now!" Jennifer announces, "I guess I'm Team Kristi after all."

The girls giggle as they continue hanging the posters on the walls. After they finish hanging all the posters, they walk over towards Kristi's table near the cafeteria. She has several people standing around talking with her and the girls wait a couple of minutes before walking up to Kristi.

"We finished hanging all the posters Kristi," Katie announces. "Is there anything else we can help you with?"

Kristi smiles at the girls and replies, "No, that was a big help, thanks guys."

"Okay, well just let us know if you need any other help during the next couple of days," Morgan says before adding, "And we can't wait to hear you speak during the debate!"

"Thanks," Kristi responds. "I'll let you know if there's anything else you can help with."

Just then another couple of kids walk up to Kristi's table so the girls walk into the cafeteria to eat their lunch quickly before the next class starts.

Once they finish their hurried lunch the girls walk back to their classroom. "I'm glad we're helping Kristi out," Katie declares to the group. "I think it's important that she get to sit out there and answer questions for other kids."

Nikki agrees, "Yeah that'll definitely help sway some people to vote for her I bet."

"Now I really can't wait to hear the debate so I can hear Kristi's other ideas," Morgan announces.

"Yeah, me too," Jennifer quickly agrees. "Since I know that I'm voting for Kristi now, I want to hear what she has to say."

Before the girls know it, the day of the debate has arrived.