

Frenemies

At my school, Rosa Parks Christian High School, Mrs. Lakes, our 9th grade history teacher, introduced us to the new student, "Hello, class. Today we have a new student. Her name is Cassandra Brown." When everyone first saw her we were all a little surprised. We have never seen a disabled person in our school before. Her hair was a reddish-brown color with lots of curls. She was on a shiny silver metal wheelchair. She was wearing a blue shirt with white jeans. When she talks, she has a really bad speech impediment. She stutters a lot.

When I was planning on talking to her Keisha put her hand on my shoulder and said, "Do you really wanna talk to that handicapped specimen over there?"

"Yes, I do. She is new here, and I would like to meet her." So I went up to her, "Hello," I said, joyfully.

"H-h-hi, what's y-y-your n-name?"

"My name is Rachel Lee, and it is nice to meet you."

"Yeah, y-y-you too," she said with a smile.

When I was about to leave, something clicked in my head and I turned back around and asked, "Oh, I just remembered. We have a math exam coming up. Would you like to study together at lunch in the school cafeteria today?"

" S-s-sure, I'd l-l-love to!"

"Great!" Then I turned around and left with Keisha and Keke, the twins.

During Chemistry class, I heard a "Psst" so I looked back and saw Keisha trying to get my attention. "Hey Rachel, do you want to sit with me and Keke for lunch at the school cafeteria?"

" Sorry, I can't, I have to study for the math exam with Cassandra."

"Ugggggh, why do you have to study with her?"

"Why can't you just sit with Cassandra and I so that we can all study together?" I tried to persuade her.

" No, I don't want to sit with that crippled girl!"

"Don't say that Keisha, you don't even know her."

"I don't care. It was so stupid of me to ask you anyway!"

When it was lunch time, I studied the math exam with Cassandra. While I was sitting with her I had a perfect idea. "Hey, do you want to be friends with me?" I asked.

"S-s-sure, that w-w-will be great, a-a-actually you are m-m-my first f-f-friend that I e-e-ever had," she said very shyly. I was happy to make a new friend.

When Keisha and Keke overheard that, they were so furious. It looked like their heads were about to blow off. I saw their reaction as I passed by. They looked at each other and had a disgusted look on their faces. Then they pretended that they were being friendly. "Hey Rachel, what are you guys doing? You

stop studying with this helpless... girl over here, and come do some tik toks with us," said Keisha.

" S-s-sorry, Rachel can't do t-t-tik tok with you guys. W-w-we are st-st-studying for the math e-e-exam. Maybe y-y-you should d-d-do that t-t-too," Cassandra said, as a smirk appeared on her face.

" Oh,l-l-look who's ta-ta-talking, the p-p-pee brain c-c-can't ta-talk p-p-properly," mocked Keisha. When the twins were about to leave Keke got the grape juice from the cafeteria's counter and deliberately spilled grape juice on Cassandra's white jeans!

"Hahahahahahaha" laughed the twins and all the students in the cafeteria.

" W-w-why would you d-do that?" asked Cassandra in embarrassment.

"S-s-sorry, it w-w-was an a-a-accident,hehehehe." mocked Keke.

Cassandra was so humiliated that she just broke down in tears. While she was crying,I stood up right in front of the twins and asked,"Why are you guys bullying her?"

"She's just lame and can't talk,so what's the point? She should learn who the better kids are around here!"

"First of all, you have no right to bully Cassandra or anyone for that matter. Second of all, both of y'all had

problems speaking when you guys were younger and that didn't keep me from being your friend. Lastly, she is my friend and if you have the audacity to treat her like nothing, there will be a problem between us! Now, I have a question, what did we learn in Bible class?"

"Uhh, that God created us in his own image, and that we are fearfully and wonderfully made."

"Exactly! Don't you think that Cassandra is made in God's image as well?"

"Uuuuummm..... well that's different because she is not perfectly or wonderfully made. What God meant was that he made people look perfect and not deformed. We don't want the association. We are cutting you off, too!" answered one of the twins.

During Language, I was thinking about what the twins said. They don't know anything about God's grace and that He never makes any mistakes. I wasn't paying attention to the Language teacher because I was so distracted by the incident and I noticed that I had a little pain in the back of my lower legs, but I just ignored it and the pain eventually went away.

Over the next few weeks, Keisha and Keke continued with the cruel behavior towards Cassandra and even to me at times. I still tried to convince them that their behavior was ungodly and unkind, but it did not make a difference.

During this time, I kept having episodes of back and leg pain. I finally told my mom about it and the doctor scheduled an MRI of my head and spine. I confided in Cassandra and told her what was happening to me. I let her know how scared I was about having the tests. Cassandra was very supportive and encouraging. She told me that she had many MRI's and other tests plus surgeries. Cassandra said, "Don't a-afraid, God w-was with me and h-he will b-be with you." I couldn't believe what she was telling me. I didn't know she had been through such an experience through her young life. Cassandra was so brave I thought to myself. She offered to pray with me. It was such a kind and thoughtful prayer. She asked God to help me to have trust and also have faith. I felt at peace.

When we arrived at the doctor's office for the diagnosis, Dr. Assantes asked us to sit down. She showed us the pictures of my tests. She said, "Rachel has cancerous lesions on her spine that will eventually grow into tumors."

"What does it mean?," I cried.

"How could this have happened?" mom said frantically.

"Calm down, Mrs. Lee and Rachel. I know this is difficult but I need to explain what will happen. Over time, Rachel will gradually become paralyzed. The tumors will be inoperable and will block the signals from her brain.

I was so depressed and distraught that I did not go to school for the next two days. My mother was so devastated that she stayed at home with me as well. Cassandra called me a few times, but I was hurting too much to speak to her or anyone. My mom finally spoke about my condition, she asked about my feelings and my future and she let me know that she will be with me every step of the way and that we will get through this together. We prayed, hugged, and cried. I finally called Cassandra that weekend and told her my diagnosis.

"I am s-s-soo sorry, I f-f-feel your p-p-pain." said Cassandra trying to comfort me. We both cried at first and then tried to cheer each other up.

I went back to school the following week. The pain in my legs became more frequent, but I was determined to continue as normal. Cassandra and I still had lunch together and studied together. Only she knew my secret. Keisha and Keke continued to tease and bully Cassandra, and we still defended one another.

Over the next few months the pain became worse and it became more difficult to walk. Some of the kids at school began to notice that something was wrong with me. They started asking questions and started to gossip about it. My mom already explained my condition to the principal and my teachers. They all tried to accommodate my difficulties in class. Keisha and Keke saw me in the hall after class and came to me and asked,

"Hey Rachel, is everything okay? You seem like you're in a lot of pain. I know that we have not been friends lately but we still care about you."

"Oh really, you care about me? you have a funny way of showing it. You have both been mean to me for making a new friend. I wanted us all to be friends but you both refused!" Now because you think you know something about me you want to be my fri... Ahhh!" I fell to the floor in agony and could not get back up. Keke and Keisha were astonished! Keke ran to get the Principal and Keisha tried to console me but was unable to help me get up. Cassandra heard the noise outside her classroom and wheeled out to see what the commotion was all about. She came over and tried to comfort me the best she could. The principal called my mom and the ambulance. My mom arrived right away and the ambulance was right behind her. "What is happening to me mom?! I am so scared! By this time, everyone was out of their classrooms and in the hallway looking to see what was going on with me. I was too scared to be embarrassed.

Cassandra, Keke and Keisha yelled out, "We are praying for you Rachel! Don't be afraid."

The ambulance raced towards the hospital. When we arrived I was taken out of the back of the ambulance and whisked inside. Everything happened so quickly. The doctor and nurses took care of me right away. I was still in a lot of pain. The nurse gave

me medication to help lessen the pain. Thank God it worked! I started to feel a little better. My mother informed the doctor of my disease. The doctor explained to my mom and I that I had to have a few more diagnostic tests to see if my illness had worsened. To our dismay, the results showed that I was getting worse and soon would have more difficulty trying to walk. We both just burst into tears!

The doctor continued to explain that there wasn't any way to operate, and we would have to prepare for me not being able to walk in the near future. My mom told him that she understood and that she and I would get through this by God's grace.

While in the hospital, I received flowers, balloons, and teddy bears from my friends at school. I was pleasantly surprised. This really cheered me up. I even received a get well card from the twins! I had missed their friendship. I was so happy to finally be discharged from the hospital and to go home and sleep in my own bed. I still had some difficulty walking and had to use a cane, but I was happy to still be able to walk. It's funny how you begin to cherish something when you are losing it.

I returned to school the following Monday and was greeted with a "Welcome Back, Rachel!" banner with balloons and confetti. I was emotional and happy to be back and thankful for all the love that was shown to me. Of course, my friend

Cassandra was right there under the banner with a big smile and hugged me. I was very excited to see the twins. They were the first ones to run up to me and greet me.

"Welcome back, Rachel, we are so happy to see you, and we are so so sorry for being so harsh and unfriendly to you and Cassandra. Could you ever forgive us?"

"Of course, I forgive you. And you should also apologize to Cassandra."

"Cassandra, could you ever forgive us for being so cold-hearted towards you? You didn't deserve to be treated that way. No one should be downcasted or ill treated for being different. We are truly sorry."

"I f-f-forgive you."

We all hugged, laughed and cried at the front of the school and then walked together to class. It was so nice to be friends with the twins again and to share a new friend together. Despite my pain and challenges walking, it was one of the best school days that I've had in a long time.

We all became friends fast, studying together, eating lunch together and hanging out together. We were having a blast! For several months we had a good time. When school finished we hung out for the summer. We even had slumber parties, rotating nights at each other's homes. It was an unforgettable summer.

We learned so much that school year and summer. We dealt with meeting someone who was a little different from us, making new friends, dealing with bullying and most importantly learning to forgive one another and accepting one's differences. Summer was almost over and we were looking forward to the tenth grade. We would be sophomores! We were all so excited. School would be starting in a few more days.

Then the Saturday morning before the first week of school, I was asleep in bed. I woke up around ten o'clock and I tried to get out of bed but my legs wouldn't move. I thought I was dreaming. I tried again and again, but my legs wouldn't budge.

"Oh my gosh! Is it happening? Is it really happening? Now?! It can't be! No! No! This can't be happening now! The doctor said gradually! Is this gradual?! Oh God, is this it? Am I now unable to walk?" I screamed for Mom to come up right away.

Mom came running up the stairs, "What is it Rachel? What is wrong?"

"This is it mom! It has happened! I can not walk! What the doctors have said has finally come true. I can not walk!" I sobbed heavily.

My mom and I just hugged each other tightly. We cried and prayed. We asked God to give us the strength to deal with this.

I thought to myself, I have become like Cassandra. I will now be in a wheelchair. How can I return to school like this?

What will my other friends think of me? Will people treat me differently the way they treat Cassandra? What about the twins? They have just accepted me again as their friend. Will they change their minds about me and begin treating Cassandra and I cruelly like last school year? I don't think I want to go back to school."

"Should I tell my friends before school starts? I am so scared, I think I am gonna call Cassandra first so only she will understand what I am going through."

"Hello?" said Cassandra.

"Hey Cassandra, I have something to tell you."

"W-What is it?"

"I...I..I can't walk." I said tearfully.

"WWWHHHAAATTT! Oh my gosh! I can't b-b-believe this! I am so sorry. How are you f-f-feeling?"

"I am not feeling so well. I am really depressed about it. Please I beg you not to tell Keisha and Keke about this and I am afraid of going to school like this, what are people gonna think of me?"

"Ok, calm down. L-L-Listen it's ok, I've been t-t-through this. We a-a-are in this t-together. At least both of us are in a wheelchair together. Hey, we're twins! (Hehehe). I can teach you h-h-how to use it and I c-c-can even teach you how to do a wh-wh-wheelie! "Hahahahahahaha!" We both laughed. Cassandra

trying to comfort me. I actually kinda felt a lot better when Cassandra was talking to me, but I still had a little sorrow inside of me.

"Thank you for understanding how I feel about my problems. You are truly a great friend. Bye Cassandra, it was nice talking to you."

"B-Bye!"

It's today! It's the first day of school today! I am really nervous about going to school. Will the twins start to bully me the way they treated Cassandra last year? Will they talk about me being in a wheelchair? When mom was assisting me into the wheelchair, I remembered what Cassandra told me on the phone. So, I said a little prayer in my mind asking God to help me not to be afraid of going to school and not to be embarrassed. When I was done praying, my mom wheeled me to the car. When we pulled up in front of the school, I was a bit nervous, but I knew that God was with me.

Keisha and Keke just ran up to me and hugged me tightly and Keke whispered to me and said, "I'm so sorry for everything that I have ever done to you, and you were right, God made us fearfully and wonderfully made. God never makes mistakes."

I was so emotional that I just started to bawl. All of my friends and classmates just came up to me and hugged me. I was praising God because he answered my prayers. I thought that my

life would be miserable but actually I learned how kind my friends can be.

The students helped me whenever I had challenges such as reaching for an object that was out of reach, and they even helped me to wheel around at games or other activities. I realized that being confined to a wheelchair is not all bad. I think that this was God's plan. Maybe that is why God sent Cassandra into my life. It was to prepare me for what was going to happen to me in the future. Cassandra helped me to believe that I am perfect in God's image even though I can not walk anymore. I believe and trust in God. He knows what is best.

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