

The Daisy Chain
By
Diane Guntrip

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Term 1 Entry 1

Dear H,

Well, the countdown is over! After all the waiting, I can now proudly boast to the world that I am a music student, specialising in Vocal Studies at St Celia's Academy of Music.

Isn't that cool?

Did you think I'd forgotten you? No way! It's just been so hectic here and I've been lost in a frenzy of activity. Have you ever felt like that? Everything is great, but I feel as though I've been uplifted to another universe and I'm spinning in a continuous whirlwind. I just need to stop the world for a short time to catch my breath.

Don't worry. It's not as bad as it sounds. I just wanted to touch base with you and let you know how I'm settling in. I'll give you all of the details when I've more time to write.

Wow!

Amanda

Term 1 Entry 2

Dear H,

At last, I've found some quiet time to sit down and write. Mum and Dad have now returned home to their hectic lives. My Mum is a successful owner of a chain of fashion boutiques and my dad is a busy senior partner in a law firm. Remember, they travelled to the Academy with me? They stayed in a hotel close by for a few days to help me settle in as it's my first time away from home on my own. I was so grateful for this.

Awesome! It's a free Saturday afternoon, and I'm really relieved no organised activities have been planned. How I've been hanging out for some spare time! The pace, so far, has been hectic and I desperately need some time-out. My head feels as though it's continually buzzing and ready to burst. It'll be much better when I'm in a routine. I have sooooo many things I want to share with you. I've been storing all of my new experiences in my head as well as scribbling them down in my notebook hoping I won't forget them.

I'm sure, sitting here and describing everything to you step by step, will help me put it all into perspective, calm me down and help me to organise my thoughts so that my mind won't appear to be in such a jumbled mess.

'I'm upside down

Inside out

Strung out on a line so tight.

I'm living in a topsy-turvy world!

Need to get myself

Sorted out!

PHEW!! Time to take some slow breaths and remember the techniques Mrs Field, my singing teacher at home, taught me when I became a bit frazzled.

What must you be thinking of me? It's really not as bad as it sounds. I'm thrilled to be here, ecstatic in fact. It's just that St Celia's Academy is huge compared to my previous school, St Ursula's, and with the brand new school routine, the adrenalin has been working overtime. Apart from this, there has been the move from home and having to get used to living in close proximity with lots of other girls in the boarding house. It's a completely new venture for me as an only child. I've always been used to my own space and spending time on my own so I have to get used to a completely different way of life. I will admit to you, and no one else, that it's not as easy as I imagined.

Now that I've got all of that out of the way, let me tell you all about it right from the start. I've a feeling that this is going to be a long diary entry!!

As we had a five hour flight, we arrived at the hotel the night before the tour of the school and special early afternoon tea took place. This was arranged only for the new students and their parents. It was SO exciting that it passed in a complete blur. It was a shame that I couldn't absorb it all.

Mum, Dad and I were then shown up to my room in Grantham House. Ever since I heard I had won the scholarship I had been counting down the weeks, waiting impatiently for this day to arrive. You can imagine that by now, my emotions had built up to a huge crescendo and I was walking on air. It wasn't until later, when Mum and Dad had returned to their hotel and all of a sudden, in my room alone, I suddenly crashed down to earth. The realisation hit me that I was on my own to cope with this new situation.

Well, not completely on my own as I had the support of my parents, Gran and Emma but they weren't going to be with me personally on this very exciting journey. I've got to keep reminding myself to keep positive and follow the dream.

Now, Amanda, keep on track!

I'd been allocated my room on the second floor of Grantham House. It contained a single bed, desk and chair, chest of drawers and bookcase, fitted wardrobe AND my own ensuite! Can you believe it? I'm incredibly lucky.

As I was busy unpacking my possessions from home, arranging framed photos of Mum, Dad, Gran and Emma on the empty shelves and pinning my favourite posters on the large cork board, I was aware of lots of frantic activity further along the corridor. I could hear doors banging, girls screaming in delight presumably on meeting up with best friends again after the long summer break. It made me feel a bit lost and I had the first tiny pangs of home-sickness. All I wished for, at that moment, was a friend of my own to greet me.

I bravely continued on with my unpacking, finished it and then realised I didn't know what I was supposed to do or what was expected of me. Had I missed out on some vital piece of information? Had I been told what was going to happen after I'd unpacked? I racked my brain. I just couldn't remember. My mind appeared completely empty.

I sat down quickly on the bed as I realised, just thinking about it all, had made me feel sick in the stomach and my legs had turned to jelly. I'd heard of people using that expression before but never really knew what it meant. Now I know! I'd never been in this situation before and I felt completely out of my depth. For an instant, all my old fears returned. You remember what I was like when I attended St Ursula's? All sorts of

doubts suddenly emerged. I felt swamped with apprehension. This was what I had been waiting for all this time. Just at that moment, I wasn't sure I was doing the right thing.

What really scared me was whether I would make friends. It sounds awful to admit that I never had any friends in my previous life at the awful St Ursula's. No one there seemed to be like me or understand me. In fact, I didn't have a real friend until I met Emma, who was a student from a nearby school, who shared my love of singing. I wish she was here with me now. She's so easy to talk to. I've arranged to Skype her later on today.

Well, silly me, I need not have worried. The next moment, one of the House Mothers on duty, gently knocked on my door, popped her head around and said, "Hello Amanda. Welcome to St C's, I'm Gillie, one of your House Mothers. All the girls on this floor are coming along to the lounge room at the end of the corridor for a get-together. Please come. Everyone is dying to meet you. See you in five minutes."

I felt Gillie's friendliness wrap around me like a warm comforting blanket. She had such a lovely open smile and such deep brown eyes. Her fair hair was tied up in a pony tail and she was wearing jeans, jumper and sneakers. Nothing formal about her and certainly not what I expected. None of the teaching staff at St Ursula's would have been seen in anything less than formal jackets and skirts.

I immediately felt my spirits begin to rise and the weight on my shoulders became a little lighter. I felt as though the new more confident Amanda I had become during the last few months was SLOWLY beginning to surface. So, I plucked up my courage, took some deep slow breaths, put a smile on my face and I went. It was all very informal. There must have been about fifteen girls of differing ages, from thirteen up to nearly eighteen. They were all perched on any available space they could sit on. Some of the

older girls appeared very composed and sure of themselves. Gillie suggested that I squeeze in next to another new girl who I had briefly noticed earlier in the day. Looking around, you could easily pick out the new girls by their frightened expressions. I probably appeared the same when I entered the room. I think the expression would be that we all looked like frightened rabbits!

Gillie began to speak. "Welcome everyone, especially the new students. It's great to see everyone here, safe and sound after the long summer break. For those of you who don't know, I'm Gillie one of your House Mothers. I also teach Song Writing. I'd like to think that you can come to see me at any time if you need to chat about anything. Now, I'd like everyone to introduce themselves and say a little about your music specialisation."

The older girls started the ball rolling and I sat there trying to remember names, but it was hopeless. There were just too many new things going on that I couldn't take it all in. I wondered if I was the only one experiencing this or whether the other new girls were experiencing similar feelings. However, I found out, through the introductions, that some of the girls had flown in from overseas to attend the Academy. I thought it would be fun to get to know them, especially as we all share a love of music.

At that moment, I imagined a wonderful picture of us all getting on so well, a harmonious group, encouraging and supporting each other in our common pursuit of musical excellence. This idea was shattered by the late arrival of another girl who appeared to be about sixteen. She burst into the room announcing loudly in a haughty manner, "For those new students who don't know, my name is Jessica, NOT Jess, and I'm an accomplished pianist. I'll be studying piano at the Conservatorium in London the year after next!"

This was greeted by the older girls with what I would describe as looks of disdain. One of them replied, "I didn't know you'd been accepted at the Conservatorium."

Jessica replied snappily, "Well, of course, I'll be accepted!"

I overheard someone mutter, "Why does she always appear to be so irritating?"

I looked towards the girl sitting next to me and I could instantly tell from the look in her eyes, that she was also feeling wary of the newcomer. There was something about the latest arrival. She seemed to be over exuberant and full of her own importance. I had an awful feeling that I wasn't going to get on with her and hoped our paths wouldn't cross.

Anyway, returning to the get-together, Gillie explained, "As is usual on the first night of term, we have the disco to which everyone is invited. For newcomers, I'm sure some of the older girls will fill you in on time, place etc."

I thought to myself, "Oh no!"

You may think I'm odd. I know I'm thirteen but I'm just not used to having boys around having only attended an all girls' college and not having any brothers or close male relatives. I didn't feel very confident about attending the disco, especially on the first evening when I didn't know anyone. Gillie mentioned that as an alternative for anyone who decided that they didn't want to attend the disco, they could meet her in the lounge at the end of the corridor for a sing-a-long. I thought that sounded more my scene.

After the introductions, I found out that the girl sitting next to me was called Immie, short for Imogen. I had noticed her at the afternoon tea with her parents. She looked about my age but appeared very sophisticated. Everyone appeared to dive into the sandwiches, tiny iced cupcakes and other delicious treats except for Immie and myself

who had already feasted earlier in the afternoon. However, I did accept a sandwich so as not to appear rude. It seemed as though everyone's nervous energy began to settle as we all became engrossed in non-stop noisy chatter.

I found out Immie's room was next to mine and she's here to study piano. She told me that her father worked for one of the major airlines and that the family was based for the time being in Singapore. "You are brave coming all this way," I said.

"I'm used to it as I've always attended boarding school," she said. "My flight was only a bit longer than yours. Now that there's Skype, it helps a lot."

Later, as we sauntered back along the corridor to our rooms, Immie said, "I'll see you at dinner. I'll knock on your door when it's time and we can go down together."

"Oh, that would be great! See you later," I replied thankfully.

I hope I didn't sound too enthusiastic, but I was SO relieved. Immie appeared so calm and confident. I didn't want to admit to her that I had been dreading entering a large dining room all by myself. I also wondered if I would have any appetite left after two afternoon teas in one day. I thought I'll have to take care in the future if afternoon tea was a regular thing. No way am I going to return to being fat and frumpy ever again, but that's another story.

I must take a break now and Skype Emma. I promised her I would fill her in on the latest developments.

Hopefully, I'll have time to continue this later this evening.

Amanda

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