

Keily | My Nemesis in My Private Space

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I hurriedly folded my laundry scattered on the bed, eyeing the mess that my room was.

The blanket was huddled into a lump at the other corner of the bed, the top of my dresser was cluttered with age-old lipsticks and eyeliners borrowed from my mom and rarely used, the study table had bundles of worn-out books ready to fall down at a single touch, and shiny wrappers of chocolates and chips—which I'd gorged on last night—peeked out of a small trashcan beneath the table.

I should definitely get rid of those wrappers before James arrives.

It was Saturday evening. At 4:30 p.m., I'd woken up from my afternoon nap and found a message from James—sent almost two hours ago—that he'd be at my house by 5 p.m.

That was enough for me to jump out of bed to fix my tornado-stricken room. The last thing I needed was to be judged by him for my messy way of living. My parents were enough for that.

I wished I could incorporate Addison's minimalist lifestyle, but unfortunately, I was too much of a hoarder.

By the time I finished cleaning, it was 5:10 p.m.

With a tired sigh, I sat down on my bed, waiting for James to show up. With the way I was running around the room, I was sure I'd lost a few pounds. It was good that he was running late.

I'd chosen my house to do our work, because it felt safer with my father downstairs.

Also, James already knew the way after he had dropped me off at home from the ice cream parlor last Friday, which saved me from an awkward car ride with him.

There was no way I could go to his turf, not knowing how he would treat me when we were alone.

Yet, I was still dreading his arrival.

“Keily!” Dad’s voice boomed from downstairs, cutting into my thoughts. “Your friend is here.”

Speak of the devil...

I immediately stood up and looked at the dresser mirror to fix my hair.

What the hell am I wearing?!

I was in my pink oversized Hello Kitty top and white-and-purple striped pajamas. In all the chaos, I’d forgotten to change out of my bedclothes. I didn’t want that bully to see me like this. It was too vulnerable.

But there was no time to change, so instead, I patted down my hair and made my way to the living room, concealing my embarrassment.

My nerves jumped on seeing James standing near the front door with my dad.

He was wearing a camouflage jacket with a plain white shirt underneath and brown cotton pants and carrying a backpack on his shoulders.

His dark curls weren’t slicked with gel, giving him a graceful, messy look. The guy knew how to dress.

Hearing my footsteps, James’s eyes moved from Dad to me. I flushed when they trailed down my body discreetly.

Compared to him, I felt so underdressed, and his piercing gaze only added to my embarrassment.

“Keily,” my father said, getting our attention. He was looking at me. “You didn’t tell me your project partner is the son of Ronald Haynes.”

He must’ve sensed confusion on my face, because he continued, “Last year, I was on the team to design their company’s software—the one for motor stimulation.”

I did remember that project, as it had been one of the few I hadn't been able to help Dad with because it was way out of the scope of my knowledge.

"Oh," I mumbled. So, his father had once employed my father. *Great!*

"I shouldn't keep you kids." Dad turned back to him, and James returned a charming grin. My eyes almost bulged out of their sockets when my father smiled, completely smitten by the asshole.

He was never this friendly with strangers.

"Go ahead." My father patted his shoulder as if they hadn't known each other for only a couple of minutes.

I bet Dad wouldn't be so chummy with James if I told him about all the insults he had hurled at me. I was tempted to, but bringing adults into teenage drama wasn't always a good call.

The last time I'd done that in my previous school, my parents had bombarded the principal's office—who hadn't even made a half-assed effort to stop the bullying.

It had only ended up giving me a reputation as a snitch among my peers and had alienated me further.

Plus, I didn't want to give that devil the power of knowing he scared me to the point of hiding behind my parents. *I am eighteen, for God's sake!*

James nodded and walked inside and stood in front of me. Without saying a word, I started upstairs. He followed.

"Keep the door unlocked!" Dad's voice rang behind us.

I grimaced, imagining the smug smile of the boy behind me.

"Your dad seems all right," James commented once we were out of his earshot.

"Yeah," I replied nonchalantly, but inside I was bursting with nervousness. *James Haynes is in my house!*

When we reached the small hallway, his steps slowed. I turned around to find him looking at our family pictures hung on the walls.

I cringed when he looked at the pictures of my younger self. I'd always been a chubby kid, and seeing how James always body-shamed me, I felt self-conscious.

I cleared my throat to get his attention and walked faster. I got it. I'd been a fat kid, but he didn't need to gawk at those photos like I was an alien.

I opened the door to my room, very aware of his presence behind me. I was inviting my nemesis into my private space.

The lemon-yellow walls of the room greeted us. It had been a good idea to clean my room beforehand, because James's eyes wandered to every corner, studying everything.

His gaze paused at my study desk, which had a framed picture of me with my parents, taken back in Remington's amusement park, and also some of the novels I was currently reading—now stacked neatly.

"Do you want to see the website's layout?" I asked, standing in front of him and cutting short his inspection. I felt oddly unsettled by the way his curious eyes took in my room.

James looked down at me, and I took a step back, realizing we were too close. He smirked at my movement.

"Sure, let's see what you designed." He strolled past me to my desk, threw his backpack on the floor, pulled out the chair, and sat down like he owned the place.

At least there was no need for me to say, *Get comfortable*.

"Bring your notebook," he ordered, treating me like a servant who was here to do his bidding.

I walked to him and opened the drawer of the study table and hastily took out the pink-colored notebook. I sat down on the bed after handing it to him.

"You did a bad job. I don't like it," James said barely a minute later after going through my drawing.

I frowned. "What don't you like about it?"

"Everything."

This asshole! I had kind of worked hard on that, so his dismissing it like a snob was pushing my buttons

"I'm pretty sure it's better than what you could've done," I mumbled, annoyed.

He lifted his brows, but instead of anger at my back talking, there was amusement. "Aww, Piggy, did I hurt your feelings?" He smirked. "Don't take it to heart. I was kidding. Your design isn't bad enough to not fly with Mrs. Green."

I replied with a weak glare, which only ended up making him chuckle. I found myself liking his carefree laugh even though I was annoyed.

He seemed to be in a good mood today.

James took his laptop from his backpack and settled it on his lap. "Let's work with what you've got. We'll keep designing the rest as we code. That's more efficient."

I nodded, eager to get on with work and wave him out of my house as early as possible.

There was only one chair in the room, so we both had to sit on my bed, side by side.

James didn't mind at all; in fact, he was the one who asked me to scoot over and make space for him on the single mattress.

As James sat beside me with folded legs, I became too aware of my body, how much space I occupied, and my flabby thighs that were brushing against his knee.

"Piggy." His breath hit my ear, and I almost jumped. That was the final nail in the coffin, and my whole face turned red with embarrassment.

I dared to look at him, expecting his usual gloating smile, but was taken aback by his piercing eyes. My blush intensified a thousandfold, and his pupils dilated.

Like a domino effect, my stomach started flip-flopping inside, and my skin buzzed with excitement. His gaze swept over my whole face, lingering on my lips.

I realized I was doing the same, studying his dazed dark eyes, Grecian nose, high cheeks, and slightly plump lips.

He's beautiful...

Shocked by my thought, I immediately backed away from him.

Where did that come from, Keily?! And when did we move that close?

I looked at James, who was frowning at me like a brat. He looked, dare I say, disappointed. My jerky movement had broken whatever spell we'd been under.

I would have been lying if I'd said I didn't mirror his feelings, but pulling away was better than dealing with the guilt if we had continued...whatever we were doing.

He hates me, I reminded myself to purge that disappointment.

"I haven't even done anything to you yet, Piggy, and you're so jumpy," James said, asshole smirk returning to his lips. "Almost makes me want to do something and see how high you can jump."

Yup, he's back.

I looked down at my lap. "Please, don't." I winced at how small I sounded. "Let's not start."

"Yeah, let's not. Unfortunately, we have work to do," James sighed, opening his laptop. "We can have our fun later," he added mischievously.

We finally started working on our project. James suggested different color schemes and other minor changes to the website while I coded.

To be honest, his choices were better than mine; he knew the palettes that attracted customers' attention.

At some point, he took the laptop from me to code, but that didn't last because he kept forgetting tags. However, his eyes never wavered from the screen, keeping tabs on everything I was doing.

"You're good at coding," he commented once.

My fingers paused on the keys at the compliment. "Uh...thanks."

"Now, work," he ordered. "We need to add two more menus."

So bossy. No doubt, he was the son of a businessman.

Two hours later, our homepage was ready. By then, we were leaning against the backrest with our legs sprawled out.

"I guess that's enough to show Mrs. Green next week," I said, looking at the web page.

"Yeah."

I turned to him and found him already staring at me. Not wanting a repeat of last time, I avoided his eyes and looked back at the screen.

I handed him back his laptop after saving the file and shutting it down. "Now you should go."

James chuckled. "Not a very hospitable person, are you?"

I lifted myself off the bed. "I don't want you to be late."

"You just want to get rid of me." James grinned before standing up to pack his stuff.

"You can't blame me for that...", I muttered under my breath, turning away from him.

He tugged a strand of my hair from behind, raising my head. "But I'll make sure you never get rid of me, Piggy," James whispered in my ear, and I stilled at his nearness.

"I'm going. For now."

With that, he backed away and left.

It turned out James only left my room, not my house.

When he reached downstairs, my mom was home, and she invited him for dinner, berating me for not having done the same.

So, here I was, sitting at the dining table with a chicken casserole on a plate in front of me and James Haynes next to me.

My father had already been swept away by him the moment he'd revealed he was the son of Mr. Ronald Haynes.

And now, with the way he was having such a pleasant conversation with my mom, soon she'd be swooning over him too. Or she already was.

What a charmer!

"Aside from computer class, do you share any other classes with Keily?" Mom asked James.

"We have English and Calculus together." James smiled and took a spoonful from his plate. His movements were very elegant.

"So, you two must be friends."

He threw a quick glance at me. "I hope so," he said after swallowing.

I scowled.

"Then, I must ask you to look after Keily. She's—"

"Mom, don't do it again," I whined, cutting her off. "I don't need a babysitter. Besides, you already hired Addison for that."

"Keily, your mother is only looking after you," Dad said, his reprimanding tone telling me to behave in front of our guest.

"Sorry." I looked down at my half-eaten plate.

"Don't worry. I'll keep an eye on Pi—Keily, Mrs. Harris," James quipped, flashing his charming grin.

Ass!

He looked at my father. "By the way, Mr. Harris, I need the recipe for this casserole. It's delicious."

“You cook?” Mom took the words right out of my mouth.

“Of course,” James replied. When he noted the table was quiet, he continued. “My parents spend most of their time at work, so my brother and I learned to take care of ourselves pretty early.

“No hard feelings against them, since they’re making money for us. And we also have maids and servants to do chores.

“But sometimes, I like to prepare my own meals to make sure I’m bulked up for football games. Plus, cooking is an important life skill that everyone should know.”

So, he wasn’t a complete spoiled brat.

“You are a very smart young man, James,” my mother swooned.

“I’m glad you’re Keily’s partner,” Dad added. “She’ll definitely benefit from your company.”

James looked at me and smiled, his eyes glinting with mischief. “I’m sure she’ll be beneficial for me too.”

Ugh.