

Keily | Persuading James

Persuading James

“Oh God, that bastard had your parents eating out of his hand.” Addison laughed.

“I don’t know if my parents are gullible or if James is just that good,” I huffed. My hands moved through the dozens of dresses hanging in front of us on a stand. I frowned at their small sizes.

“At least he behaved,” Sadhvi added with a grin.

Addison and Sadhvi had invited me to join them on their shopping spree. It was our girls’ day of going through different stores in different malls and pigging out on street food in between.

Lola couldn’t make it, as she already had a family thing planned.

Right now, we were at the third store of the day, searching for party dresses.

So far, Addison and Sadhvi had tried on millions of outfits but had bought none, even though they’d looked fabulous in most of them.

Meanwhile, I just desperately looked for something decent in my size. No wonder I wasn’t a shopping enthusiast. Finding the right clothes for me was like searching for treasure on a remote island.

Every time I liked something, it turned out it wasn’t available in my size, and by some rare chance, if it was, the outfit lost all its beauty once I put it on.

I wish I wasn’t fat. Life would be much easier.

Even though I didn’t like shopping, I was here because my closet lacked party clothes, and an after-game party was coming up on Friday. The kids of Bradford sure partied a lot.

“You could’ve told your parents about him picking on you,” Addison said, holding a baby-blue off-the-shoulder top in front of her and looking at the mirror. “That would’ve brought down his charm a notch.”

I'd narrated James's visit to my house yesterday, leaving out the part where he and I had acted weird and were about to...um...kiss?

Argh, I didn't know what we'd been about to do! The girls already had their theories, and I wasn't going to add fuel to them—especially when I myself couldn't grasp what was happening.

"I don't know," I replied. "It seemed silly ratting him out to my parents. I don't want to look childish." *Also, I don't want James to think of me as a coward.*

Addison put the top back. "I kind of get it. Sometimes parents can complicate stuff."

"Especially when they still treat you like a twelve-year-old," Sadhvi agreed. I guessed she'd had her own experiences.

Sadhvi picked out a dress from the stand where I was digging. I felt envious of how easily she found her size.

"I'm going to try this one." She waved the dress at us before strutting off to the changing room.

"Still not found anything?" Addison asked me. I was the only one who hadn't found anything to even consider.

I shook my head. "There's nothing good in my size."

"Let me help." Addison stood beside me and rummaged through the same stand. When she didn't find anything, she moved to a cluster of clothes on another stand. And then another.

After the fifth pile, she huffed and glared at the mannequin, who was clad in a beautiful summer dress and posing with one hand on her hip. "This place is garbage."

I sighed, sitting down on a leather stool. "You don't have to curse the place. This always happens. It's not easy to find clothes for me."

"Don't deprecate yourself because of this shitty store. Even I can't find anything good here. These people mess up their sizes a lot. Small, medium, large—everything is the same."

“How does it look?” Sadhvi walked out of the changing room and stood in front of us in a satin tube dress that reached her mid-thigh.

The dress complemented her figure, and she looked very beautiful.

“It’s pretty. You should—”

“Change out of it,” Addison interrupted me. “We’re going to Vian’s.”

Sadhvi blinked in confusion. “I thought you were short on money.”

“Keily can’t find anything good here, and neither can I. I’ll buy one less skirt, but at least other things will be worth it.”

Sadhvi nodded before turning to me. “Vian’s is perfect for you.” She grinned. “It’s a little expensive, but they have a very good section of plus-size clothes. You’ll love it.”

With that, she trailed back to where she came from. A minute later, we were on the road.

I tried not to get my hopes up too much for Vian’s, but it was hard when Addison and Sadhvi were praising it throughout our car ride.

And once we stepped inside the store, I understood what they were talking about.

They had more choices than all the shops we’d visited combined. The fabrics were also of much better quality, and most importantly, they were stocked with outfits in my size.

Heck, even the ambiance of the place was different—in a good way.

“Told you that you’d love it,” Sadhvi chirped from behind as I was checking out a red skater skirt.

“Thanks for bringing me here,” I smiled. Things were definitely more expensive here, but fortunately, my months of savings could accommodate that.

“Why don’t you try it?” Addison said, looking at the skirt in my hand.

“Okay.”

“Wait. Put this on too,” Sadhvi stopped me and handed me a top, then rushed me to the changing room.

Addison’s eyes widened, and Sadhvi gasped when I stepped out and stood in front of them. The top that Sadhvi had given me was a black halter neck with intricate woven designs on the collar.

I had tucked it inside the red skirt, which reached a couple of inches above my knees. Although my arms and legs looked stocky, I still liked how it fit me overall.

“You’re so getting that,” Addison said.

I grinned. “You don’t have to tell me.”

We looted the store until six o’clock, finally *shopping*.

In addition to the previous outfit, I bought a navy-blue cocktail dress, black block-heeled sandals, and a peach cardigan—just because it looked so pretty.

Addison got herself a pair of denim shorts and a shimmering blue crop top. She wanted more stuff but ran out of money, as she had already spent some on online shopping last month.

Sadhvi picked a miniskirt, a frilled maroon shirt, a leather jacket for the coming winter, and pink loafers.

“I can’t believe a place like this actually exists!” I almost shrieked.

We were exiting the store to get something to eat. Circling the whole shop one hundred times and running in and out of changing rooms had left the three of us famished.

“My mom will freak out once I tell her about this store,” I said.

“Remington didn’t have anything close to Vian’s?” Sadhvi asked.

“They have small boutiques, but nothing close to this. I can barely find things in my size in common stores.”

Addison unlocked her Volkswagen. “No wonder you’re so conscious about your body,” she muttered before entering.

Her remark took me aback for a second. Maybe she was right.

Maybe my unease wasn't completely my fault. When the stores don't stock your size, how are you supposed to believe you're desirable?

I felt good, kind of happy. There was a little bounce to my steps as I walked to my locker after class.

This morning, before I'd left for school, Dad had handed me a letter that said I'd passed the test for my learner's permit.

I'd taken the written test last Thursday at the town's DMV. Now, five days later, I had my permit, allowing me to drive with an adult.

I knew it wasn't a big deal. I just had a learner's permit, not even a driver's license. However, after having such a good time on Sunday with Addison and Sadhvi, this week was looking up for me.

A month later, I would be a full-fledged legal driver. *Yeah!*

I opened my locker and started arranging my stuff for my next class.

"BOO!"

I jumped, hitting my hand on the inside wall of the locker.

After catching my breath, I turned around to find Lucas with a wide grin on his face and James standing behind him with a completely opposite facial expression.

"Why did you do that?" I glared at Lucas, trying to ignore James, who was burning me with his stare.

"You were here, and I wanted to." Lucas shrugged, his grin still intact. *Idiot.* I shook my head. "You do realize people can die from shock." I turned back to my locker to get my stuff and also to avoid James's scowl. *What's he doing here, anyway?*

"But you haven't," Lucas countered.

"For all you know, I could." I tucked my calculus book inside my bag.

“She’s right, you know. You shouldn’t do that.” James’s gruff voice ended our banter, and I looked at him with surprise. Even Lucas’s eyebrows rose.

Something flickered in James’s expression at the attention on him. He shoved his hands into his pockets nonchalantly. “All that fat’s got to have built up somewhere. Heart disease is no joke.”

I rolled my eyes and turned away. *There it is.*

Lucas groaned. “James...”

“Now, hurry up. I’m not in the mood for Penson’s speech about punctuality.” He sounded annoyed.

“Then, go, James. No one’s stopping you.” My voice bounced around inside my locker as I spoke with my back to him.

But I was done anyway and slammed my locker shut. I swiveled around, giving a tight smile to Lucas and blanking James.

“Let’s go.” I stepped ahead of them. The joyful skip of my feet had now turned into stomping.

Leave it to Asshole to ruin my happy vibes.

I heard Lucas cuss at him before they both joined me on either side. Lingering glances were thrown our way by other students; however, I tried to ignore them.

They were inevitable, since a fat girl was walking with two of the most coveted boys of the school.

But at the same time, with my five-foot-three stature, I felt like a dwarf between two six-foot-something giants.

Lucas shifted closer to me. “So, you heard about the after-game party on Friday, right?”

“Yeah. Addison told me about it.”

I knew James was eyeing us quietly. His warnings regarding Lucas’s and my relationship were always at the front of my mind whenever the three of us were together.

“So, you’re coming to the game and the party,” Lucas declared.

“What if you guys lose the game? Will there still be a party?”

“If we lose, then we’ll have to party harder to get over it.”

“That’s the spirit.” I smiled despite the devil on my other side.

“But there’s one problem, Keily, and I need your help,” Lucas said, his lips jutting out into a fake pout. “James, here, isn’t letting us throw the party at his house.”

“Lucas, drop it,” James scolded, but it was me who flinched at his sharp tone.

Lucas appeared not to notice. “I’m trying to get him to succumb to peer pressure and agree. Will you be peer number twelve, after our whole team, to pressure him to host the party at his house?”

What made him think that I’d be of any help in persuading James?

“C’mon, Keily, ask him,” Lucas said to me.

“I’m sure he has his reasons,” I replied. “You shouldn’t force him.” I didn’t want any part in this conversation.

“No, he doesn’t. His mom is going to be in the hospital for her shift, and his father is leaving on Friday morning for two days. He has the whole house to himself.

“And Mr. and Mrs. Haynes don’t even mind it as long as we don’t party when they’re home. I get it. They need their home quiet to rest after their long hours of work.

“I wish you were at the parties that James hosted last year. One was after we won the championship, and the other was on New Year’s Eve.

“His house has a pool, a gaming room, and also a mini basketball court. Oh, the bets we made on that court are hilarious.

“Keily, it’s actually going to be to your benefit if James throws the party at his house. You’d love it there, especially that swimming pool.”

James snorted, cutting into Lucas's rant. "She won't even show up at the party if it's at my place. Plus, Seth has no problem hosting. Let him do it."

James was right.

No matter how enticing a big house with a swimming pool was, I wouldn't step inside the devil's house just to party.

I mean, it would have been so strange drinking and dancing at the house of your bully.

And if, by some miraculous stupidity on my side, I showed up at James's party, he'd throw me out himself before I could cross the threshold.

Lucas's face fell, but after a thoughtful minute, a smug smile replaced it. "So, you care if she comes, then," he said to James.

James and I both went rigid. I wasn't sure what was going on in James's head, but in mine, I was wondering whether James really had just implied he wanted me there.

"Shut your mouth, Parks," James warned. His voice was almost a growl, and it sent a shiver down my spine.

"I'm sure if you ask Keily nicely, she'll come," Lucas said. "There's no need to disappoint us all because you care so much about her attending the party."

Lucas stepped in front of us, blocking the way into Calculus. He looked at me. "Promise him you'll come to the party if it's at his house."

"Uh..."

"I swear you won't regret it." His big eyes bore into mine.

I shifted my weight from one foot to another, a blush rising on my face. At this moment, I hated Lucas so much for putting me on the spot.

"What are you doing?" James asked, and I noted curiosity in his tone instead of anger.

No, no, no, no.

"You don't want Keily to miss the party," Lucas answered him. "*That's* why you're not opening the gates of heaven for us."

I peeked a glance at James; his eyes were already on me, and there was a smirk on his lips that warned of incoming trouble.

Of course, the asshole was enjoying my discomfort. He reveled in it, fed on it like a demon.

“Your feeling is very wrong,” he told Lucas. “But now that I think about it, I don’t want to deprive a newcomer of *heaven*. So, I’ll host the after-game party *only* if Piggy promises to come.”

“Of course, she promises,” Lucas said immediately. “Right?” He looked at me with so much hope that a single *no* could have shattered his life.

I turned to James, who raised his eyebrows in a challenge, awaiting my reply. Somehow, peer pressuring James had turned into peer pressuring me, and I was caving.

“Yeah. Sure. I promise.”

What’s wrong with you, Keily?!

“Yes!” Lucas fist-pumped the air, attracting more glances from around the hallway.

“We have a class to get to,” James said casually, sidestepping Lucas and walking into the classroom.

Next Chapter

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