

## Keily | Breaking Promises

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I looked back at him, puzzled, trying to ignore the fuzzy sensation in my chest at his touch.

My confusion must have been amusing to him, because his ferocious gaze dimmed, and an all too familiar smugness appeared on his face.

“If you’re away from me, how will I give you a tour of my house?” He stood up, towering over me. “This party, after all, is for you. It wouldn’t be right for the host to leave their special guest to sulk in some lone corner.”

I frowned. So, he wanted to show off.

“I won’t sulk in some corner. I’ll find Addison. You don’t have to be so concerned about your *special guest*.”

“I saw Addison and Sadhvi getting drunk somewhere, having too much fun to remember you,” James countered. That cocky smirk was infuriating.

“Plus, Matt and Lola are getting frisky in the garden. And our friend Lucas most likely has his tongue shoved down Myra’s throat by now.” There was a triumphant gleam in his eyes at the mention of Lucas.

He really hated the idea of Lucas and me being together.

“I’m the only company you have left,” he said. “Why not take it?”

He was right, and I didn’t like that.

“Besides, I promised your parents I’d look after you.”

The last remark earned him a glare from me, but that only widened his smirk.

“You just want to have your time poking fun at me,” I mumbled, my gaze darting to his chest. *Why do I like him?!*

"I'm glad you know me so well."

"You wanted me to come. I came. Now, leave me be. This is your party, James. All your friends and the whole team are here. I'm sure you'll enjoy it better with them."

"I can't enjoy it with them when my favorite toy is right here."

I looked at him, appalled. His wolfish grin angered me further.

*Toy.* Of course, I was just a toy for his entertainment.

"I'm not your toy!" I hissed and tugged my arm away from him. To my surprise, he let go.

James's words had been degrading before, but they'd never stung this badly. I had an inkling that was the result of my newfound feelings for him.

*Oh God, I hope this isn't how it's going to be from now on.  
This is all so messed up.*

My hurt must have been evident, because his grin dropped and his eyes softened.

Since when had he started caring about hurting me? Wasn't that all he wanted?

Well, I wasn't going to hold my breath for an answer. My desperation would lead me to come to dangerous conclusions, and I already had a bunch of emotions to struggle with.

I turned my back to him to bolt from the room.

"Keily!" James called after me.

I paused. He'd never called me by my name except in front of teachers and my parents. A sick part of me liked the sound of it in his deep voice. *Ugh...*

A large hand landed on my shoulder, and I spun back to shove it away. His touches were overwhelming. So were his dark eyes, watching me intently, figuring me out, making me feel exposed.

"You're really touchy tonight," he said. Then a look of realization passed over his face.

"It's Lucas, isn't it?" His jaw clenched, and darkness took over his features. "You're still hung up on our quarterback. You like him."

*Oh God.*

"James, I don't—"

"You deny it, but you want him. All fucking dressed up to impress *him*, get *his* attention." His eyes trailed down my body.

"James, I'm not interested in him!" I was tired of his baseless accusations.

"But what does he do?" he continued, ignoring me. "Leaves you hanging to dick his ex. But you're *still* hung up on—"

"You! I'm hung up on you, asshole!" I snapped.

His eyes widened. For a second, I was glad to just shut him up, but then I realized what I'd spluttered. Fear and anxiety crawled within me.

*No!*

That was why I didn't want to be near this ass. He made me unstable.

Especially now.

"I...I didn't mean..." It took me almost a minute to find my voice and break the tense silence between us.

"Then what did you mean?" James stepped forward, his wide eyes gaping at me as if I held the secret to world peace.

"I meant...nothing," I managed to choke out, stepping back from his inquisitive stare. My face was burning. Heck, my whole body was burning.

"You meant nothing?"

I nodded.

"So, are you or are you not hung up on me—"

"I mean, I don't like Lucas," I cut him off. "And I can dress however I want. If a girl dresses up, it doesn't always mean she wants to impress guys. Most of the time, she just wants to feel good. I want to feel good. Guys give themselves too much credit—"

James grabbed my hand, stopping my word vomit.

"I get it," he said, curling his fingers around mine. They felt warm against my cold, sweaty ones, even though my body was on fire. "You don't like Lucas, and you want to feel good."

I should have pulled away; it was the right thing to do. But one small smile from him—a real one with no hidden mischief or taunt—and my mind was a blank slate.

*I'm in trouble.*

James started leading us through the crowd, and it was a while before I came back to my senses.

"Where are you taking me?"

"To push you off a cliff."

I stopped. He looked back, pressing his lips together, most likely to suppress a laugh.

"I'm kidding. There are no cliffs in Bradford. I'll have to drown you in the lake."

His asshole self was back. I tried to pull my hand away, but he held tight.

"I'm giving you a tour of my house," he finally said.

"I didn't say I wanted one."

"You have no one else to hang out with. Be with me," he suggested.

"So you can insult me and have a good laugh?" My words came out bitter.

He sighed. "How about I try to behave tonight? Is that all right?" He sounded...genuine.

I looked at our entwined hands. James was being nice. It almost felt surreal, but I was very aware that this could all turn around for the worse.

But suddenly, something in me was willing to take the chance despite all the promises I'd made to myself to stay clear of him.

"Fine. Let's go."

Besides, I really did have no one else to hang out with.

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