

Keily | Let's Make This Clear

Keily

Let's Make This Clear

"James is such a sweetheart," Mom said, handing me the pair of folded navy-blue track pants. James's pants. She had brought them from the clothes hanger outside.

I had hand-washed the pants last night.

They were expensive, and as a middle-class person, I hadn't allowed them to be put in a washing machine for rough handling, no matter how little value they held for James.

"You should invite him for dinner. Your dad likes him too."

I grunted noncommittally and put the pants in my bag. I went back to my breakfast—boiled eggs with veggies—with Mom's gushing over James as background noise.

Since my parents had found me in men's pants when I'd returned home last evening, I'd had to narrate my embarrassing incident in James's house to them—or to my mom, because once I'd said *period*, Dad had awkwardly excused himself out of the living room.

Not all men can be James.

Unfortunately, I was more like my dad, if my shame in front of James was any hint. Mom had correctly labeled Dad and me as two prudes.

Yesterday, James and I had worked on our website until 7 p.m. before he dropped me off at home.

He'd been surprisingly well-behaved while we worked, even after creepily threatening me to get back to his old ways.

Add in the stuff he'd done for me instead of kicking me out of his house for almost ruining his car's seats; I was wary of him and his hot-and-cold behavior.

What a confusing fella!

Addison's Volkswagen honked right on time, five minutes after I'd finished my breakfast.

Dad was still asleep, as usual, so I said goodbye to Mom and bolted for the front door, eager to get away from her rambling about what a good kid James was.

"Girl, you hate school more than I do, huh?" Addison smirked at my sullen face as I sat in the passenger's seat.

I shook my head. "Not that I don't hate school, but that isn't it." I put on my seatbelt, and my cousin started the engine.

"Continue."

"Ever had your mom fangirl over the boy who's made your life a chaotic mess?"

Addison's eyes, staring at the road ahead, narrowed. "What did James do now?"

"Nothing," I replied immediately. "I mean nothing bad. In fact, he helped me..."

Once again, I narrated the clean version of what had happened yesterday, cutting out the part where I cried and behaved like a child.

"That was strangely kind and...unexpected," my cousin commented.

"I'd rather have his kindness than him humiliating me for staining my pants."

"Don't think too much of that. Almost every girl has faced it. Periods suck."

"Yeah, they do," I agreed, feeling slight pain in my belly. Usually, my period cramps only acted up on the first day, but when I felt anxious or tense, they lingered longer.

And right now, I was anxious about James.

"So, what are you two right now?" Addison asked and threw a side glance.

I snorted. "Frenemies."

Addison chuckled. "Welcome to the club."

I shook my head. "I have no idea what we are."

"Maybe that kiss finally brought him to his senses. He probably thinks he has a chance with you now."

I blushed. "I don't think so." I remembered his cruel words on Monday morning, labeling me as a *desperate whale* for kissing him.

Helping me yesterday had been just a random act of kindness, which I shouldn't take for anything else, because he was going back to his old ways and apparently "stepping up his game."

But now, I wasn't going to take his insults lying down.

Addison looked at me and raised her brows. "I like that you're angry with him." I realized I was scowling and schooled my expression.

"Give him hell and make him pine. It'll be fun to watch."

I flushed harder. "No one is pining for anyone, and it's *him* who likes giving *me* hell."

"Then, change that. Make sure now he's on the receiving end."

"Calm down. I'm just starting out with this whole vengeance thing," I said, eyeing her mischievous grin. "But I promise I'll try my best to do that if he continues with his assery."

I found James at his locker with a girl before the first bell. I'd seen her plenty of times with him before. She was very pretty.

James's shoulder was leaning against his locker, and a lazy smile washed over his lips.

The girl giggled at something he said, and jealousy flared inside me, seeing them standing so close, followed by anger at myself for being this pathetic.

When it came to him, my brain lost its simple reasoning skills—because my reactions weren't very reasonable.

I had to return his pants. I wanted to wait until the girl left before approaching James, but he spotted me, so I decided to get over it.

His eyes lit up with amusement—and also mischief—watching me come to him. He stood up straight when I reached them, his eyes raking me from head to toe.

I fought back the redness ready to spill on my cheeks. Even though I was turning over a new leaf, the old habit of being wary of him wasn't going to die overnight.

"Hey," the girl said, and I broke my gaze away from James. She gave a tight-lipped smile that was supposed to be friendly but wasn't. "You're Keily, right?" Her sharp eyes scanned me.

"Hey." I smiled back, mine more fake than hers, and nodded. I didn't know her name. We didn't share any classes. She probably got my name from the aftermath of last Friday night.

"I'm Anne, by the way." She chuckled awkwardly, easing a little bit of tension. Her eyes moved between James and me. "So, are you two a thing?" She didn't sound too delighted, despite the big smile.

I knew her assumption came from our leaked picture on Instagram.

She looked at me. "I hope James isn't hiding you. It'd be cruel of this scoundrel to keep the hopes of so many girls alive." She punched his arm lightly.

"We're not—"

"Who knew my relationship status was the whole school's business?" James taunted her, shifting closer to me. "Also, I don't believe I'm the subject of *many girls' hopes*, but if that's the case, then they've been squashed a while ago."

I whipped my head in shock to gape at him. A small smirk was playing on his lips. He should have been denying her assumptions about us instead of egging them on.

Anne's smile dimmed. "So, you two *are* together," she stated a little grimly. "No," I said immediately, "we're *not* together. I was just here to return his..." Somehow, I felt bringing up his pants wasn't going to help the situation.

“Oh, yes. You have my pants,” James said, his smirk widening as he shifted his body slightly, his shoulder brushing against mine. The touch was subtle but electric, making my pulse quicken.

Okay, he’s trying to pull something.

He glanced at Anne, then back at me, his voice deepening. “The ones I lent you yesterday at my place,” he practically purred.

I felt the air thicken, my breath catching as his shoulder lingered against mine, the heat of his body making it impossible to step away. Anne’s smile faltered, but I was too paralyzed by the closeness of James to break the moment.

Damn this devil!

“Oh.” Anne’s smile had completely disappeared. I kind of felt bad for her. She liked James, and here he was, deliberately insinuating to her that there was something between us.

I was not comfortable giving my embarrassing period story to counter the narrative he was building. I wasn’t good at coming up with lies either.

“Were they comfy, Keily?” James asked me in a cooing voice.

I was speechless. This guy was impossible.

“I think I’m going to go,” Anne said, smiling awkwardly. “Thanks for the notes, James.” She waved the binder in her hand, which I hadn’t noticed earlier, and walked away.

“What was that?” I asked James once she was out of sight. I hastily stepped away from him so I could breathe again.

“What was what?”

“Don’t play. You were trying to make us look like we have something going on.”

He sighed. “Anne’s a good girl, but a little dense sometimes—or maybe she’s persistent. She wasn’t taking hints that I’m not interested in her.”

Not going to lie, I felt good knowing he wasn’t interested in her.

“And you just walked in right now. It felt easier to play into her presumptions about us to get her off my back. Consider it repaying my favor from yesterday.”

I glared at him. “You can’t just use me like that.”

“Use you?” James scoffed. “Really?”

“Any rumor regarding you spreads like wildfire here. You shouldn’t drag me into it.”

He shook his head, staring down at me. “People already have a lot to gossip about us after you kissed me at the party. Don’t worry, this will barely scratch your image.”

My cheeks finally reddened. He was right, but I didn’t want to back down. “I thought you didn’t want to be associated with me.”

“Then, maybe you should think harder.”

“With all the mood swings you have, it’s pretty hard to know what you want.”

That shut him up. We stared at each other, and I realized we had moved closer. I stepped back, my blush rising at full force. I took my bag off my shoulders and unzipped the back to take out his pants.

“Here.” I handed them to him. “Thanks for your help yesterday,” I said curtly and turned around to go to class.

“Keily,” James called gently, making my insides fuzzy just hearing my name. I stopped and faced him again. I was taken aback by his determined expression.

His eyes were hard, and his lips pursed, contrasting with the softness in his voice.

“What?”

“Since my mood swings confuse you, let me make it clear what I want.” He stepped forward and didn’t stop until our bodies were inches apart. “I want you.”

Next Chapter

Continue to the next chapter of Keily