

## Keily | Deserve to Be Miserable

### Deserve to Be Miserable

“BOO!”

Lucas jumped, his head hitting the locker’s door. “Ow!”

I laughed as he turned around to glare at me.

“That hurt!” He rubbed the side of his head.

“Not very pleasant to be sneak attacked, is it?” I teased.

“Since when did you become the Punisher?” Lucas grumbled and spun back to shut his locker.

“Ever since I learned vengeance is so sweet.”

“Addison is bad company for you.” He looked at me, furrowing his brows like an admonishing school principal.

“And that’s coming from you?”

A smile played on his lips, threatening to break his serious facade. “Okay, you got me.”

I chuckled, and he at last smiled.

“Let’s go. I can’t wait to stuff my mouth with our cafeteria’s delicious food,” he said sarcastically.

“Wait.” I stopped him. “I want to talk to you.”

It was lunch, and my stomach was roaring to be filled with *the cafeteria’s delicious food* too, but it had to wait. I was on a mission.

Lucas nodded and stared at me to begin.

“It’s about James,” I said.

“What did the fucker do now?” I noticed his fists tightening. I didn’t like his anger at the very mention of James’s name. *It shouldn’t be like that.*

“He didn’t do anything. At least not anything bad.” Oh, he’d done a bunch of stuff, but it definitely hadn’t been bad.

I tried to keep my cheeks from reddening, thinking about how James had helped me at his house or when he’d kissed me at school, or stood up for me at the game.

“I meant about you and James,” I clarified. “You guys are being ridiculous by still fighting.”

I wanted Lucas to patch things up with James already. They’d been dragging out their fight for too long.

Though it wasn’t my place to interfere, I felt responsible, because I was—*kind of*—the reason behind their spat.

I wasn’t interested in playing their mother, but maybe I could nudge Lucas a little to let go of his hostility. The two were childhood friends.

I could see Lucas struggling by not having James by his side. Sure, he had many friends, but James was his person. James must have been feeling lonely without Lucas too.

Plus, football season had begun too. With one loss already for the team, keeping their animosity off the playing field would definitely help. Victories and losses felt much better with friends.

Another reason—that took me a while to admit to myself—was that I wanted them back together because *I was turning soft on James.*

“Oh, come on, Keily, don’t do that,” Lucas moaned. “He deserves it, considering how he bullies you.”

“We both know he’s stopped now,” I argued. “I really appreciate what you did for me, though I obviously don’t condone your actions, but don’t pin this on me now when you’re both prolonging your fight because of your foolish egos.

“Also, I know you still care about him. You wouldn’t have defended him against Ryan and Collin at the game if you didn’t.”

"I was just standing up for a teammate. It's my job as captain." Lucas huffed, folding his arms and leaning his shoulder against the locker. "Anyway, I won't be making the first move. It should be him who apologizes."

He looked above my head at something behind me. My back tingled, feeling the familiar awareness of someone's gaze.

I turned back to find James standing with Axel and Keith near the back door. *When did he arrive?* Keith's locker was in the same hallway as Lucas's, so he was probably here for him.

The boys were conversing among themselves, but James's eyes were fixed on us.

I frowned in confusion when James narrowed his eyes. I gazed back at Lucas to see him glaring back and moving closer to me. I sighed. Both of them were behaving like giant toddlers.

"To be fair, it was you who punched him. He didn't even retaliate," I said, getting Lucas's attention and stopping his eye daggers.

"He totally deserved that punch!"

"What's up with you jocks and using violence?" I shook my head. "Maybe he did, but it isn't right to hit someone—"

"Why are you taking his side?" Lucas scowled. "You're not supposed to defend him. You're supposed to bash him with me."

"I, um—" He would have been right if not for the things that had happened these past few days. I caught myself looking back at James and blushed. "Recently, he's been good to me."

"Has he?" Lucas leaned down with a smirk, purposefully getting our faces closer.

"Don't do it." I stepped back. It didn't feel right to continue with this act. Myra didn't like it. James definitely didn't like it. Now I wasn't liking it either.

Lucas pouted. "Don't do what?" He feigned innocence.

“Don’t play dumb. You know what I mean. I ran into Myra yesterday at the grocery store. She thought we had something going on. People here talk about us, and it reached her ears too.”

“What did she say?” he asked curiously. His demeanor changed at the mention of Myra.

“Not much. She just gave a very short version of why you guys broke up. You wrongly accused her of cheating on you.”

“Of course, I am the evil guy,” he commented bitterly before leaning down, his green eyes glinting. “What did she think of you and me? Like, was she jealous or something?” He really tried to sound like he couldn’t care less.

“Kind of.” I shrugged, hiding my smile. “But I’m not speaking for her.”

“Are you two planning on skipping lunch?” someone said from behind.

I turned around. James, Keith, and Axel were here. Keith and Axel had amused smirks on their faces, whereas James was frowning. My face heated under his accusing gaze.

“We were about to head off,” Lucas told Axel. “Thank you for your concern.”

Axel rolled his eyes. “Stop being a bitch, Lucas, and come sit with us. It’s getting annoying now.”

“Yeah, will you two just cut it out?” Keith added, looking between James and Lucas.

“We’ll cut it out when we want to,” Lucas huffed. “C’mon, Keily. Let’s go.”

“Keily, will you sit with us today?” Keith popped the question before we could move.

“No, she will not,” Lucas answered immediately.

“Let her speak,” said James. He turned his scowling face toward me.

My blush returned under all the pairs of eyes.

“Yeah, join us. We’re one friend down; we can use another one,” Axel urged, taunting Lucas. “We’ll buy you lunch.”

"I'll buy her lunch," Lucas announced.

"Or maybe we can ditch this shitty food, and I can drive us to the nearby pizza place," James suggested, his scowl intact and not at all inviting. "Treat's on me."

"You won't make it back in time."

"Who cares?" He shrugged.

"Well, I'm not going to leave her with you."

"Last time I checked, you're not her dad."

"Oh, I'm definitely not her dad." Lucas smirked. "I'm something better."

*What?*

James's jaw clenched. He looked ready to kill. "Do you think I don't know what you're doing? Your shitty acting is not working. You're not her anything. I already have her—"

"Hey, stop it!" I interjected, my face red with anger and embarrassment. These two were talking as though I weren't here.

"You both are hopeless! Why was I even trying? You know what? Bash each other's heads like buffoons, for all I care. You two deserve to be miserable without each other. I'm done feeling guilty."

With that, I swiveled around and stomped away. I hated the attention my outburst had drawn.

"Stop checking her out, dude," I heard Lucas mutter.

"Shut your mouth, Parks," James warned.

*Oh God!* I thought my face couldn't burn more. I was wrong.

By the time I reached the cafeteria, lunch was half over. Addison, Lola, and Sadhvi raised their eyebrows at my sour face, but I wasn't in the mood to say anything.

They would find out from somewhere else anyway. People here loved to gossip.

Oh, and Lucas didn't come to our table. He was back at his regular one.

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I rubbed the steam from the mirror and looked at my reflection wrapped in a towel.

I had an average face for a white teenage girl, discounting my chubby cheeks and double chin...or maybe they were sort of okay too.

Though I did wish for smooth skin, free of the red spots and acne on my cheeks and forehead. I envied those who didn't have to deal with this part of growing up.

Then came my body, with which I shared a complicated relationship. I hated my chunky belly, big thighs, jiggly arms, and most of all, the ugly stretch marks covering them—courtesy of puberty.

However, there were some times, although rare, when I admired my breasts and curvy hips. *I felt pretty.*

Until the *harsh* opinions of others that I'd heard for the majority of my life bombarded my mind.

I knew it was not a good life strategy to let others define me, but it was hard to not derive my values from the people around me. Their words imprinted on my mind, consciously or unconsciously.

So, in the end, their harsh opinions mattered.

I was working on self-love. I ate right and didn't go on crazy diets, and I also tried to stay active. I'd read books and blogs and watched YouTube videos preaching body positivity.

They'd all produced some benefits. But in the end, having the good company of Addison, Lola, Sadhvi, and even Lucas was working wonders.

Mom and Dad were awesome too, but acceptance from peers provided a different validation. Friends were what I'd lacked in Remington. My schoolmates there hadn't been so kind.

I thanked my lucky stars that we moved away from that toxic place.

I unwrapped the towel and put on my nightwear. Usually, I didn't wash myself at night, but tonight, I felt like taking a warm shower before sleeping.

I walked out of the bathroom into my room, threw myself on the bed, and picked up my phone lying next to my pillow.

My heart fluttered, seeing there was a recent message from James. I opened it.

James

Hey, I just want to apologize for today. I was angry at Lucas. I didn't mean to be so brash. I'm sorry for bringing you into it.

I smiled. I felt harder, seeing his considerate side.

Truth be told, I'd been more flustered than furious when James and Lucas were arguing. Their bluntness had taken me aback, and it hadn't helped that Keith and Axel had been there too.

I'd ignored James and Lucas in Calculus, so it was natural for them to assume I was angry.

I scrolled up and compared this message with our last ones, when James was threatening me about our computer assignment. There was so much contrast. When had he become so...different?

Keily

Apology accepted. At least you and Lucas made up.

Not a minute later, he was back online.

James

Only because he was too afraid to see you. Honestly, I was a little too.

I grinned.