

Keily | Footsteps in the Hallway

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Footsteps in the Hallway

James pulled the Camaro to a smooth stop in front of my house, the engine purring for a second before he shut it off.

I'd been staring out the window, trying to keep my nerves in check, but now that we were here, my stomach twisted up in knots.

"Home sweet home," James said with a grin. His tone was teasing but gentle, as if he could sense I was wound tight.

He turned his head to look at me, those dark eyes of his warm and confident. I could feel them even though I refused to look back.

I let out a slow breath, pushing open the door. "Let's just get inside."

James followed me out, and we walked up the short path to the front door. My dad's car was in the driveway, which meant he was home. That eased some of the tension coiling in me.

I would never become used to being alone with James—and especially not now that we'd admitted our feelings for each other. Everything felt too intense, and I was too aware of how easily I lost control around him.

I knocked once before pushing open the door. "Dad, I'm home!"

From the kitchen, I heard the clatter of dishes and then Dad's voice. "Hey, sweetheart!"

He appeared in the doorway, drying his hands with a towel. His face lit up when he spotted James stepping in behind me. "James! Good to see you again, son."

James gave him that easy, charming smile I'd seen him use to win over everyone. "Good to see you too, Mr. Harris."

My dad clapped him on the back like they were old friends, and I rolled my eyes. James had my dad wrapped around his finger, just like he did with my mom.

“You two getting some work done today?” Dad asked.

“Yeah,” I mumbled, already heading for the stairs. “We’ve got that web project to finish up.”

“All right. Keep the door unlocked, okay?”

“Yeah, yeah,” I said over my shoulder, pretending not to notice James’s smirk as he followed me up the stairs.

When we got to my room, I opened the door wide and stepped inside, letting James follow me in. I dropped my bag by the desk, feeling him move closer behind me.

He was close—too close. My breath hitched as I felt the warmth of him on my back; his presence was making my skin buzz.

I froze for a second, staring at the neatly stacked books on my desk, not daring to turn around. I could feel the familiar heat of his gaze on the back of my neck.

“Keily,” he murmured, his voice low, almost teasing. He leaned in just a little, his breath brushing against my ear. “Why so tense?”

I swallowed hard, my pulse racing. “I’m not tense,” I lied, trying to step away, but his hands landed on my shoulders, applying just enough pressure to stop me from moving.

His thumbs glided over the space between my shoulder blades, pressing just a little, but damn did it feel good after carrying books around school all day.

“Really?” His voice was full of mischief. “Because it seems like you are.”

I didn’t dare turn around, not with him standing so close, with his fingers just brushing my skin at the neck of my T-shirt.

I could feel the tension crackling between us, pulling me toward him, even though I knew I should pull away.

I was still scared to trust him fully, scared that whatever this was between us could disappear just as quickly as it had started.

But at the same time, I couldn't deny how much I wanted him.

I forced myself to step away from his touch. "We should get started," I said quickly, moving toward the bed and sitting down.

James just chuckled softly as his hands dropped to his sides, like he knew exactly what was going on in my head. He knew exactly what he was doing.

As James sat down next to me, he opened his laptop and set it on the bed between us. Our website was looking good—clean, professional, and coded mostly by me, since James wasn't exactly a genius.

"So," James said, scrolling through the lines of code. "We're almost done with the homepage. Just need to tweak the navigation bar a bit, right?"

I nodded, trying to stay focused on the work and not on how his knee was pressed against mine, or how his arm was draped casually over the pillow behind me, just close enough to brush my shoulder every now and then.

"Yeah, the nav bar still needs to be aligned properly. I think I'll have to adjust the padding." I leaned over, reaching for the keyboard to start typing, but James shifted closer, making me lose my train of thought.

"I got it," he said confidently, but the second his fingers touched the keyboard, I knew he was about to mess something up.

"No, you don't," I said quickly, pushing his hand aside and pulling the laptop onto my thighs. "You'll break the whole layout if you don't space it right."

James chuckled, leaning in closer as I typed furiously.

"Oh, come on. You think I'd mess it up that bad?"

"Yes," I said flatly, though my lips twitched into a smile. "You literally forgot to close a div tag the other day. The whole page collapsed."

"Hey, that was one time!" he protested, but there was a teasing lilt in his voice. "Besides, you're the one who's a perfectionist about this stuff. I could've left it, and no one would've noticed."

"Mrs. Green would've noticed." I typed quickly, making the adjustments I'd planned. "Okay, I think that should do it."

He leaned over my shoulder, his breath warm on my neck as he peered at the screen. "You missed a tag," he said softly.

I inhaled sharply, feeling the weight of his presence all around me. "I-I didn't miss it," I stammered, quickly double-checking the code to prove him wrong.

But my fingers felt clumsy, shaky even, and I could barely concentrate with him this close. I fixed the error anyway, just to be safe, and turned to glare at him.

"See? I didn't miss it."

James grinned, unbothered by my attempt at annoyance. He was leaning even closer now, his dark eyes full of that playful mischief.

"You know," he said after a beat, "you're kind of a control freak. You could let me do something."

I raised an eyebrow. "Oh, really? You think you can handle it?"

He flashed that cocky grin of his. "I mean, you do most of the heavy lifting, I'll give you that. But I could totally tweak the colors or something. Make it pop."

I laughed, rolling my eyes. "You think changing the color scheme is all it takes to make a website look good?"

"Hey, I've got taste," he shot back, sitting up straighter and pretending to be offended. "I could totally make this thing look cool."

"Cool? Right." I couldn't help but laugh again, though the sound came out breathier than I intended.

"Fine," I said, sitting back and crossing my arms. "Show me what you've got. I dare you to make it look *cooler*."

James grinned, leaning forward to take over the keyboard.

But as soon as his fingers hit the keys, I knew this wasn't about making the website "cooler" at all. He was stalling—dragging things out on purpose, giving himself an excuse to stay close.

And I didn't mind. Not one bit.

Minutes passed like that, with him changing things that didn't need to be changed and me fixing them afterward. Eventually, I pulled the laptop onto my lap again.

"James, see? You can't use that tag there—" I turned to look at him and froze.

His eyes met mine, and for a long, silent moment, neither of us moved. The air felt thick, and I knew I was in trouble—big trouble—because I didn't want to pull away this time.

I didn't realize how close we'd gotten until he reached over with one hand and gently moved the laptop off my lap, setting it to the side on the bed.

My heart thudded in my chest, a nervous flutter building in my stomach, and I suddenly became hyper-aware of how intimate this was—us, lying on my bed, just inches apart.

James didn't move back. Instead, he stayed close, his arm sliding down from the pillow to rest behind my shoulders, his other hand lightly brushing the edge of my leg as he shifted, leaning in even more, until his breath was warm against the side of my neck.

My chest tightened as the space between us disappeared entirely, and suddenly, I was lying flat against the bed, with James leaning over me.

His hand moved to cup my face, his thumb gently stroking my cheek. The touch was so soft, but it sent a tremor down my spine. I couldn't breathe, couldn't think—only feel.

His fingertips brushed my jawline as he tilted my chin up, guiding my face toward his. I felt the bed dip under his weight, his body nearly pressing against mine.

I blinked up at him, my heart in my throat, as his lips hovered just a breath away. And before I could stop myself, my body responded, leaning up just enough to close the distance.

His lips met mine, and the world tilted.

His kiss was gentle at first, as though he wanted to take his time, savor the moment. Then it deepened as he plunged his tongue into my mouth as if he couldn't get enough.

His hand slid down to my waist, finding the skin where my T-shirt had ridden up. I responded instinctively, my fingers curling into the fabric of his shirt, holding on like it was the only thing keeping me grounded.

The heat of his touch set me on fire. It was impossible to think straight. His other hand trailed slowly down my arm, fingertips barely grazing my skin, and I felt like I was unraveling, piece by piece.

The bed seemed too small, the air too thick, and all I could focus on was the way his body pressed against mine, the scent of him filling my senses, the taste of him making me dizzy. Our bodies fit together perfectly.

But then, out of nowhere, we heard footsteps in the hallway, and I jerked back, eyes wide. We broke apart so fast that my head spun.

James, on the other hand, leaned back on his hands, his usual smug smirk on his face, like he hadn't just kissed the breath out of me.

A knock came at the door, and then Dad's face popped around the wood. "Dinner's ready, kids."

James flashed me a quick look—calm, collected, and completely infuriating in how composed he was. "Thanks, Mr. Harris," he said. "We'll be right down."

I barely managed to nod, still trying to catch my breath and act like everything was normal.

Meanwhile, James stood up, packing away his laptop as if nothing had happened. He turned to me, a grin still tugging at his lips. "You okay?"

"I'm fine," I mumbled, but I could feel the heat in my cheeks.

"Sure you are," he teased, and with one last glance, he headed for the door, leading the way downstairs like he owned the place.

Dinner was more of the same—James, charming my parents with ease.

I tried to focus on my casserole, but I couldn't stop thinking about the kiss. My lips still tingled, and a new kind of heat was building in my core too. A new kind of need.

It was frightening.

"And Keily," Mom said, pulling me out of my thoughts. "The carnival's starting on Friday night, at the lakeside. We should all go this year."

I blinked, still distracted. "Oh, I'm already going with Addison, Sadhvi, and Lola."

"Well, I'd be happy to go with you, Mrs. Harris," James said smoothly, throwing me a quick glance that made my cheeks flush all over again.

Mom chuckled, blissfully unaware. "Oh, you charmer."

And this time, I couldn't even be annoyed by how easily he fit in with my family.

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