

Keily | Trying to Be Charming

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James pulled away from me, letting the cool air slip between us. I didn't really want him to stop, but now my thoughts were nagging me, and I couldn't let us continue before everything was out in the open.

He sat back, giving me his hand to help me sit up again. "Ask away."

"You said you weren't serious when you name-called me. Then, why did you do it?"

I felt him stiffen. I didn't want to ruin the mood, but I needed to know.

He'd admitted to being in the wrong but had never told me *why* he'd done and said all those things.

"I'm pretty sure I never did anything to you. I even tried to stay away from you, avoid you. So, why were you so...awful to me?"

"Why do you think?"

"Lola told me that you liked me and didn't know how to show it." I chuckled. "It's plausible... But sometimes, I think you really did find me fat and ugly and just didn't want me to hang out with your perfect group of friends—especially Lucas."

"You're not fat or ugly, Keily. You're beautiful," he stated firmly. "Maybe Lola was right."

I frowned and shifted away from him. "So, you threw all those insults at me because you couldn't simply say, 'I like you'?"

I glared. "Do you have any idea how terrible I felt every time you made fun of me for my appearance?"

I'd half expected this reply from him; still, it hurt to hear I'd faced all of that verbal bashing because *someone* couldn't be mature about their feelings.

"I'm sorry." James pulled me back, closing the gap between our bodies and trapping me in his arms.

"I really am sorry that you had to take the brunt of the shit I was going through. You absolutely did not deserve it, and I'm ashamed of putting you through it."

"What do you mean?"

He looked at me. "I don't want to scare you away."

"With the way you're holding me, it'd be pretty hard to run away."

"I'll catch you if you even try." He grinned before dropping a kiss on my forehead. It took everything in me to not melt in his arms.

"Today feels like a dream," he said. "I still can't believe I have you here with me, like this. I could hold you like this for days if you let me."

"Now, don't change the subject with your sweet talk," I chided, trying to maintain my composure.

James sighed and then nodded, knowing I needed answers for closure. "Do you remember the first time I saw you?"

How can I forget? He was the first stranger in Jenkins to call me fat to my face.

"Yeah, we met in Mr. Crones's class when you were very rude to me." *Then it only went downhill from there.*

"Didn't leave a very good first impression, huh?" His eyes trailed over my face, heating me up with their fervor.

"It will sound mushy, but the first time I saw you, I was literally swept away. You were sitting there, all shy and adorable, trying to discreetly check me out.

"Then our eyes met, and it felt like something hit my chest. The feeling was too strong; it's *still* too strong, and I'd never felt something like that before. Then you looked away, blushing. That was the cutest fucking thing ever.

"You had me then and there, Keily. I was confused, intrigued, and more than that, left with this overwhelming need to have you. I tried to keep a calm facade, but inside, I was everything but calm."

"I know it's not ideal or realistic to just fall for someone you haven't even said a single word to, but unfortunately or fortunately, that's how I felt.

"And then you were so cold to me when I reached out. Maybe I wasn't used to rejection—" He shook his head. "No, I was angry that here I was, feeling this shit ton of things, and you—"

"I was intimidated by you," I added, barely keeping my head straight with all the stuff he was saying. "Someone like you, I expected to be a bully, so I treated you like one."

Was that where we went wrong?

"I understand," he said. "I was trying to be charming, but I had no idea what I was doing. Looking back, I wouldn't blame you if you were scared."

He chuckled. "I had no idea what was happening to me; I only knew one thing: you were responsible for it. You giving me the cold shoulder didn't sit well. It kind of hurt, so I said the first thing to hurt you back without thinking.

"I beat myself up all morning for it. Then lunch came around. You were in the cafeteria with Addison. I was thinking of apologizing.

"And as my luck would have it, you came to our table and treated me like I wasn't even there. Fair enough. I was a jerk to you.

"But then I saw how good-natured and friendly you were with Lucas. That pushed my buttons. Never in my life had I been jealous of Lucas until that moment.

"In short, I felt entitled to your attention, and you gave it to him instead. I was beyond pissed. I saw you first. You were mine. It wasn't even a competition.

"Instead of apologizing, I lashed out at you, because obviously, it was your fault that I was jealous, obsessed, and feeling so many things that I've never felt before."

He scoffed at himself. "I was stupid. And then I got even stupider. If you weren't going to look at me, then I would make you, and I'd already learned how. I got reactions out of you when I picked on you."

“So, you called me a cow, fat, whale, and whatnot when, on the inside, you were attracted to me?” I accused him more than asked.

My eyes were stinging, and I had to look away from him to stop the waterfalls. “Out of all the things you could’ve done, you chose my body to make fun of—the thing I’m most insecure about.”

“Don’t you get it, Keily? I am *more* than attracted to you,” James said, burying his nose into my cheek, but I rejected him.

He sighed. “As for your body, it just felt like an easy target, even though it is one of the most beautiful things about you.

I finally turned my head to face him. I noticed his eyes were watery like mine. This whole revelation thing hurt me more than I was expecting. And it hurt him too.

“Can you forgive me for all my bullshit, Keily Harris?” His voice broke a little.

“James, I—”

“What do we have here?” someone said.

Sounds of multiple footsteps followed, breaking into the private bubble that James and I had surrounded ourselves with.

We turned around to find four familiar men behind us.

Oh no.