

Keily | You Never Answered Me

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Everything that happened after the man found us was a blur.

A crowd gathered around us, wails of sirens followed, and then we were carried to the ambulance. I could barely process it all.

But I remembered pointing to the lakeside and telling the cops about our assailants, who were probably still lying there and also in need of medical attention—even though what I wanted most was for those monsters to be behind bars.

Paramedics were quick to provide medical care to James.

They wrapped his torso with bandages to stop the bleeding, laid his unconscious figure on the ambulance bed, and attached countless wires to his body, breaking the silence inside the ambulance with beeping sounds.

I was grateful for any sound to drown out my anxiety-ridden heavy breaths.

One of them asked me some questions, too, while shining a light in my eyes to check for a concussion.

I was exhausted. Still, I couldn't tear my eyes away from James's pale face or the monitor that recorded his heartbeat. I was scared to look away, fearing he'd slip away if I did.

"Your boyfriend is going to be all right," the other medical attendant sitting next to me said. "Don't worry."

I didn't feel like correcting her that James wasn't my boyfriend. I simply nodded but kept my eyes trained on him.

It's okay. James is going to be all right.

He's going to be all right.

“He passed out because of low blood pressure and trauma. The knife almost grazed his intestines, and the blood loss was quite heavy,” the doctor explained to me.

We were at the emergency room. James was on a bed behind the white curtains that separated him from others.

“Fortunately, he won’t need a transfusion. He’s young and healthy, so he’ll recover in a few weeks. I’ll advise him to spend the night in the hospital.”

I nodded, listening attentively.

“He’ll need a follow-up too, because there’s always a risk of infection, and his dressing needs to be changed. His stitches will be taken out in a week,” he continued.

“I’ve prescribed him some antibiotics and painkillers. For the next week, he’ll need complete rest.”

“Thank you, Doctor.”

He shook his head lightly. “Your name is Keily, right?”

“Yes.”

“Keily, James is all right. Don’t worry about him—save some worry for yourself too.” His brows furrowed, taking in my face.

I knew I wasn’t looking my best. I’d caught my reflection when the nurse was treating me, and it wasn’t pretty.

My left cheek was tainted with an angry purple bruise, and my forehead had a cut, which was now bandaged. In fact, my belly had also started bruising from Blond’s punch.

After the nurse was done checking me, the first thing she’d made me do was call my parents.

They exploded on the phone once I told them I was in the emergency room.

I only provided them the gist of what had happened, laying emphasis again and again on the fact that James and I were all right. But I don’t think it made them any less panicky.

They were on their way.

Then I'd called James's mom, using his phone. Nurses had given me his cell phone, wallet, and other belongings before taking him in.

Mrs. Haynes was a lot calmer than my parents. Maybe because she was a doctor and used to hospitals. Whatever the reason, I still reassured her James was fine and gave her the hospital's name.

I tried calling Addison, then Sadhvi and others, but none of the calls went through. It seemed they were still at the carnival, probably looking for James and me.

At last, I'd settled on texting them about the situation, hoping they would see it once they had cell phone reception.

"The police told me they found your attackers where you indicated," the doctor interrupted my thoughts. "For now, they're being given medical care. You two did quite a number on them."

"Well, they did a number on us too," I muttered. "Are they in this hospital?" I didn't like the idea of those wretched men being here.

"No. They're not here. Don't worry," he assured me. "They'll be arrested. Hopper needs both of your statements to press charges, but they won't get away. Two of them have already been to jail for felony and domestic violence."

I nodded, assuming which ones: Blond and Black Hair. But I didn't want to see any of those criminals ever again.

"Don't worry about it, Keily. Take it easy for now. Your parents must be on their way; let them handle that."

"Okay." I smiled at him. "Thank you again for everything."

"Don't fuss about it. It's my job." He smiled back. "You can go and see James now."

With that, he left.

I slipped behind the curtain and found a scowling James. His eyes brightened on seeing me, but the brat kept his scowl intact.

Even though the doctor had reassured me he was fine, I still felt relieved to find him awake.

The color had started to return to his previously ashen face. He also sported light injuries and small cuts on it.

“Hey,” I said, taking the chair beside his bed. “You look really good in a hospital gown. Blue suits you.”

His lips twitched upward slightly. “I can wear this at home, if you like it. Just get me out of here.”

“If you were awake, then you heard what the doctor said. They’re keeping you here for a night.”

“I have two doctors in my family. I’ve learned enough to take care of myself,” he grumbled sullenly.

“You’re not one of those doctors, so you haven’t learned enough,” I retorted and shook my head when he huffed. “Lucas is right. You’re such a diva.”

“Thanks. I get it from my mom.”

I chuckled. “Speaking of your mother, I’ve informed her about our...situation. I think she’s on her way. So are my parents.”

He nodded. “What about Lucas, Matt, and the others?” he asked. “Do they know?”

“I tried reaching them, but I think they’re still at the carnival. I texted them instead.”

James sighed. “How did the best night of my life turn so shit?”

Same.

He held my hand that was resting on the bed and gently stroked the back of it with his thumb. The simple touch made me feel at home, but I saw red bruises on his knuckles.

He was looking at my purple cheek, though. “Are you okay? Does it hurt?”

"It hurts when I touch it. Other than that, it's fine, I guess. But my whole body is so sore," I replied honestly.

His features darkened. "I'm going to make sure those bastards pay tenfold for every demeaning word they said and every injury they caused you."

"Don't think about them for now," I said, gently pushing back the hair from his forehead. His brown locks were so soft and long, always finding a way to fall over his face. I loved the feel of them.

And it seemed I wasn't the only one who enjoyed me touching them. James calmed down instantly, letting me pet him.

"Keily," he said after a while, and I hummed. "You never answered me."

"Answered what?"

"At the lake, I asked you if you forgive me."

I sighed. "James, I don't think it's as simple as—"

"I know I've been twisted and selfish," he interrupted, eyes pleading. "I realize how shitty I was to you and how many times I crossed lines."

"I was too self-absorbed in my mission to even stop and consider your feelings. Fuck, I didn't even consider *my* feelings. I only knew this hunger to keep you close."

"Lucas's punch and him going off about how he lost his girl because of stupidity. It was a long tirade." His thumb rubbed my knuckles.

"Our kiss at the party left a deep impression too. I was also a little angry back then that you gave me such big hope, only to snatch it back with a big 'I hate you.' I guess I was still blaming you."

"After Lucas's spiel, I decided to give myself a break from pursuing you. It helped me reflect on my actions."

"There wasn't a single second when I didn't want you, but looking at you like a creep from across the hallways was okay too. In fact, it was better than hounding you..."

His eyes drifted away from me, settling on our hands. “The rest you know. I can’t say I’m a fully reformed man now. I get jealous when I see you getting close to other guys. Hell, I’m still jealous of Lucas and how close you two are.

“I don’t know what happened to me. I got scared of all these new emotions and let my worst instincts control me, and I ended up—”

“James.” I stopped caressing his head, and his dark eyes met mine. This was going to be a long conversation.

“When we were walking through the woods, you were barely awake. There was so much blood coming out of you, and I was so scared. For a minute, I thought that I was going to lose you.

“That thought was so awful. It felt like someone dug into my chest and ripped out my heart. It hurt so much that my physical pain didn’t even hold a candle to it.

“When we fell down and I was screaming for help, I also imagined a life without you. It was empty, as good as dead. I would have given anything to have you back.

“Your stupid bullying or my weight issues didn’t matter at that moment. All that mattered was you being there. Alive. With me.”

I sniffled and rubbed my eyes. “I might have run rampant with my overthinking, but it made me realize things that I was denying because of my insecurities and fears.”

I was surprised I wasn’t suffering from dehydration yet, seeing how I was crying for the thousandth time tonight. “You see, this incident made me face my biggest fear: losing someone I love.”

James’s lips parted in awe. I saw tears flowing from his eyes too.

Oh God. We’re both crybabies!

“So, James, I think I love you,” I said. “No, I *know* I love you... Yes, I love you.” I nodded to confirm my words. “It might be too early, but this is how I feel. And I’m not going to let your stupid actions make me deny my feelings.

“I’m not going to be immature about them like you, either. The last thing I want to do is repeat this cycle of stupidity.

“But that doesn’t mean I’ll let you treat me like trash again. The words you said to get a reaction out of me did achieve their purpose, but you should know that reaction was hating you.

“I hated you every time you picked on me. So, I’ll have no problem hating you if you go back to that attitude again.”

I held his gaze steadily. “You know, the time I realized I had a thing for you was when you gave me your full-blown grin right after our team won that first game against Westview...

“God, you look so beautiful when you smile... I guess this really shows what approach you should’ve taken if you ever wanted to pursue me.

“You could’ve just smiled, and I would have lain flat at your feet.” I paused to take a breather and rub away the tears on my cheeks. I was an emotional mess.

James nodded sincerely. He was about to say something, but I stopped him.

“So, what I’m getting at is that I forgive you. I forgive you for all your bullshit, James. And if you stay like this, I’ll keep loving you, like I do now... I love you.”

A minute of silence followed as we stared at each other. “Okay, now I’m done,” I said when he didn’t speak.

“Yeah.” He cleared his throat and blinked his eyes to get rid of tears. “I love you too. I loved you since the moment I saw you. I’m sorry for all the stupid things I said because I was so fucking desperate.

“I love you, Keily, and this time, I’ll show it right.”

“Good.” I chuckled, breaking the heaviness between us. Confessions were tense.

“You beat me to saying the L word—and here I thought I was going to scare you away.” James grinned widely. Now that this devil knew my weakness, he was working up his charm.

"You saved my ass and took down two of those shits...", he said. "You have way more strength than you let other people see, Keily. I can't believe you let me get away with all the bullshit I spouted.

"You're so strong, amazing, beautiful. And all mine."

"What about you?" I countered. "Are you mine?"

"It's not even a question. I was yours the moment we met." The conviction in his voice had me. *He's mine.*

Another round of tears followed. "Can I just stop crying already?" I complained, trying to clear my eyes.

"Well, you have to stop, Keily, because you make me cry too." He laughed, and I loved the sound of it.

"What do you mean?"

"It's stupid actually," he said, "I'm not much of a crier, but I can't stop myself every time I see tears in your eyes. You crying somehow triggers me to cry too." He shook his head. "What did you do to me, Keily?"

That's so sweet.

"I wish I knew that earlier. I would've bawled my eyes out the very first time you made fun of me. Then you wouldn't have been so formidable. It would've saved us some trouble."

"I guess." James smiled, and I couldn't stop myself from stroking his magnificent face. We looked at each other like love-sick fools.

"Kiss me," he demanded, and I wholeheartedly obliged. I leaned down and took his lips.

This kiss stung a little because of our bruises, but it didn't diminish our desire one bit. He was gentle; so was I. My body buzzed, wanting to fall in sync with him.

I'd always thought first kisses were supposed to be special, but with him, the magic never faded.

It felt like I could kiss him for the millionth time, and the next kiss would still be like our first one. *I love him.*

When we pulled away, I was, as always, flushed and dazed in euphoria.

“We’ve sealed it with a kiss.” His finger played with the strands of my hair.
“Now you’re all mine, Keily Harris.” He smirked when my blush darkened.
“Finally.”

The curtains giving us privacy flashed open, making me immediately move away from him.

“James.” A tall woman stood in front of us. She had dark-brown hair in a clean bun, black eyes, and familiar facial features. James’s mother.

If the lady was middle-aged, she certainly didn’t look like it; she came off much younger and beautiful. *Good genes run in the family.*

“Mom.” James turned serious, but he didn’t let go of my hand. Mrs. Haynes noticed it too.

She cleared her throat and then smiled at me. It wasn’t the same as James’s.

“Keily, thank you for being with my son—especially when you aren’t well either. I am grateful for that. You’ve been very kind.”

“It’s okay.” I smiled back, trying to make James let go of my hand. Thank the stars his mother hadn’t walked in on us when we were making out.

“I’ve talked to the police on the phone, and James’s father is on the way. He and I will make sure that those thugs pay for doing this to you and my son.”

I nodded and stood up. “I’ll give you two privacy.” I looked at James, and, with a sigh, he finally unhooked his fingers from mine.

I stepped out of the curtains, but before I left, I heard some of their words.

“Is there something going on between you—”

“She’s my girlfriend,” James announced shamelessly.

He is so blatant!

I dashed out of the ward, blood rising to my cheeks. Eavesdropping on them wasn't something I would do, no matter how much I wanted to hear his mother's opinion about me.

I hoped I'd made a good first impression with my swollen face and tattered clothes.

After a minute of sitting on a bench, I saw my parents rushing toward the emergency room from across the hallway. Their eyes widened as they spotted me.

I prepared myself for the incoming onslaught of questions.

It had been a long night, and by the look on my parents' faces, it wasn't close to ending.

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