

## Keily | A Ridiculous Idea

### Keily

#### A Ridiculous Idea

Monday morning came too soon for my liking, and I rushed to the computer lab, internally dreading another encounter with James. At the party, he had made it crystal clear he hated me.

Well, the feeling was *very* mutual—and also tiring.

A significant part of my mind was spent on coming up with ways to avoid him, or mentally handling the insults he threw at me whenever we were in the same room, or simply just thinking about him in my free time, even when he wasn't there to torment me.

It was exhausting.

When I reached the lab, I settled into my seat and started the computer system in front of me.

James's seat next to mine was empty, but it didn't provide me any relief and only built the anticipation of our next meeting. It was alarming how he was taking over my thoughts.

I sighed at the ridiculousness of everything before fiddling with the computer to pass the time.

Seats started filling up, but there was no sign of James. Soon, the teacher showed up too, and he still wasn't here. Where was he?

*Probably eating the souls of helpless puppies.*

I reminded myself to actually be relieved that he hadn't shown up. The fewer interactions we had, the better.

Mrs. Green started her lecture, and my jumbled mind finally had something to focus on. For the first time, I felt relaxed in this class, because James wasn't breathing down my neck.

When the last fifteen minutes were left, I expected Mrs. Green to give us a small project related to today's topic like always, but instead she went on about something else.

"You all will be designing a website," she began, and a faint groan came from the corner. She glared at the student before resuming.

"Obviously, we have barely started with the subject, so I'm just giving you all a heads-up. You'll be designing and developing a website using the tools that we'll be studying. And, to lessen the workload, you'll work in pairs."

*No...*

"And don't think you can just copy and paste your project from the internet at the last minute. The main theme of your website will be given by me, and every week, I'll be checking your progress.

"Your final submission is due a month before the end of the semester."

I internally groaned—a very big one. I didn't have a problem with the work, but partnering with someone was a huge headache.

I preferred working alone, because it gave me the freedom to do things at my own pace and however I wanted.

Two brains were bound to have disagreements, and being the people-pleaser that I was, I'd probably let the other person have their way.

Mrs. Green then started calling two students at a time and asked them to pick a sheet of paper from a pile that had been placed facedown, hiding the text.

The papers had the themes of websites written on them. When she called the third pair, I noticed she was assigning us partners based on our seating.

My luck can't be that bad.

Immediately, I began counting the students before me, desperately hoping I wouldn't be paired up with James. I couldn't handle working with him for almost an entire semester.

*Nope, never.*

However, it turned out my luck was indeed bad. I counted three times, and each time, I ended up even with the empty seat beside me.

The only consolation I could give myself was maybe Mrs. Green would find me another partner, given that James was absent.

“James and Keily,” she called.

I stood up and walked to her table. “James isn’t here,” I said. *Please don’t pair me with him.*

She looked up. “Oh, yes. James and Seth are training. Mr. Martin is leaving early today, but he didn’t want the boys to miss practice, so he’s conducting it now.”

Her tone didn’t sound pleased about Coach Martin’s decision. “Inform James about this assignment. He’s your partner.” She gestured for me to pick a sheet.

“Can I pair with someone else?” I blurted, making Mrs. Green’s eyebrows knit. Her mood was already sour.

“Why?”

“Uh—” *Because he’s an asshole.*

She sighed as if she couldn’t be bothered by me right now. “Keily, almost every student before you has asked me to change their partner. I refused them all, and I’m refusing you.”

“But—!”

She raised her hand. “I get it. James isn’t very bright at coding, and maybe that’s why you don’t want him. But it’ll be a good opportunity for him to learn by working with you. Consider it as helping your fellow student.”

I fought not to frown in my teacher’s face. It wasn’t my job to make that devil learn!

“Don’t worry about your grade. I’ll make sure he won’t lower it,” she added. “Satisfied?”

No.

“Now, pick a sheet.”

Hiding my grimace, I pulled out a sheet from the stack on her table. *Our* theme was to design a website for a coffee shop to display the menu and place orders. So lame.

I plopped down in my seat when I returned. My eyes moved to the paper clenched between my fingers. I frowned, cursing the whole universe for throwing me into the clutches of the satanic wolf.

Yes, James was the satanic wolf. And I couldn't seem to catch a break from him.

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“The game is next week, and we still haven't settled on our routine,” Sadhvi said. “Addison, it is catastrophic!”

“Don't be so dramatic,” Addison said, taking a bite of her pizza. “We just have to choreograph the last part.”

“Exactly. We haven't choreographed the last part!”

It was lunch, and Lola, Addison, Sadhvi, and I were sitting at our table, munching on our bland cheese pizza.

Addison and Sadhvi were arguing about their cheerleading routine. Lola was quiet as always, and my mind was too worked up about the computer project to add to their conversation.

I hadn't seen him yet, so it was most likely he still didn't know we were project partners.

I would have chosen to keep it that way and do all the work by myself if not for Mrs. Green checking up on us every week. Unfortunately, he'd find out eventually whether I told him or she did.

He'd be as devastated by the news as I was, if not more. The guy loathed my mere existence.

“Keily, why are you so quiet?” Addison said, snapping my attention back to the table. “Daydreaming about someone?”

She quirked her brows suggestively. She had seen me dancing with Lucas at the party and was now teasing me about him.

I scoffed. "More like having nightmares."

"Is it about the party? You were crying on the way home. I kept asking you if something was wrong, but you just cried and didn't say anything."

The blurred memory of the night flashed in my mind. James's words had left quite an impact on my drunken self.

It wasn't like I didn't already know I didn't belong with them. I knew it was strange that a fat girl like me was hanging out with all these beautiful, popular people.

A Piggy playing dress up.

"It was probably nothing," I replied. My embarrassment stopped me from revealing anything to her. Also, James harassing me wasn't something new either.

"Are you sure?" she asked, her face settling into a frown. "I left you with Lucas, thinking he'd look after you. I've known him since we were kids, but he was drunk, and you never know with guys. Did he do—"

"No!" I immediately cut her off. Lucas had been nothing but kind to me. "He didn't do anything. In fact, I had so much fun with him. I...I was crying because we were about to kiss but got interrupted."

A teasing smirk appeared on Addison's lips. "Is my ship sailing?"

"No."

"But you were going to kiss him? And you two looked so cute together, dancing!"

*We were only going to kiss to spite James.  
And it turned out to be a very bad idea.*

"We were drunk, Addison," I said, wanting to put an end to her fantasy. If anything, I was grateful nothing happened, or it'd be so awkward for both of us.

Or maybe I was just telling myself that. Lucas was... *wonderful*. James's polar opposite.

I shook my head. "Sink your ship, because a guy like Lucas will never go for me, especially when there are so many beautiful girls already after him." That was the truth.

"Why wouldn't he go for you?" Addison quirked her brows. "What's wrong with you? You're beautiful"—she pinched my cheeks aggressively, making me yelp—"and so cute."

She used to do that a lot when we were kids and only stopped when I began to cry.

"Don't do that." I unlatched my burning cheeks from her vice grip. "You do realize that it hurts?"

I received a goofy grin across the lunch table before she brought us back to the topic. "It's not a miracle if Lucas likes you. Have some confidence in yourself, Keily."

"That's easy for you to say when you look like you do. I don't. I'm fat. I don't exactly fit many people's criteria." It slipped out before I could stop myself.

"No, you're not fat," Addison said immediately. "Sure, you're a little bit chubby, but that's a trait that makes you look like you. You should flaunt it, coz."

I shrugged. I was sure many people, including James, would shake their heads.

"So, what was it that interrupted your kiss?"

"Uh..."

I felt the familiar sensation of being watched, causing my head to reflexively turn toward the source. And there he was. James was walking through the cafeteria's door, his gaze fixed on me.

His hair was wet, falling on his forehead, and I concluded that their practice had just ended, and he had come from the shower.

Lucas and some other guys from the team were with him. James and Lucas separated from the others and headed for their usual table with Matt, Axel, and Keith.

Lucas spotted me and sent a small smile my way. I returned it, acutely aware of James's penetrating gaze.

My resolve to tell James about the project faltered when I saw his angry scowl. *I'll probably talk to him later.* Yeah, later would be better, when he'd be less intimidating.

"Whoa, what did he do this time?" Sadhvi asked, picking at her slice of pizza.

I looked at her, confused. "Huh?"

"You're looking at James like he threatened to kill you."

He may as well have...

I sighed. "I'm partnered with James for our computer assignment," I answered. "We'll have to work together for the entire semester."

"Oh, that's bad..."

I nodded. "He doesn't know it yet, because he was at practice during class. God knows how he'll react. He can't stand me. Working with him is going to be a nightmare."

Addison shook her head. "James is already picking on you. It's likely he'll bully you into doing the whole assignment by yourself."

*I wish.*

"Did you ask your teacher to change partners?" Sadhvi asked.

"Yeah, but she won't."

"Maybe it's time I finally do what you should've done days ago." Addison fisted her fingers, glaring in the direction of James.

Thankfully, he was too busy talking with Matt to notice my cousin about to jump on him.

“Please, don’t...,” I sighed, holding her ready-to-knock-out fist and putting it down. “Let’s not cause a scene. I’ll handle him.”

All three of them—including Lola—looked at me with raised eyebrows, telling me they didn’t believe me. It wasn’t like I could blame them.

Whenever James picked on me in front of others, someone else usually came to my rescue. And my friends weren’t even aware of the extent of his verbal abuse.

“If you don’t want Addison to punch him, then you should do it yourself,” Sadhvi said soberly.

I gaped at her. “I won’t punch him!”

“I was just kidding.” A teasing smile broke out on her face. She was trying to lighten the mood. “But at least you should bitch-slap him.”

Seeing my frown, she finally turned serious. “Okay, okay. Jokes aside, you really should stand up to him and not let him push you over. If I were you, I’d make him cry so bad—mind you, without using my hands. Even though I’m with Addison, it’d be sad to bruise that pretty face.”

“Aren’t you scared of him?” I asked, not digesting her words.

“Scared?” Addison grimaced. “What are you talking about? Sure, the man’s got the whole bad-boy vibe going on, but nobody’s scared of him. Keily, don’t tell me you’re afraid of him.”

“Um...”

Listening to the girls, I did realize they weren’t intimidated by him. I recalled their interactions with him, and none of them had ever looked like they’d been ready to bolt at his sight, unlike me.

But then again, James never insulted them. I was an easy target because of my body.

“You both are so dense,” Lola muttered, her eyes moving between Addison and Sadhvi. “You two aren’t afraid of him because he didn’t do anything to *make* you afraid of him. He bullies Keily every day.”



“Well, if he ever tries to bully me, I’ll sock his teeth out.” Addison shoved the remaining piece of her pizza in her mouth angrily.

Lola rolled her eyes. “I believe you, Addison, but Keily isn’t like you. She’s a little”—she paused, looking for an acceptable synonym for *pathetic*—“timid and shy. Perfect prey for a bully.”

Lola gave me an apologetic smile.

“You know...James is arrogant, a huge douche, and many other things, but I never heard of him bullying someone before,” Sadhvi added curiously. “He usually keeps to himself.”

Her tray was now empty, reminding me of my half-eaten food; however, I was too immersed in our conversation to care about it.

“I have my theory about why he’s after you, Keily,” Lola said. “Whenever you’re around, he always has something to say to make you react. He enjoys the interaction.”

Lola leaned back in her chair and crossed her arms, looking at me thoughtfully. Then she uttered the most preposterous statement of the century.

“He likes you.”

*What?!*

I choked on my saliva.

Addison almost threw up food inside her mouth.

Sadhvi just sat still.

“That doesn’t even make sense,” I said, my cheeks tinting. “I think your theory is absolutely wrong. He hates me.” How she had gotten that idea was beyond me.

It was clear as day he didn’t harbor any feelings for me other than a big dislike. *You don’t insult people you like.*

Plus, someone who looked as good as James would never go for me. Not that I wanted him to.

“Last time I checked, we aren’t in kindergarten,” Addison said, wiping her lips with a napkin. “Besides, he dated River before. I never heard her complaining about him—until after they broke up, obviously.”

“River is on the cheerleading team with us,” Sadhvi told me, then turned to Addison. “From what I know, *River* was the one who pursued *him* for over a month before they started dating. He had plenty of chances to put her down harshly, yet he didn’t.”

My cousin nodded. “Now that I think about it, I know many girls who’ve been into him. He *is* handsome.”

No disagreement there, but why were we discussing this?

“He also has clout because of football,” Sadhvi added.

“And he’s filthy rich, which puts him higher on his high horse,” Addison continued. “I guess he does have the traits of a bully and resources to get a free pass to be one. But those traits can also attract a girl. No need to pick on the person you like.”

“We should stop assuming he likes me,” I interjected. “Even thinking about it is very uncomfortable.” I nibbled on my pizza to hide my blush as all three looked at me.

*Oh, Lola, why did you put such a ridiculous idea in their minds?*

“It doesn’t matter if he likes you or not—”

“He absolutely doesn’t,” I interrupted.

“He’s being a douche, and you should not put up with that,” Addison finished.

Lola shrugged, showing she agreed with her, and Sadhvi nodded.

“And if you need help, I’ll be there, coz.”

“Thanks.” My lips lifted in a grateful smile. Maybe it wouldn’t be so bad if I let my cousin punch James.

Lola and Addison got back to finishing their lunch. Sadhvi slurped her juice, returning to her complaints about Addison’s lack of dedication to cheerleading.

My shoulders slumped tiredly. I'd been at Jenkins for only a week, and my life had already started to become a mess.

My eyes once again moved to the person responsible for it. Like he knew I was watching, his gaze moved to me too, fierce and menacing. I suppressed a gulp.

Others weren't subjected to his frightening looks. They didn't know he could be very intimidating if he wanted to be.

But I knew. And I had to do a stupid project with him.

*What a mess!*