

Keily Book 2: Dating My Enemy |

Backyard Game

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James went down. Lucas had tackled him to the ground.

The two boys rolled before they came to a stop. They laughed and got back to their feet.

James didn't show any sign of injury. Thank goodness—clearly, his side had healed well.

I was sitting in James's backyard, watching the two boys practice football. The tackle had been unexpected and playful.

But now, they continued their warm-up routine with an intensity that was impossible to ignore. They swung their arms and did high knees.

They jogged around the backyard too. Butt-kicks followed.

Then there were some jumping jacks and lateral lunges. After that, Lucas picked up the football.

With each throw, I could see the determination etched on James's face. There was a fluidity to his movements, a gracefulness that belied the months of pain and frustration he had endured.

I watched as James and Lucas engaged in mock tackles, their laughter ringing out into the stillness of the evening. Despite the physicality of their interactions, James showed no signs of pain or discomfort. Good.

It was as if the backyard had transformed into a miniature football field, with James and Lucas as its star players. With each tackle and throw, I could feel the tension building, the anticipation of James's imminent return to the football team hanging in the air.

They were so beautiful. A mixture of awe and envy washed over me.

Their tall, lean frames seemed to glide across the grass with such ease. I couldn't help but marvel at their athleticism. They seemed to embody everything I wished I could be.

But as I admired them, I couldn't escape the nagging voice of self-doubt that crept into my mind. Their towering stature and lean muscles served as a stark contrast to my own short, curvier frame. In their presence, I felt small and insignificant.

I didn't belong in the same space as them. Maybe that's why they were playing in the backyard, while I was sitting on the grass.

I wanted to admire them, to celebrate their talents and achievements, but I couldn't shake the feeling of being out of place. It was a familiar sensation, one that I had grown accustomed to over the years, but it still stung just as much as it always had.

In that moment, surrounded by their effortless athleticism, I couldn't help but feel like I would always be on the outside looking in. James ran over, as if he heard my thoughts and came to rescue me.

"Hey, Keily! Wanna learn how to throw a football?" he exclaimed, his enthusiasm infectious.

I couldn't help but smile at his excitement, despite the knot of nervousness that had settled in my stomach. I didn't want to disappoint him. He clearly wanted me to be a part of this. With James by my side, I didn't need to feel left out.

"Sure, why not?" I replied, trying to sound more confident than I felt.

He helped me to my feet. With a patient and encouraging demeanor, James guided me through the proper technique for throwing a football spiral. I awkwardly gripped the ball in my hands, trying to mimic his movements as he demonstrated the proper form.

"Ready?" he asked.

I nodded. "Lucas, catch it!"

"I will!" he replied.

I threw the ball. But despite my best efforts and James's coaching, my attempts at throwing a spiral were less than stellar. The ball wobbled through the air, veering off course. Lucas didn't even bother lunging after that.

"Aiming for the trees I see," he teased.

"I just didn't want to hurt you," I teased back. "I don't know my own strength."

That made the boys laugh and I felt a little bit better. I tried again. And again. But I clearly sucked at this.

Yet, instead of getting frustrated, James laughed and joked with me, lightening the mood and easing my nerves. He offered gentle encouragement and helpful pointers, never once making me feel inadequate for my lack of skill.

I threw the football again. It didn't even come close to Lucas. I watched as he sprinted after it, expecting him to pick it up and toss it back to me. But instead, he grabbed the ball and spoke.

"Man, I can't believe Chad's finally back," Lucas exclaimed. "It's gonna be like old times again."

James nodded eagerly, his eyes alight with excitement. "I know, right? I've missed that guy. Remember all the crazy stuff we used to get up to with him?"

Lucas laughed, nodding in agreement. "Oh, how could I forget? Sneaking out at night to grab our first beers, getting into all sorts of mischief... Those were the days."

"We'll be having more beers together, don't you worry," Chad said as he walked onto the backyard.

Where had he come from? As he and James were friends, he obviously knew where James lived. But I hadn't expected to see him here now.

"Chad!" Lucas and James said simultaneously.

"Hi guys!" he greeted, not once looking at me.

I didn't belong here. "Catch!" Lucas said, throwing the ball.

Chad caught it mid-flight. Clearly, he wasn't as clumsy as me.

As Chad joined James and Lucas, the atmosphere became livelier. They talked excitedly about football, their voices filled with anticipation and enthusiasm. I tried to join in, offering the occasional nod or smile, but with each passing moment, I felt more and more like an outsider, a mere spectator in their world.

I didn't know what to say. "I miss playing for Jenkins High," James said, absentmindedly touching his side.

"It's not the same without you," Lucas remarked. "But now that you're healed and Chad's back, I know we will perform better."

"We're gonna show Westview High what we're made of," Chad agreed.

James chimed in, his voice filled with confidence. "Absolutely. We're gonna crush them this year. I can feel it."

Lucas nodded fervently, a determined look on his face. "Yeah, we're gonna bring home that trophy. Just wait and see."

No one even looked at me. Nor did they throw the ball my way.

James asked, "Anyone thirsty?"

Chad grinned, "I could use a beer."

James chuckled, shaking his head. "I don't have any at home."

Chad shrugged, still wearing a playful smirk. "Worth a shot."

"I can get us soda and snacks," he said, heading toward the house.

Lucas piped up from beside him. "I'll come with you. Can't trust you not to eat everything by yourself."

James laughed, throwing an arm around Lucas's shoulder. "Fair point. Let's go raid the kitchen."

As they turned to head inside, an awkward silence settled over the backyard. I shifted uncomfortably, feeling the need to fill the void with conversation.

"So, uh, how was studying abroad?" I asked tentatively.

"It was good," Chad replied evenly. But he didn't look at me as he spoke. His gaze followed James and Lucas.

Desperate to break the awkward silence, I blurted out the first thing that came to mind. "Everyone is happy to have you back," I said.

Chad smirked, his expression taking on a sinister edge. "Of course they are," he replied, his tone dripping with arrogance.

Feeling increasingly uncomfortable when he refused to look at me while we talked, I searched for something else to say. "Uh, how long were you gone for?" I asked, hoping to steer the conversation away from the growing tension.

But Chad didn't answer my question. Instead, as James and Lucas disappeared from sight, he took a step closer. His eyes narrowed as he looked me up and down. And then, with a sneer on his lips, he delivered his cruel words like a knife to the heart.

"I don't know how a fat cow like you tricked James into dating him, but I'm going to fix that."

Next Chapter

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