

Keily Book 2: Dating My Enemy |

Spotlight Spotlight

The next day, the stupid newspaper was in the middle of the cafeteria table. Addison had brought it to me.

She'd wanted to show it to me before I saw it on the wall. Too bad, I'd already seen it yesterday.

Lola and Matt clung to each other, their usual bubbly demeanor replaced by a palpable sense of discomfort. Lucas glared at the newspaper as if willing it to disappear, his fists clenched tightly at his sides.

Sadhvi's lips were pressed together in a thin line, her expression one of quiet resignation.

And then there was James, his jaw clenched in barely contained rage, his eyes flashing with a fiery intensity that sent shivers down my spine. I could practically feel the waves of anger rolling off him.

Chad sat there with a fake scowl on his face. He was pretending to be upset—but no one seemed to notice his fakeness. It was as if the newspaper had sucked all the joy from our cafeteria table.

No one spoke. The silence stretched on uncomfortably. It was clear that no one knew quite what to say, how to address the elephant in the room without making matters worse.

"Keily, seriously, don't let a stupid newspaper get to you. It's just a bunch of nonsense," Addison said. As the leader, it wasn't a surprise that she was the one who spoke up first.

But now that she broke the silence, the others felt comfortable joining in.

"Exactly, don't let those words bring you down," Lola said.

Matt nodded vigorously. "Yeah, it's total garbage. You're so much more than what some article says about you."

“Don’t let them get to you, Keily. They’re just trying to stir up drama. You’re better than that,” Lucas said. It was funny coming from him, seeing as he enjoyed drama.

“You’re stronger than this, Keily. Don’t let their petty gossip bring you down,” Sadhvi said.

James’s simmering anger was palpable. “Ignore them, Keily. They’re not worth your time or energy.”

Chad joined in with mock outrage. “Yeah, who do they think they are, calling you ‘plus-size’, like that?”

But even as Chad protested, I knew he didn’t mean it. There was a mischievous glint in his eye that spoke volumes. It was a hint of amusement lurking beneath his feigned outrage. Maybe he was the one responsible for the whole thing, orchestrating the gossip to suit his own agenda.

I wouldn’t be surprised.

I struggled to find my own voice amidst the overwhelming swell of emotions threatening to consume me. My throat tightened, making it impossible for me to speak.

I blinked back the tears that threatened to spill over. I willed myself to hold it together in front of my friends. I didn’t want to cry, so I fought to push the tears back.

All I wanted was to disappear, to melt into the chair. I longed to escape the prying eyes and whispered gossip that seemed to follow me wherever I went.

Some kids looked at me as they walked past. James’s glare shot daggers at them. Were they looking at me in a funny way? Or were they just curious?

The bell signaled the end of lunch.

I felt a knot of anxiety tighten in the pit of my stomach. I said goodbye to James and headed toward my next class—P.E. Every step I took felt like a journey through a minefield, each glance from my classmates like a dagger aimed straight at my heart.

Maybe someone—maybe even someone I considered a friend—had voted against James and me in the Cupid poll. The thought filled me with a sense of dread and unease.

With each passing face, I couldn't help but wonder: was it them? Was it her? Did they really think so little of us, of our relationship, that they would cast their vote against us without a second thought?

The hallway seemed to stretch on forever. I felt exposed, vulnerable, as if the eyes of my peers were boring into me, judging me.

I tried to keep my head down. I wanted to avoid making eye contact with anyone as I hurried through the crowded hallway. Every whispered conversation, every stifled giggle, felt like a personal attack.

By the time I reached the gym, my heart was pounding in my chest, my palms slick with sweat.

As I walked inside, my heart sank at the sight. Instead of our usual gym class, the space had been repurposed to set up for the Valentine's Day dance. Students were bustling about, hanging decorations and arranging tables.

My stomach churned as I spotted Chad among the crowd. He saw me too.

He offered me a smile, but there was nothing friendly about it. The sweat was practically rolling off me in rivers now. I knew he'd take any chance he could to torment me, so I would actively try to avoid him.

With a sinking feeling in the pit of my stomach, I made a beeline for the far corner of the gym, determined to avoid any unnecessary interaction with Chad or anyone else for that matter. I busied myself with hanging heart-shaped balloons and draping pink streamers across the walls, trying to lose myself in the mundane task at hand.

But no matter how hard I tried to distract myself, I couldn't stop thinking of the upcoming Valentine's Day dance. Maybe I should just pretend to be sick that day.

After all, what good would it do for me to attend? It would only be a reminder of the rumors and speculation that had been swirling around me.

Mr. Crones addressed the class, "Okay, we have too many people hanging up hearts. I need some of you to make tiaras and sashes for the 'Cupid's Favorite Couple' award," he said. "Keily."

Hearing my name made my heart drop. I didn't want the spotlight! I could feel the eyes of my classmates turning towards me.

"I need you to start with the tiaras and sashes," he said.

"Ok, sir," I made my way over to that table.

"Chad, you too."

No.

How unlucky could a girl be? I could feel the heat of Chad's gaze boring into me. It was a silent promise of the torment to come. I wanted to run away from him. But I had a feeling his long legs would always catch up.

As we set to work on our assigned task, Chad stepped closer than necessary. He invaded my personal space. Now he could mutter insults that no one else could hear.

"Fatso," he hissed.

I glared at him. I wanted to say something back, but I was too scared of the consequences.

"I always knew James liked bacon," he said. "Guess I underestimated how much."

I tried to step away from him, to create distance. But he followed me.

"You really are the fattest bitch in this school," Chad continued.

I felt a surge of anger rise within me, but I bit back the retort that threatened to spill from my lips. I wanted to scream, to lash out at him with all the pent-up rage and frustration that simmered beneath the surface. But I knew that would only make things worse, only give him the satisfaction of knowing he had gotten to me.

So I gritted my teeth and endured, forcing myself to focus on the task at hand and block out Chad's hurtful words. But no matter how hard I tried to ignore him, he stayed persistent.

"It looks like you've been hitting the snacks pretty hard lately," he sneered.

I felt a knot form in my stomach, but I forced a tight smile, trying to brush off his words.

"Just trying to keep my energy up," I replied.

Chad chuckled, the sound grating on my nerves. "Energy? More like padding for those thunder thighs of yours."

I swallowed hard, trying to hold back the tears that threatened to spill over.

"I...I don't know what you're talking about," I stammered.

But Chad wasn't done yet, his insults coming fast and furious. "Oh, come on, Keily, don't be like that," he said, his tone mocking. "I'm just trying to help you out. Someone's gotta tell you the truth, right?"

I felt my cheeks flush with embarrassment, but I couldn't find the words to respond. I just stood there, my heart pounding in my chest.

"Guess you don't have to ask for the truth," he said, his smirk widening. "It's written all over you."

I accidentally tore the sashes I was working on.

"Can't believe they picked you for this," he mumbled.

"Who knows what else I'll be picked for," I finally challenged. Yes, the Cupid poll was in the back of my mind.

Our eyes met and Chad barked a laugh.

"Maybe if you and James get this award I'll back off," he said. "But if you place dead last, then you better prepare yourself for the worst."

Next Chapter

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