

## Keily Book 2: Dating My Enemy

### Faking Illness

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“Cough-cough.”

Oh, I couldn’t help but cringe at the sound of my own fake cough. It sounded so forced, but I hoped it would be enough to convince my mom that I was too sick to go to school.

Just then, I heard the sound of footsteps approaching my bedroom door, and I quickly closed my eyes.

“Keily, honey, are you okay?” My mom’s voice was filled with concern as she entered the room.

I let out another fake cough before opening my eyes and giving her a weak smile. I’m sure I didn’t look sick either. But I pulled the covers up to my nose, as if I had a fever, anyway.

“I’m not feeling too well, Mom,” I said. “I think I might have caught a bug or something. I just need to rest.”

My mom studied me for a moment, her brow furrowed in skepticism.

“Let’s see if you have a fever,” she said, making her way to the bathroom to get the thermometer.

“No need, I already checked,” I lied. “I, uh, don’t have one.”

Mom raised an eyebrow.

“Are you sure you’re not just trying to get out of school?” she asked.

“No,” I said a little too quickly. “I just need some rest.”

My mom sighed, clearly unconvinced, but she nodded nonetheless.

“Okay, sweetheart,” she said. “I’ll let you stay home today, but if you’re not feeling better by tomorrow, we’re going to the doctor.”

I nodded.

“Thanks, Mom,” I said. “I’ll stay in bed all day.”

With that, my mom gave me a gentle pat on the shoulder before leaving the room. And as I lay there in bed, I couldn't help but feel a pang of guilt for lying, although she didn't fall for the lies. But the stress of school was just too much to bear, and I needed this day off more than anything.

I found myself sinking deeper into my bed. Then I switched on my iPad. I scrolled mindlessly through Netflix, searching for something to distract me from the stress.

I tried to lose myself in the world of TV shows and movies. Choosing one of the movies on the Top 10 list, I made myself focus on the screen. I immersed myself in the fictional lives of characters who were facing challenges far different from my own.

But with every passing minute, my thoughts inevitably drifted back to Chad and James.

I couldn't help but replay Chad's hurtful words over and over again. I kept thinking about how he was always around James, like a shadow. I reminded myself how important he was to James and that his opinion of me mattered.

Urgh. Would he ever come around to liking me?

And then there was James, his stress about making it into MIT weighed heavily on my mind. I knew how much this opportunity meant to him, to us.

I didn't want to think about it.

But as the day wore on and the hours melted away, I found myself sinking deeper into a state of numbness. The outside world faded into the background as I retreated further into myself.

My phone pinged and I checked to see who it was.

James  
Where are you?

I sat upright in bed.

Keily

I'm in bed. Not feeling good today :(

I waited for the reply. It came quickly.

James

Oh, no! Sick?

I lay down again, holding the phone.

Keily

Something like that.

I wish we hadn't said goodbye yesterday on angry terms. James had still been fuming about the newspaper article at the end of the school day.

James

I hope you feel better soon. <3

I sighed.

Keily

<3

I put my phone down and looked for the next movie. When it beeped, I hoped it was James again. Instead, it was Addison.

Addison

James tells me you're sick. I hope you get better soon! Xx

Keily

Thanks girl<3

I spent the day watching several shows. I didn't bother to get dressed or brush my teeth or hair. I was comfortable being lazy for the day. Eventually I fell asleep. I stirred from my nap as I heard the creak of my bedroom door. I looked at the door, expecting to find my mom.

But it was James who stood there.

"Hey there, sleeping beauty," he said, his voice gentle as he approached my bed. "Your mom let me in."

I blinked groggily, still trying to shake off the remnants of sleep as James settled himself beside me.

He was carrying snacks! And all of my favorite ones, might I add.

Oreos.

Snickers bars.

Reese's peanut butter cups.

M&Ms.

"I brought you some of your favorite snacks," he said, putting them on the bed next to me. "I figured you could use a little pick-me-up."

I couldn't help but smile as I reached for the Oreos.

"Thanks, James," I said. My heart fluttered.

"Are you ill?"

"No," I said. "I'm just feeling a bit off."

He settled in beside me, and for a moment, we just sat there in companionable silence, the weight of our earlier argument hung between us.

"I'm sorry about yesterday," James said finally. "I was just tired and a little stressed out, and I took it out on you. I didn't mean to upset you."

I reached out to take his hand, squeezing it gently.

"It's okay, James," I said. "I'm just glad you're here now. Will you stay for a while?"

"Of course I will," he said, climbing into bed.

I moved over so that there was room for both of us.

"What are you watching?"

"I just finished *Mean Girls* and I'm trying to decide on the next movie."  
"*Fast and the Furious*," he suggested.

"I was thinking *The Notebook*," I said.

"No way."

"Okay, so let's compromise."

"Yeah?"

"And watch *The Notebook*."

James barked a laugh. "I'll let you win this one, but only because you're not feeling well."

And with that, we settled back against the pillows. The tension between us melted away as we cuddled. The familiar comfort of James's presence soothed the ache in my heart.

As we snacked on our favorite treats and lost ourselves in the world of comfort shows, I couldn't help but feel a sense of peace settle over me. With James by my side, everything felt just a little bit brighter, a little bit easier to bear.

We laughed and talked and shared stolen kisses between mouthfuls of M&Ms.

But the time came that James had to leave.

"I've got football practice again," he said. He slowly got up and leaned in to press a soft kiss to my forehead.

"James, please promise me you won't overwork yourself," I said, taking his hand. "You've been pushing yourself so hard lately, and I don't want you to wear yourself out."

James gave me a reassuring smile, his thumb tracing gentle circles on the back of my hand.

"I'll be fine, Keily," he said. "I know my limits, and I'll make sure to take breaks when I need them."

"Okay," I said.

"I'll see you soon, okay?"

I nodded. As the door closed behind him, I couldn't help but stare at the spot where he had been.

Once James left, my anxiety returned.

The Valentine's Day dance is happening soon, bringing with it the dreaded Cupid Poll. The idea of being scrutinized and compared to others made me pop a few more Oreos into my mouth.

Chew-chew.

And then my phone rang, making me jump. As I picked up the phone, the cheerful voice of my cousin greeted me.

"Hey, Keily! How are you feeling?" Addison asked, her tone bright and bubbly.

"I'm okay," I replied. "Just taking it easy."

Addison's excitement was palpable as she continued, "Are you getting excited for the dance? It's going to be so much fun!"

"Yeah, I'm looking forward to it," I said, forcing myself to sound more excited than I actually felt.

"And guess what?" Addison exclaimed, her voice practically overflowing with happiness. "The girls and I are planning a girls' night out for some dress shopping, and you're coming with us!"

I knew I needed a dress for the dance. But I really wasn't feeling it. I wasn't in the mood to go from store to store, knowing most of them won't have my size anyway. I know my friends didn't mind going to the plus size store with me, but still.

"I'm still in bed..."

"Then get out of bed."

"I'm not feeling well."

"You sound okay to me. And you said you were okay earlier."

I was about to give in. I couldn't help but feel like a pushover. Despite my reluctance to go shopping for dresses, her persistent enthusiasm was wearing

me down. Addison had a way of getting what she wanted, and I was on the brink of caving in to her demands once again.

“Well—”

“Keily,” she cut me off. “I won’t take ‘no’ for an answer.”

I knew better than to argue with her.

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