

Keily Book 2: Dating My Enemy |

Retail Therapy

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We strolled through the bustling mall. Addison led the charge, her infectious enthusiasm spreading to the rest of us as we chatted animatedly about the upcoming Valentine's Day dance.

Even I was beginning to feel better about it. I guess that's the effect one's friends have on them. They could either drag you down or build you up. Mine built me up.

I was so grateful for them. "I can't wait for the dance," Addison exclaimed. There was a skip in her step. "It's going to be so much fun!"

I forced a smile, trying to match my cousin's enthusiasm. "Yeah."

"I think the dancing is going to be the best part," Lola said.

"Matt can't dance," Sadhvi pointed out. "He has two left feet."

"We might have taken a few dancing classes together..." Lola said.

This made us all giggle. Clearly, she was taking the dance seriously.

"Maybe the two of you will win the Cupid Poll," Addison said.

"I hope so," Lola said, her voice filled with pride. It was clear she was proud to be Matt's girlfriend. And why wouldn't she be? Lola's beauty had a way of making Matt look even better when they were together.

I, too, should be proud to be James's girlfriend, but I couldn't help but feel like I didn't quite complement him in the same way Lola did with Matt. Who was I kidding? I didn't complement him at all. And yet, we were in this stupid cupid poll.

While winning first place in the competition seemed impossible, I hoped James and I wouldn't finish last. Maybe somewhere in the middle would be a more realistic outcome.

I could hear Chad's threats as if he were speaking them. "Have any of you heard rumors about who it will be?" Lola asked.

"Honestly, all I hear rumors about is Keily and James," Sadhvi said. As soon as the words left her lips, she bit them.

I tried to meet her eyes but she looked away.

"What did you hear?" I asked.

My friends shared uneasy glances, their expressions a mix of concern and reluctance. Okay, clearly they'd all heard something—or some things—that I hadn't.

"It's probably just a bunch of jealous freaks making stuff up," Addison interjected, her tone light, as if she were trying to brush off the topic entirely. "You know how people love to talk."

Lola nodded in agreement, her voice echoing Addison's sentiment. "Yeah, it's all nonsense. We shouldn't let it bother us."

Sadhvi remained silent for a beat, her brow furrowed in thought. "I don't think it's worth paying attention to. Forget I said anything."

But despite their attempts to deflect, I needed to know what was being said about James and me.

"But what exactly are they saying?" I pressed.

My friends hesitated. Their gazes flickering uncertainly between one another. It was clear they didn't want to divulge the details, perhaps out of a desire to spare my feelings. But as tears welled up in my eyes and threatened to spill over, their resolve began to waver, and they finally relented.

"You know, Keily, there's this ridiculous rumor going around that James only dates you because you do his homework for him," Addison said. But then she added, "I guess everyone knows you're the clever one."

She had tried to make light of the situation, but it wasn't working.

I looked at Lola, "What did you hear?"

"That, uh, you pay James to be your boyfriend."

The girls giggled at this one and I forced myself to laugh with them. I knew they weren't laughing at me, only at the silliness of the rumor.

"Sadhvi?" I asked.

"I heard someone say James is only with you because he feels sorry for you," she said. "I also told that someone to shut up because they don't know what they are talking about."

That made me give her a smile. She stuck up for me.

Lastly, it was Addison who spoke up again, her tone apologetic. "And, um, there's this other rumor... about James being embarrassed to be seen with you in public because of your size."

With each word, a wave of pain crashed over me, threatening to drown me in a sea of insecurity. But on the outside, I remained composed, my expression carefully neutral as I absorbed the hurtful rumors. Inside, however, my heart ached. Yet, I forced myself to wear a mask of indifference, refusing to let my friends see the depth of my pain.

"Thank you for telling me," I said. "Let's continue shopping."

Before they could stop me, I strolled into the next store. Obviously, nothing in here would fit me. But I looked through the clothes anyway. They'd distract me from the horrible things that people were saying about me and James.

Letting the conversation go, Addison, Lola, and Sadhvi began searching for their dresses.

"Oh, this one is gorgeous!" Addison exclaimed, holding up a floor-length gown adorned with intricate lace detailing. "What do you think, Keily?"

I admired the dress from afar, its delicate fabric shimmering under the soft glow of the store lights. "It's stunning," I replied.

Lola was next to find her perfect dress, her eyes immediately drawn to a vibrant red number hanging on a nearby rack.

"This color is everything," she declared.

I watched as they disappeared into the fitting room. When they emerged moments later, their faces lit up with delight. They each twirled in front of the mirror, the dresses flowed gracefully around them.

“It’s perfect,” Lola declared.

“I feel like a queen,” Addison said.

Sadhvi hurried into the changing room and tried on her dress. It exuded timeless elegance, its flowing silhouette adorned with delicate beading that caught the light with every movement.

“I love it,” she breathed, a soft smile graced her lips as she admired herself in the mirror.

As my friends reveled in the joy of finding their dream dresses, I couldn’t help but feel a pang of envy. The sizes available in these stores simply didn’t cater to my body type. I forced a smile as I sifted through the racks, trying to find something that would fit. But none of them were designed with someone like me in mind.

As Addison, Lola, and Sadhvi chatted excitedly about their upcoming dance, I couldn’t shake the feeling of isolation that gnawed at me from within. I longed to share in their excitement, to feel the same sense of anticipation as they did, but it seemed that the world of glamorous dresses and picture-perfect moments was simply not meant for someone like me.

They bought their dresses.

“Keily hasn’t found a dress yet,” Addison pointed out. “Let’s go to Vian’s.”

There was an unspoken understanding that we needed to find something that would fit me. We went to Vian’s, a store with plus-size attire. We’d shopped here before.

The reality of having to shop in a different section hit me, and embarrassment crept in. Yet, my friends, perceptive to my emotions, reassured me with smiles and encouraging words.

“Keily, you’re beautiful just the way you are,” Addison declared.

Lola nodded in agreement, her supportive demeanor unwavering. “Exactly! We’re here to find a dress that makes you feel as amazing as we do in ours.”

Sadhvi chimed in, “And trust me, James is going to be absolutely blown away when he sees you in it.”

As we combed through the racks, my friends pulled out dresses they thought would be perfect for me. Each piece was a testament to their genuine desire to make me feel just as special and beautiful as they were. The store’s atmosphere was different, warmer, and I began to appreciate the effort my friends were putting into making sure I felt included.

Finally, we found it—a dazzling dress that captured their vision for me. It was a deep blue, the fabric flowing gracefully as if it had been designed with me in mind. The bodice was adorned with subtle embellishments, and as I tried it on, I felt a newfound sense of confidence.

“That’s the one,” Addison declared, clapping her hands in excitement. “James won’t know what hit him!”

Lola grinned, holding back tears. “You look absolutely stunning, Keily.”

Sadhvi handed me matching accessories, two silver earrings, adding, “This completes the look. James won’t be able to take his eyes off you.”

“Thank you, guys,” I whispered, a genuine smile breaking across my face. “I couldn’t ask for better friends.”

I headed to the cashier and purchased. After that, Addison dropped us all off at home. She dropped me off first, and I hugged all of my friends goodbye. Spending time with them had lifted my spirits in ways I hadn’t expected. As I made my way to my room, I couldn’t resist stealing a glance at the dress hanging from my arm.

Running my fingers over the fabric, a spark of excitement ignited within me. It was a rare sensation, considering how I had been feeling lately.

How will James react when he sees me wearing this dress?

I hung the dress up and kept looking at it. I was finally excited for the dance.

Next Chapter

Continue to the next chapter of Keily Book 2: Dating My Enemy