

Keily Book 2: Dating My Enemy |

From Last to First

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“James Haynes and Keily Harris.”

It was like a bomb had gone off. There was a ringing in my ears— I could hardly hear, as if my head was stuck underwater. But I could see just fine. I could see the leers and snickers from the crowd. I could feel the weight of their judgment.

My heart hammered in my chest as I struggled to keep my composure, but the shame and humiliation threatened to overwhelm me. Tears pricked at the corners of my eyes. Any moment now they were going to spill over.

I couldn't stop them.

The lights blinded me. Or maybe it was the water in my eyes. My chest was so tight I couldn't breathe. James and I had really finished dead last.

I wished I could just die.

As I scanned the crowd, my eyes landed on Chad. He was laughing his ass off. Guess he didn't care about fake niceties anymore.

It felt like the ground had fallen away beneath me. I could barely stand upright.

Every laugh, every pointed finger, felt like a blow to my already fragile ego. I could feel the heat rising in my cheeks, the warm tears spilling from my eyes. It felt as if I were standing naked before the entire world.

I turned to run off the stupid stage.

But James grabbed my hand. He held on tight. I couldn't pull free even if I wanted to. With a reassuring squeeze of my hand, he stepped forward into the center of the stage and took the mike from Mr. Crones.

This boy had no fear.

“Listen up!” His voice cut through the snickers, commanding attention. “I’ve got something to say, and I want everyone here to hear it loud and clear.”

The chatter died down, replaced by a curious hush as all eyes turned to James, waiting with bated breath for his words.

What was he going to say? I knew James would try to make it better, like he did everything. But could he? This was an impossible situation and I couldn’t see anyone fixing it. Yet, seeing him stand there, for me, did make my heart feel lighter.

“I love Keily,” he declared. His voice was unwavering, filled with a conviction that left no room for doubt. “I love her with every fiber of my being, with every beat of my heart. And I won’t stand by and let anyone disrespect her, not now, not ever.”

His words hung in the air, charged with emotion. He held the gaze of each person in the room, daring anyone to challenge his declaration of love.

He was so brave.

“If anyone here has a problem with that,” he continued, his voice rising with determination, “then say it to my face. Because I won’t tolerate any more of this shit.”

A palpable tension filled the room, the weight of James’s words hanging heavy in the air. For a moment, there was silence, as the crowd processed his impassioned declaration.

James made my heart melt.

Then, to my surprise, Chad’s voice rang out, “You’re just saying that because you feel sorry for her.”

I guess he really was done with his facade.

I didn’t miss the look of hurt and betrayal that crossed James’s face. James’s jaw clenched, his hand tightening around mine.

“I’m saying it because it’s the truth,” he shot back, his voice firm.

Their eyes locked. But then James turned to me. “I love you, Keily.”

“Awh,” the crowd went, swayed by James.

But Chad wasn't having it. He actually stepped forward. His disdain was evident in the set of his jaw and the coldness in his eyes. James met Chad's challenging gaze with a steady stare.

“What on earth are you thinking, James?” Chad's voice rang out, filled with incredulity. “You're making a fool of yourself by dating her.”

“I'm thinking that I love Keily,” he replied, his voice carrying over the murmurs of the crowd. “And I'm not afraid to say it.”

With that simple declaration, admiration went through the gathered students. I could see it in their eyes, in their postures. Their whispers hushed as they awaited James's next words.

“I love her,” James continued, his voice growing stronger with each passing moment, “for so many reasons. I love how easily she blushes.”

Yes, my cheeks instantly heated up.

“I love how shy she can be,” he added, a fond smile tugging at the corners of his lips. “How she sometimes stumbles over her words when she's nervous, how she tucks a strand of hair behind her ear when she's feeling self-conscious.”

He was speaking so confidently, so openly. I didn't feel the need to run away anymore.

“I love how much she supports me,” James continued, his voice filled with gratitude. “How she's always there for me, cheering me on when I need it most, lending me strength when I feel like I'm falling apart.”

I had tried to support him. But until now I didn't realize just how much he appreciated it.

“I love how she accepts me as I am,” he went on, his tone tinged with awe. “Flaws and all, without judgment or hesitation. How she sees the best in me, even when I struggle to see it myself.”

I didn't even know that James had insecurities. And that was ridiculous, because everyone did. It was just that I saw him as perfect, flawless.

"I love how much we laugh together," James added, a genuine smile spreading across his face. "How she brings lightness and joy into my life, how her laughter fills the room with warmth and happiness." We did laugh a lot.

"And above all," James concluded, his voice filled with conviction, "I love how kind she is. How she always puts others before herself, how she goes out of her way to make the world a better place."

I did stay kind. Even throughout the bullying I never became a mean person.

As James's speech concluded, a sense of awe settled over the gathered students. Their initial skepticism giving way to a newfound respect.

I saw Lucas giving me a thumbs up.

But amidst the sea of supportive murmurs and encouraging smiles, Chad remained unmoved. His lips were twisted in a nasty snarl. I could have sworn his eyes looked watery...

But what did he have to cry over? He ran away. He actually ran away, like I planned to do. How the tables have turned.

Mr. Crones stepped forward, next to James, reaching for the mike. James handed it back to him.

"That was a beautiful speech, James," he remarked. "Thank you for sharing it with us."

"Just speaking from the heart, Sir," he replied modestly.

"Now, if I may have your attention," he announced, his voice carrying over the crowd, "I'd like to continue announcing the winners of our Cupid Poll."

James and I stepped back in line.

A ripple of excitement surged through the room as everyone leaned in, eager to hear the results. Mr. Crones read the couples in ninth place, then eighth. And so it continued.

"Coming in third place," Mr. Crones began, a smile tugging at the corners of his lips, "we have Matt and Lola!" Applause erupted from the crowd. I was so happy for them. Lola had been really excited for this, and I really think they deserved to be one of the winners.

He read the couple's names who won second place before he said,

"And in first place...!"

The anticipation reached its peak. There remained one couple whose names had yet to be called. It was evident to everyone in the room who the winners were.

Mr. Crones made the announcement.

The winning couple stepped forward, their hands clasped tightly together. Mr. Crones handed them their sashes, but they didn't put them on. They exchanged a meaningful glance before the young man spoke up.

"Actually, Mr. Crones, there's been a mistake," he said, his voice steady and sure. "We may have won the poll, but we believe there's another couple more deserving of this honor."

The room fell silent, stunned by the unexpected turn of events. All eyes turned to James and me, disbelief written on their faces as they waited to see our reaction.

Without hesitation, the winning couple walked toward us, their sashes held out in offering.

"James and Keily, you two are the true winners tonight," the young woman said, her voice filled with sincerity. "We hope you'll accept these sashes as a token of our admiration and respect."

I reached out to accept the sashes, overwhelmed by their selfless gesture. James stood beside me, his expression one of gratitude and humility as he accepted the honor.

As James and I placed the sashes around our necks, a wave of emotion swept over me. It was a moment I never expected to experience, and yet here we were, standing in the spotlight as the true winners of the night.

There were tears in my eyes. But this time they were tears of joy.

I turned to James, my heart overflowing with gratitude for the man standing beside me. He'd stood up for me. He'd stood up for us.

And then, as if on cue, the crowd erupted into cheers and applause. It was so much better than the leers and snickers! In that moment, I felt an overwhelming sense of pride, knowing that we had earned not just their admiration, but their genuine affection.

With a smile that stretched from ear to ear, I looked up at James. My heart burst with love for the man who had stood by my side through thick and thin. And as our eyes met, I knew that this was a moment we would cherish forever.

James kissed me in front of everyone. This night ended perfectly.

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