

Keily Book 2: Dating My Enemy |

Mansion of Expectations

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A few days passed. As I stood in front of the mirror, adjusting the collar of my jacket and smoothing down the fabric of my dress, I couldn't help but feel a sense of contentment wash over me.

The past few days had been blissfully peaceful, devoid of drama and tension. With Chad gone back abroad, life had returned to normal. I relished in the quiet simplicity of it all.

And I was finally going to have dinner with James and his parents!

Dressed in my semi-formal attire—a pretty dress paired with a stylish jacket and boots—I felt a sense of satisfaction. I'd found the perfect balance between overdressing and underdressing. It was important to me to make a good impression.

I made the final adjustments to my outfit—pushing in the pockets and smoothing out the dress. I couldn't help but feel a surge of anticipation for the evening ahead.

My phone vibrated.

James
I'm here. <3

As James pulled up outside my house, I felt a flutter of nerves dancing in my stomach. Of course, I was nervous, this dinner was a big deal! I really wanted James's parents to like me. I wanted to make a good impression.

I went to the car and he got out so that he could open the door for me. It was these little things that made me love him so much more.

Once we began to drive, I fidgeted with my jacket. Then I checked my makeup in the mirror. What if his parents didn't like me?

"You look beautiful," James said. "And don't worry, my mom already loves you."

It was as if he had read my mind. I tried to hold onto his reassurance. But I couldn't get rid of the nerves.

"What about your dad?" I asked.

James hesitated for a moment before responding, his brow furrowing with concern. "He's... well, he's a strict man," he admitted. "But just be yourself and try not to let him intimidate you."

His words offered little solace as I imagined myself stumbling over my words in the face of his father's stern gaze. I knew I shouldn't let my nerves get the best of me, but the thought of facing his disapproval was daunting to say the least.

As we pulled up to James's house, my eyes widened in awe at the sheer grandeur of the mansion that loomed before us. The structure stood as a testament to success, its imposing presence exuding wealth and sophistication. The expansive estate was surrounded by manicured lawns and elegant landscaping. It created an atmosphere of opulence that left me breathless.

I'd seen it many times before. Yet, the effect it had on me remained the same.

The house itself was a sprawling masterpiece of architectural brilliance. Three stories high, adorned with intricately designed balconies and large windows. The exterior was a blend of classic elegance and modern luxury.

We parked in one of the many garages. I couldn't help but marvel at the Mercedes and Audi that were already parked there.

As we stepped out of the car and made our way to the entrance, I couldn't shake the feeling of trepidation that lingered beneath the surface. Meeting James's parents felt like stepping into a world of prestige and privilege. Would I measure up to the expectations that undoubtedly accompanied such a life?

We entered the house. I walked on the marble floors and saw the sweeping staircases, and tasteful artwork that adorned the walls. The air carried a sense of refined luxury.

I could never compare this place to my house.

James guided me through the halls. The house seemed to stretch endlessly, revealing spacious living areas, home offices, and entertainment rooms that spoke of a life accustomed to abundance.

We approached the dining room, where James and I had eaten our romantic dinner. I braced myself for the encounter with James's parents.

And there they were.

James's mom was walking out of the kitchen, while his dad was sitting at the head of the table.

"Keily! It's so good to see you again," Mrs. Haynes greeted me.

She walked over and pulled me into a warm hug which instantly eased my nerves. When the hug ended, I took a moment to really look at her. Her dark brown hair was neatly pulled back into a clean bun. It was the same hairstyle she'd worn when we first met.

She looked incredibly young for a middle-aged woman. She didn't have many wrinkles around her eyes and little to no freckles. I really wished I could age the way she had.

Again, I couldn't help but notice the striking resemblance between her and James. They had similar faces and the same smiles.

James's father, on the other hand, was more reserved in his greeting. He remained seated.

"Hello and welcome," he said.

I took a moment to look at him. He looked like the older version of James, who had forgotten how to laugh. His posture was tense, as if he didn't know how to relax. Where Mrs. Haynes was warm, he was cold. He immediately put me on edge.

"Hello, Sir, I'm Keily. Thank you for having me over," I said.

He assessed me with a keen gaze. His resemblance to James was unmistakable, yet there was an air of sternness about him, a sense of authority that commanded respect. His presence exuded a sense of discipline and formality.

As I introduced myself, I couldn't shake the feeling of being scrutinized under his penetrating gaze. His eyes, sharp and discerning, seemed to size me up with each word I spoke, leaving me feeling acutely aware of the weight of his judgment. I remained determined to make a good impression.

"So formal," James teased and gave me a kiss on the cheek.

I couldn't stop the blush from coming.

James pulled out my chair before sitting next to me. Mrs. Haynes took the seat opposite us. We dug in. There was filet mignon and vegetables of every color. Even their cutlery looked expensive—it was delicate china.

As the flavors exploded in my mouth, James's phone received a text.

He quickly pulled it out, silenced it, and stuck it back into his pocket.

I didn't miss the disapproving look Mr. Haynes gave him. Maybe they had a no-phones-at-the-table rule.

"New phone?" Mr. Haynes asked.

James nodded casually. "Yep, just got it."

"You didn't tell me you were getting a new phone."

"You weren't here."

"Well, now you know, dear," Mrs. Haynes mediated between them.

"You're spending too much money on unnecessary things. You need to learn how to budget," Mr. Haynes said.

James, never one to shy away from confrontation, shot back defiantly, "It's my pocket money, Dad. I can do with it what I want."

The tension in the room escalated. Sensing the impending storm, James's mother intervened.

"Now, now, let's not ruin a lovely evening with arguments," she said, her gentle smile masking the concern in her eyes. "James got his good taste from his father, after all." She smiled at me.

“He does have good taste,” I agreed.

“Especially in women,” James winked at me.

I felt the blush coat my cheeks.

“What drew you to James?” Mrs. Haynes asked.

“I was drawn to her,” James said before I could answer.

I smiled. “James has a way of getting what he wants,” I said. I’d meant it in a playful and happy manner. I meant it like James is dedicated. When he knows what he wants, he will work hard and find a way to earn it.

But Mr. Haynes’s expression darkened at my words.

“You can say that again,” he mumbled.

It felt like he was implying that James was a spoiled brat. Which hadn’t been what I meant at all.

“What are your plans after senior year, Keily?” Mrs. Haynes asked quickly. It was evident she was trying to divert our attention away from the brewing conflict.

“James and I are planning on going to MIT,” I replied, hoping to steer the conversation towards a more neutral topic.

But the mention of MIT seemed to strike a nerve with James’s father. His brows furrowed, and a shadow crossed his face.

“MIT?” he repeated, his tone laced with skepticism.

Oh. Clearly James hadn’t told him. I wish I hadn’t said anything—but I hadn’t known better! I assumed James would have told them weeks ago, around the time he and I made the decision.

I could sense the tension building once again, the unspoken disapproval radiated from Mr. Haynes. It was clear that MIT did not align with his expectations for James’s future.

James shifted uncomfortably in his seat, a flicker of defiance in his eyes.

“Yeah, MIT,” he affirmed, “It’s where I want to go.”

But his father’s reaction was immediate and visceral. “MIT doesn’t have a good football program.” Then he looked from me to James, drawing his own conclusions. “You can’t throw away your talent for some girl.”

Some girl. The words cut deep into me, leaving my heart bleeding. Okay, I’d just met Mr. Haynes, but his opinion about me was important. He was James’s dad and I wanted his approval. I didn’t want him to see me as some insignificant girl.

But I briefly wondered if his father was right. Maybe I was holding James back. Maybe he was throwing away his talent for me.

I glanced at Mrs. Haynes, hoping for some semblance of intervention, but she remained silent. I guess he hadn’t told her about his plan for MIT either.

“And why am I only hearing about this now?” Mr. Haynes asked.

“Because you’re never here,” James said.

This made his father pause. He was clearly thinking about James’s words and I knew he couldn’t deny them. James was telling the truth.

“I work very hard to support your lifestyle.” Okay, he tried to justify his actions. I noticed how he’d stopped eating, how his knuckles had gone white as he gripped the fork. It was clear that James’s words had gotten to him. I was sure he felt guilty for not being present more often.

“I never asked for all of these things,” James shot back, dropping his own fork on his plate with a loud ‘clang!’.

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw Mrs. Haynes rub her forehead as if she had a headache now.

“I am, however, asking you to support me with my decision to go to MIT,” James pushed.

“I will never support that.”

His words were like a punch to the gut. I couldn’t breathe. Couldn’t chew. Couldn’t swallow.

I was absolutely devastated.

I didn't expect Mr. Haynes to be so opposed. I had thought he'd support James. But clearly he thought he knew better.

And just like that, our college hopes went up in flames. What were we going to do?

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