

Keily Book 2: Dating My Enemy |

The MIT Confrontation

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"I am going to MIT," James declared.

"No, you're not," Mr. Haynes retorted, his tone resolute.

"You're not throwing away your future for some school that doesn't even have a decent football program. I won't let you."

"Football isn't everything, Dad," James shot back, his frustration palpable.

"MIT is an opportunity for me to pursue academics."

"Opportunity? More like a waste of time and money," Mr. Haynes countered, his voice rising in frustration.

"Since when have you wanted to pursue academics anyway? You love sports. You're not thinking this through, James. You're letting your emotions cloud your judgment."

He looked at me as he said that last part. I almost shied away from his look.

Guess it was a good thing I was sitting down. How had this evening gone so horribly wrong so fast?

"I'm not letting anything cloud my judgment," James insisted, his resolve unwavering.

"I've thought long and hard about this, and I know it's the right decision for me."

"You're being stubborn, James," Mr. Haynes argued, his patience wearing thin.

"You need to listen to me."

"You never listen to me," James countered.

“Enough,” Mrs. Haynes interjected. “Let’s not argue about this now. We’re all tired, and we’re not going to resolve anything tonight.”

The room fell silent, the tension between father and son simmering beneath the surface like a dormant volcano on the verge of eruption.

“But Mom—” James began, his frustration evident.

“No buts, James,” Mrs. Haynes insisted, her tone firm.

“Let’s agree to revisit this conversation another time, when we can discuss it more calmly and rationally. For now, let’s say our goodnights and try to get some rest.”

Reluctantly, James nodded, his shoulders slumping in defeat as he conceded to his mother’s request.

Mr. Haynes sighed heavily, his expression softened by his wife’s gentle intervention.

“Fine,” he relented, though the tension still lingered in the air.

“But we’re not done talking about this, James.”

Mr. Haynes got up abruptly, his chair scraping against the floor as he left the table without so much as a second glance at me.

I felt like I was just another chair sitting around the table. But then Mrs. Haynes turned to me, as if she saw me for the girl I was.

“I’m sorry about that,” Mrs. Haynes said softly, her voice heavy with regret.

“I hope we haven’t made you too uncomfortable.”

“No,” I lied, forcing a small smile.

“It’s okay.”

It wasn’t okay. Nothing about this was okay.

I’d wanted both parents to like me, but now Mr. Haynes didn’t. And, he was going to screw up James’s college plans. He really was a strict man. And he was difficult to talk to.

"Maybe we can try this again some other time," Mrs. Haynes suggested, her tone hopeful.

"I hope you have a good night."

She rose from the table without offering a hug, leaving behind an awkward silence that hung heavy in the air. None of us had finished our food.

I reached for James's hand. His anger had dissipated, replaced by a palpable sense of sadness that mirrored my own.

We sat in silence. Neither of us knew what to say to the other.

I pulled out my phone to text my dad.

Keily
Please come get me.

He texted back immediately.

"Keily," James began. "I'm sorry about my dad. He can be... difficult sometimes."

I glanced up, meeting his gaze with a small smile.

"It's okay, James," I reassured him, though the truth was, I felt a pang of sadness. "I understand. He just wants what's best for you."

James nodded, his expression grave.

"I know, but sometimes he doesn't realize that what he thinks is best isn't necessarily what I want."

"He has a point though. You are really good at football. And we've only been dating for a little while."

James interrupted me with a kiss. My heart fluttered in my chest, a rush of warmth flooding through me as I melted into his embrace.

When he pulled away, his eyes were filled with a determination that took my breath away.

"I'm not 'giving anything up' for you, Keily," he said firmly, his voice unwavering. "I'm not interested in football, and I want to go to MIT with you. I'll figure something out with my dad."

I searched his eyes, seeing the sincerity and conviction shining brightly within them.

"James..." I began, my voice trailing off as I struggled to find the right words.

But James interrupted me, his hand reaching out to gently cup my cheek.

"I mean it, Keily," he insisted, his thumb tracing circles against my skin. "I've never been surer of anything in my life. You're the one I want to be with, and I'll do whatever it takes to make that happen."

Tears welled up in my eyes, threatening to spill over as I was overwhelmed by the depth of his love and commitment.

"I believe you, James," I said.

"Football was never my dream," James added. "It's my father's dream."

And James wasn't responsible for making his father's dreams come true.

My phone vibrated and I checked it.

Dad
I'm here.

"Is your dad here?" James asked, getting up.

I gave him a nod and he walked me to the car.

He gave me a long hug goodbye.

As I slid into the passenger seat of my dad's car, he greeted me with a warm smile.

"How was dinner, sweetheart?" he asked.

I hesitated for a moment, unsure of how to respond.

"It was... okay," I replied vaguely, my mind still reeling from the events of the evening.

My dad glanced at me, a knowing look in his eyes.

"Something tells me it wasn't just 'okay'," he said gently, his tone filled with concern.

I sighed, knowing I couldn't keep the truth from him.

If I didn't tell him now he'd just ask again tomorrow. And the day after. Again and again. I might as well explain everything and get it over with.

"It's just... it didn't go quite the way I had hoped."

My dad's expression softened, sympathy evident in his eyes.

"I'm sorry to hear that, sweetheart," he said, reaching out to squeeze my hand comfortingly.

"But don't take it to heart. Parents can be very protective of their kids, even if they don't always show it in the best way."

I nodded, grateful for his understanding.

"I know," I murmured.

Suddenly, my dad chuckled, breaking the somber mood.

"You know, I have to admit, I was a little suspicious of James at first," he confessed.

I laughed, shaking my head in disbelief.

"Dad, really?" I exclaimed, unable to hide my amusement.

He shrugged sheepishly, a grin spreading across his face.

"I guess I just wanted to make sure he was worthy of my little girl," he admitted.

I couldn't help but laugh at his confession, feeling a surge of affection for my dad.

“Well, you have nothing to worry about,” I assured him, leaning over to give him a quick hug. “James may be stubborn sometimes, but he’s a good guy. I promise.”

“I know, sweetheart,” he said, his voice soft with emotion.

“And I’m glad you found someone who makes you happy.”

I was glad too. I just didn’t want to lose him if we ended up going to different colleges.

Once at home, I got into bed. I picked up the MIT pamphlet that lay on my bedside counter. It was the one that James and I had eagerly marked up during one of our study sessions. We had outlined all the cool classes and areas we hoped to explore around campus.

I looked at the coffee shop that James had wanted to go to.

I flipped through the pages, a sinking feeling settled in the pit of my stomach. Most of the annotations and highlights were in my handwriting, detailing the classes and programs that had sparked my interest. There were barely any markings from James, other than the coffee shop, and those that were present seemed almost perfunctory in comparison.

Was he really that excited to go to college?

Had I been projecting my own hopes and desires onto him, assuming that he felt the same way without ever truly knowing for sure?

If James wasn’t as excited about MIT as I was, what did that mean for our future together?

Even if James and I managed to achieve the high GPA necessary for acceptance into MIT, it might all be for naught if James’s dad continued to disapprove.

It was just another obstacle to add to the ever-growing list of challenges we faced.

Does James even want this?

Earlier he’d accused his dad of not listening to him.

Maybe I was the same. Maybe I was too focused on my own dreams that I hadn't listened to his. Maybe I was the problem.

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