

Keily Book 2: Dating My Enemy |

Burden of Choices

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I was nervous.

I knew I shouldn't be because I had worked hard on this assignment. Yet, my palms were sweaty.

I was in English class and James sat beside me. He'd gone quiet. He was also nervous, although he wouldn't admit it out loud.

I realized I was more worried about his grade than I was about mine.

Mr. Crones walked around the classroom, handing back the graded assignments.

I dried my hands on my pants.

My paper was placed in front of me.

I immediately looked at the grade, written in red, on the first page. I had passed! With flying colors, might I add.

James must have been watching me because he said, "I knew you'd do well."

"Thanks!" I told him.

Each glowing grade brought me one step closer to my dreams, solidifying my path towards the prestigious halls of MIT.

I watched Mr. Crones give James his paper with a disappointed shake of his head.

A pang of concern tugged at my heartstrings. James' face fell and then his fists balled on the table. I glanced at his grade and realized that he had failed.

Oh no.

My heart ached for him as I watched him struggle to come to terms with his grades. I knew he'd been focused on football and hadn't had enough time to focus on this assignment.

"It's okay," I said, knowing that it wasn't.

"It's not okay, Keily," James replied, his voice tinged with frustration. "I'm not going to make it into MIT, am I?"

"Don't lose hope," I urged.

"I am losing hope," James admitted, his tone laced with resignation. "This assignment was so important..."

"But you had to practice football for the Pinewood Academy game," I pointed out.

"I know," his shoulders slumped. "I thought I could do it all, but maybe I was wrong."

He stuck the paper into his backpack and got up.

"And I can't even stick around to talk about it because I have football practice. I'm sorry," James said.

"You don't have to apologize for that," I assured him, reaching out to squeeze his hand in a gesture of support.

But James only offered me a sad smile before leaving the classroom.

What could I do? There had to be a way to help James.

This assignment had been a big one and James needed a better grade. If he had done better, then he could have gotten a high enough GPA for MIT.

Mr. Crones had finished dealing out the papers.

My hand shot into the air.

"Excuse me, Mr. Crones," I said.

He walked over to me with a warm smile. I was clearly a star student and he liked me very much. But this wasn't about me.

“Yes, Keily? Is there something I can help you with?”

“I was wondering if there are any special assignments for extra credit,” I asked. “For those who may need a little boost.”

Mr. Crones furrowed his brow in confusion. “But Keily, your grades are already excellent. You don’t need extra credit.”

I bit my lip, unsure of how to explain without revealing too much.

“It’s not for me,” I admitted.

Mr. Crones looked from me to James’ empty desk. Recognition dawned.

“It’s for James,” he stated.

I nodded, feeling a lump form in my throat. “He’s been feeling discouraged lately, and I just want to help him however I can.”

Mr. Crones placed a comforting hand on my shoulder, his expression filled with compassion. “You’re a good girlfriend, Keily,” he said sincerely. “But James had a fair chance to do well in this previous assignment. It’s not my fault he didn’t study.”

“He didn’t have time to!” I interjected quickly, desperation creeping into my voice. “Please, Mr. Crones. He has been so tired and stressed with football season. His dad is pushing him to focus on sports. But he wants to go to MIT with me. We’ve been working so hard, and it will all be for nothing if he doesn’t get in. Please help him. Please help us.”

Mr. Crones sighed, his gaze fixed on the papers strewn across his desk as he weighed his options. Finally, after what felt like an eternity, he looked at me with a small smile.

“Alright, Keily. I’ll give James another chance. He can redo the assignment. I’ll give him a week before he needs to hand it in.”

Relief flooded through me. I was so happy I could hug Mr. Crones!

“Thank you, Mr. Crones. Thank you so much,” I exclaimed.

Mr. Crones nodded, his expression firm but kind. "But this is his last chance, Keily. If he manages to ace this assignment, he should have a high enough GPA to qualify for MIT. I can't give any more chances if he screws it up."

"I understand," I replied. "Thank you for believing in him."

The bell rang.

I left Mr. Crones's classroom feeling hopeful.

I made my way to the football field to find James. I couldn't wait to share the good news with him.

I saw him throwing the football at Lucas.

For a while, I just watched.

When practice finally ended, I hurried over to where James was gathering his things, a smile plastered across my face.

"James!" I called out, unable to contain my excitement.

He turned to me, a tired but curious expression on his face. "Hey, Keily. What's up?"

"We did it, James," I exclaimed, unable to keep the grin from my face. "Mr. Crones is giving you another chance. If you ace this last assignment, you'll have a high enough GPA to qualify for MIT!"

James's eyes widened in disbelief, a mixture of shock and gratitude crossing his features. "Seriously? What did you say to him?"

"I just asked him nicely," I said.

"I bet you batted those pretty eyelashes at him and he caved," James said.

That made me laugh.

"This is amazing, Keily! Thank you so much," he said, pulling me into a tight hug.

I returned his embrace with equal fervor.

“When do I have to hand it in?”

“One week from today,” I said.

“What?” James asked, stepping away from me. His happiness had disappeared as fast as it had come.

“What’s wrong?” I asked.

“A week from now will be one day after the big game.”

My heart plummeted as the realization dawned on me.

How could I have forgotten about the football game against our longtime rivals, Westview High School? They had been practicing for months, pouring blood, sweat, and tears into every training session in preparation for this crucial match.

“We've been practicing for months now...” James trailed off.

I winced. Not only did he have to contend with the pressure of the game itself, but now the added stress of the assignment deadline threatened to overwhelm him.

“And my dad is going to be there,” James said.

That was news to me. James’s dad was always busy with work, rarely able to make it to his son’s football games. I knew that having his father attend was a very big deal for James. It was a rare opportunity to showcase his skills and make his dad proud.

I knew the thought of disappointing his father, of failing to live up to his high standards, weighed heavily on James. Mr. Haynes was a successful businessman, with a no-nonsense attitude and a relentless drive for excellence. He had always pushed James to be the best, to strive for perfection in everything he did.

I thought back to the night I’d met him.

He was so strict. So serious.

Despite his best efforts, I knew that James often felt like he fell short of his father's expectations. The pressure to succeed, to live up to the legacy of his family name, was a heavy burden to bear.

As I looked at James, the lines of tension etched into his face, my heart ached for him. I realized how much this game meant to him. He desperately wanted to make his father proud.

"I'm sorry, James," I murmured, my voice filled with empathy. "I didn't realize the timing would be so difficult."

James offered me a weak smile, his eyes reflecting a mixture of gratitude and uncertainty. "It's not your fault, Keily," he said softly. "But I don't know how I'm going to juggle everything."

He couldn't.

It was all too much. It looked like he was going to have to choose between the Westview High School football match and his English assignment. Which was more important?

Next Chapter

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