

## Keily Book 2: Dating My Enemy |

### On the Doorstep of Discord

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I had to talk to James's dad. As I stood outside James's house, a knot of nerves tightened in my stomach.

The decision to confront James's father had been brewing in my mind since yesterday. It was fueled by my growing concern for James's well-being.

I knew James and his dad couldn't have a conversation without it turning into an argument. The strained relationship between James and his father was no secret.

At dinner, their conversation had ended in a fight, leaving both parties frustrated and hurt. Yet, I couldn't stand idly by while James continued to burn himself out, juggling the demands of football, school, and his father's expectations.

I had to do something. Taking a deep breath, I reminded myself of my intentions.

I wasn't here to cause trouble or stir up conflict. I was here because I cared about James, because I couldn't bear to see him suffer under the weight of his responsibilities.

I'd come all the way to his house and now I looked at the doorbell. But as I reached out to ring it, a surge of uncertainty washed over me.

Would Mr. Haynes even listen to me? Would he see me as an intruder, meddling in matters that weren't my own?

I hesitated, my finger hovering over the doorbell. Should I ring it?

Should I leave? I considered turning around and walking away, leaving James to navigate his struggles alone.

But then, the image of his exhausted face flashed before my eyes, and my determination solidified. I took a deep breath.

Then I let it out again. Okay, this was stupid. I couldn't just show up unannounced.

I didn't have a relationship with Mr. Haynes and if I talked to him it would only make things worse. James was the one who should talk to him, not me.

As I turned to leave, the sound of an approaching car drew my attention. I watched as James's mom pulled into the driveway, in her sleek Audi.

She'd seen me, hadn't she? Okay, there was no slipping away now.

I hesitated, unsure of what to do next. Before I could make a decision, the car door swung open, and James's mom emerged, a warm smile lighting up her features.

"Keily!" she called out, her voice carrying across the driveway. "What a pleasant surprise! Come inside, dear."

Feeling somewhat sheepish, I approached her, offering a hesitant smile in return. "Hello, Mrs. Haynes," I greeted.

She waved away my formality with a dismissive gesture. "Oh, none of that 'Mrs. Haynes' nonsense now that it's just us girls," she chuckled. "Call me Sarah. Now, come on in. I was just about to make some tea. Would you care to join me?"

Her easygoing manner put me slightly at ease, and I found myself nodding in agreement. "Sure, thank you," I replied, falling into step beside her as we made our way to the front door.

As we entered the house, the familiar surroundings offered a small measure of comfort. But as Sarah busied herself in the kitchen, preparing the tea, I couldn't shake the feeling of unease that lingered in the air.

I fidgeted nervously, my hands twisting together in my lap as I waited for Sarah to return. I had never been alone with her before, and the thought made me feel oddly self-conscious.

I reminded myself that she liked me. Or, at least I think she did.

When Sarah finally emerged from the kitchen, she was carrying a tray of tea and cookies in hand. She sat down opposite me and I reached for a cookie.

As Sarah and I sipped our tea, she leaned forward with a curious glint in her eye. "So, Keily, how did you and James meet?" she inquired, her tone laced with genuine interest.

I couldn't help but smile at the memory. "We met at school. He asked me if he could borrow a pencil, but then I saw that he already had two of his own."

I carefully omitted the details of the bullying that had initially brought us together. It wasn't something I would ever share with Sarah.

Sarah chuckled at the anecdote, a warm smile playing at the corners of her lips. "Oh, that doesn't sound like James," she remarked. "He's usually smoother than that. He must have been nervous. That means he really liked you."

The thought brought a flutter of warmth to my chest, and I nodded in agreement. "Yeah, I think so too." "I can tell you about James..." she said with a proud smile on her face.

"Tell me!" I said eagerly. "He was a spirited and mischievous boy, always full of energy and curiosity."

To my surprise, Sarah came and sat down next to me. She pulled out her phone and began scrolling through a collection of photos, eager to share glimpses of James's past with me.

The first photo she showed me was a candid shot of James as a toddler, his chubby cheeks flushed with laughter as he chased after a stray butterfly in the backyard. My heart swelled at the sight, marveling at the innocence captured in the snapshot.

Next, Sarah revealed a series of photos documenting James's elementary school years. In one, he grinned proudly as he displayed a handmade Mother's Day card, his messy handwriting scrawled across the front in colorful crayon.

In another, he stood proudly beside a towering sandcastle he had built at the beach, his sandy fingers clutching a plastic shovel as he beamed up at the camera.

The next photo truly stole my heart. In it, James stood arm in arm with another boy. They looked the same, with matching grins. "Who is this?" I asked.

“James’s older brother,” Sarah said. As I gazed at the photo, a sense of belonging washed over me.

In that moment, surrounded by memories of James’s past, I felt a deeper connection to him and his family than ever before. I was grateful to Sarah for sharing this with me.

As Sarah scrolled through the photos on her phone, she paused on one that caught my attention immediately. It was a snapshot of James and his dad, clad in matching football jerseys. Their faces were radiant with joy as they tossed a football back and forth in the backyard. Their happiness was captured in the image.

I couldn’t help but think about them sitting together at the dinner table. Where had the happiness gone? “That’s a lovely photo,” I remarked. “James looks so happy.”

Sarah’s smile turned wistful as she nodded in agreement. “Football has always been a big part of James’s life,” she explained, her gaze lingering on the image. “It’s something he holds near and dear to his heart.”

I couldn’t tear my eyes away from the photo, my heart aching at the thought of the bond between father and son, forged on the field of play. But as Sarah continued, her tone taking on a somber note, I realized there was more to the story.

“However,” she continued, her voice tinged with sadness, “James never wanted to pursue football professionally. It was always his passion, but it became more of a job, an obsession, if you will.”

I furrowed my brow in confusion, struggling to reconcile the image of James’s beaming smile with the notion of football as a burden. “But why?” I asked, my curiosity piqued.

Sarah sighed, her expression heavy with regret. “His father,” she replied. “He saw James’s potential and pushed him to do better, to be the best. But in doing so, he inadvertently drove James away from the sport.”

I let those words sink in. I couldn’t help but feel a pang of sympathy for James, caught in the crossfire of familial expectations and personal desires.

“James and his dad have been on awkward terms for a long time,” Sarah admitted, her voice soft with sorrow. “But deep down, I know they both love each other and want the other to excel in life.” “James wants to make his father proud,” I told her.

“I know,” she said. We finished our tea.

I couldn’t shake the feeling of unease that lingered in the air. Despite Sarah’s warm hospitality, the weight of the conversation weighed heavily on my mind. The strained relationship between James and his father, coupled with James’s conflicted feelings about football, left me feeling unsettled and unsure of how to proceed.

“You’re good at mediating between them,” I remarked, breaking the silence that had settled between us. “Why not hold a family meeting and have them talk things out?”

Sarah shook her head, a weary sigh escaping her lips. “Because they are both so stubborn,” she admitted, her tone tinged with frustration. “No matter how hard I try, they just can’t seem to see eye to eye.”

I nodded in understanding. It was clear that the rift between James and his father ran deep, rooted in years of misunderstanding and resentment. And while part of me longed to bridge the divide, I knew that it wouldn’t be an easy task.

As I rose to leave, I turned to Sarah, gratitude swelling within me. “Thank you for everything,” I said sincerely. “For the tea, the photos, and for sharing your stories.”

Sarah smiled warmly, her eyes crinkling at the corners. “You’re welcome anytime, Keily,” she replied.

I felt like she meant it. She was such a genuine and kind person. I’d instantly taken a liking to her and felt like our relationship would only grow deeper from here on. I wished I could say the same about Mr. Haynes.

I left the house. How was I going to navigate all of this?

The strained relationship between James and his father, James’s conflicted feelings about football, the uncertainty of our future together... It was a

tangled web of emotions and obstacles, and I couldn't help but wonder if I was up to the challenge.

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