

Keily Book 2: Dating My Enemy |

Between Ambition and Exhaustion

Between Ambition and Exhaustion

James couldn't focus. He was dead tired from practice.

We were sitting on my bed, textbooks and papers scattered around us. It was time for James to do the makeup assignment, and I was here to help.

I couldn't help but admire him for his determination. His brow furrowed in concentration, he pored over the material with an intensity that both impressed and concerned me.

There were dark circles under his eyes. His hair was a mess.

And judging from the way his eyelids drooped, he needed a nap.

"James," I said softly, reaching out to touch his arm. "Maybe we should take a break. You look exhausted."

He glanced up.

"I'm fine, Keily," he insisted. "I just need to finish this section."

My heart ached at the sight of him pushing himself so hard, juggling the demands of football practice and academic pressures. I knew he was giving it his all, but I also knew that he couldn't keep up this pace.

"James, I appreciate how hard you're working," I began, my voice gentle. "But pushing yourself like this... it's not sustainable. You need to take care of yourself."

He sighed, running a hand through his hair in frustration. "I know," he admitted, his exhaustion palpable. "But I can't afford to screw this up again."

I squeezed his hand, offering him a reassuring smile.

"I understand," I said softly. "But you can't keep pushing yourself like this. It's okay to take a break, to give yourself some time to rest."

"I can't rest now," he said. "I only just started."

"I do want to talk to you about something," I said.

The intensity of my tone caught James's attention, his gaze flickering up from the paper he had been poring over. He set the paper down, a furrow forming between his brows as he regarded me with curiosity.

"Sure, what's up?" he asked, his voice tinged with concern.

I took a deep breath, steeling myself for the conversation ahead.

I hesitated for a moment, gathering my thoughts before plunging ahead.

"I've noticed... things seem a bit tense between you and your dad," I began tentatively, choosing my words carefully.

James's demeanor shifted almost imperceptibly, a flicker of discomfort crossing his features. He shifted his weight around the bed.

"Yeah, well... it's complicated," he replied evasively, his gaze dropping to the sheets.

I pressed on, refusing to be deterred. I know he didn't want to talk about it. But I'd let this go too many times before.

No more.

I wouldn't be a pushover this time.

"I know it's not an easy topic to discuss, but I think it's important," I said firmly, determination lacing my words. "I talked to your mom, James. I know about how things were with your dad, and how they're... awkward now."

James's jaw tensed, his eyes narrowing slightly as he regarded me with a mixture of surprise and apprehension.

"You talked to my mom?" he echoed, his tone guarded.

I nodded, meeting his gaze head-on.

"Yes, I did. I went to your house the other day."

James's gaze bore into mine.

His reaction was immediate and explosive. With a sudden burst of anger, he shoved his papers to the floor, the sound echoing through the room like a gunshot.

"You went snooping around my house?" he accused, his voice sharp with frustration.

I recoiled, shock coursing through me at the intensity of his reaction.

"No, James, it wasn't like that," I protested, scrambling to explain myself. "I went to talk to your dad."

But my explanation did little to quell his anger. Instead, his glare intensified, his features contorted with disbelief and resentment.

"You had no right to do that," he spat.

Desperate to defend my actions, I pushed forward, determined to make him understand.

"I know it might seem like I overstepped, but I was just trying to help," I pleaded, my voice trembling with emotion. "Besides, your dad wasn't home. It was your mom I spoke to."

He just glared at me, so I continued talking.

"She was really kind and told me I could come back anytime," I continued, my voice faltering slightly under the weight of his disapproval.

"Yeah, you go hang out with my parents while I practice football," he retorted sarcastically, his tone dripping with bitterness.

I could feel my own frustration rising in response to his dismissive attitude.

"James, you need to let your dad know how you really feel," I urged. "You can't keep trying to juggle football and everything else. It's not fair to you."

But instead of acknowledging my words, James's anger only seemed to intensify.

“How could you possibly understand how I feel?” he demanded, his voice rising with each word. “You don’t know what it’s like, Keily. I have to try and live up to not only my ultra-successful mom and dad’s expectations, but I also have to live up and get out of the shadow of my brilliant older brother, too.”

His words cut through me like a knife, the pain of his struggle written plain on his face. I wanted to reach out, to comfort him in some way, but I feared he would push me away.

He was right—I couldn’t fully understand his position. I wasn’t living his life, facing the same pressures and expectations that he was.

Unlike James, I was an only child, with no siblings to measure up to. My parents, while loving and supportive, were far from the wealthy, successful figures that James had to contend with. Their careers were average, their ambitions modest in comparison to the lofty standards set by James’s family.

In that moment, I felt a pang of guilt for even attempting to offer advice, knowing that my experiences paled in comparison to his. How could I presume to understand the weight of his burden when I hadn’t walked in his shoes?

But I did know that he couldn’t continue like this.

“I’m done talking about this,” James said, climbing off the bed.

“James, no. Please don’t go,” I said. “We can talk about something else.”

“I’m done talking.” He shoved his things into his backpack.

“Then we can continue working on the assignment.”

“I’ll finish it on my own,” he said.

James stormed out of the room.

The weight of his departure hung heavy in the air. I watched him go, my heart sinking with each receding footstep, feeling a sense of helplessness. I couldn’t make him stay.

Tears welled up in my eyes as I lay down on the sheets. The events of the past few moments replayed in my mind like a broken record. I had only

wanted to help, to offer some semblance of support in the face of James's mounting struggles. But instead, it had blown up in my face.

Devastation washed over me. It was as if all my efforts had been in vain, making everything worse. How had things gone so wrong, so quickly?

The deadline for the makeup assignment and the upcoming football game was around the corner. James was facing an impossible choice, torn between his commitment to his team and his aspirations for the future. And with each passing moment, the pressure continued to mount.

I really wished he would have talked to me.

I really wished he would have talked to his father.

I knew that James needed time to himself, to process everything that had transpired and come to terms with his own feelings. But as I sat there, grappling with my own sense of guilt and remorse, I couldn't help but wonder what the future held for us. Would we be able to overcome this latest obstacle, or was this the beginning of the end for our relationship?

I didn't want to lose him. That thought made a terrible sound escape my lips.

What was James going to do? Would he be able to find a way to balance his commitments, or would he be forced to make a choice that could change the course of his future forever?

Next Chapter

Continue to the next chapter of Keily Book 2: Dating My Enemy