

Keily Book 2: Dating My Enemy |

A Heart Close to His

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Christmas Day had arrived! My home was filled with the warmth of love and the scent of festive delights. To make the day even more perfect, James was there. He celebrated with me and my family, seamlessly blending into our traditions as if he had always been a part of them.

He belonged with me.

And I belonged with him.

The table was laden with a feast fit for royalty, and laughter filled the air as we shared stories and reminisced about old times. Addison and her family were there too, adding to the joyous atmosphere with their infectious energy.

Throughout the day, I couldn't help but notice how well James got along with my family. His easy charm endeared him to everyone. I found myself falling even more deeply in love with him.

This boy...

As we sat down to eat, conversation naturally turned to our plans for the future.

"I dream of attending MIT," I told everyone. My passion for coding and programming shone through as I spoke.

"And it's a dream that will come true," my father said.

"You'll get in—of that I have no doubt," my mother agreed. "What about you, James?"

"What about me?" James asked.

"Will you also be going to college?" my mom asked.

"Or will you go work for your dad?" My dad asked before James could answer.

I had a feeling that in the future our relationship would be so much harder. I wanted to see him every day. But that might just not be possible, depending on what he decides to do and where he decides to go. The panic that welled up in my chest made me eat a little bit faster.

“I’ve not really given it much thought,” James said.

“Have your parents?” my dad asked. “I’m sure they’d have some idea of what’s best for you.”

When the topic strayed towards his own family, I noticed a subtle shift in James’ demeanor. The muscle in his jaw jumped and his knuckles turned white on the fork.

“I’m sure they think that too,” he brushed off the questions. Then he shifted the conversation away from himself and back to me, “I think MIT is the perfect choice for Keily—she and I worked on building that website, for school, together. I can tell how passionate she is about it. And good at it too!”

I couldn’t help but feel a pang of concern as I watched him deflect the conversation. It was clear that there was something he wasn’t ready to share. I wanted to ask about it, but not now. Not with the whole family listening.

Instead, I focused on enjoying the present moment, surrounded by the warmth of family and the love of the man who had captured my heart.

Despite the underlying tension regarding James’ family, I’m filled with happiness as I watch him interact effortlessly with my family. My parents seem to genuinely like him.

After dinner, it’s time to exchange gifts.

We headed to the Christmas tree and I reached for one of the gifts. With eager anticipation, I handed it to my cousin.

“Addison, I hope you’ll adore this as much as I do,” I said.

A smile danced on her lips as she carefully unwrapped the gift. Her eyes widened in delight as she beheld the exquisite dress nestled within the folds of tissue paper.

“Oh, Keily, it’s stunning!” she exclaimed, fingers tracing the intricate lace and silk. “Thank you so much. It’s perfect.”

I beamed with satisfaction, heart swelling at her genuine appreciation. I knew she’d like it because we’d gone shopping many times. I knew her taste, her style.

“You’re welcome, Addison. I knew it would suit you.”

James seemed to pause, studying Addison’s reaction. What was he thinking?

Returning the sentiment, Addison presented me with a beautifully adorned box, her eyes twinkling.

“I hope you find these to your liking, Keily,” she said.

With eager fingers, I untied the ribbon and lifted the lid, revealing an array of luxurious bath ointments. Their earthy scents wafted through the air.

“Addison, these are exquisite,” I breathed, overwhelmed by her thoughtfulness. “Thank you ever so much. You always know just what I need.”

Addison’s smile was radiant as she nodded. “I’m glad you like them, Keily. You deserve every bit of pampering.”

We exchanged heartfelt thanks and embraced. I noticed James watching this exchange. There was something in his eye that I couldn’t quite identify. I think it was longing. Maybe he wasn’t used to having cousins around with whom he could exchange gifts.

Did he feel out of place? But then I looked at his relaxed shoulders and curious eyes. He didn’t feel left out, he was intrigued. It was as if this was his first time experiencing a happy Christmas.

As Addison’s mom and dad handed out their gifts, the air filled with the irresistible aroma of rich chocolates and delectable cookies. They’d gotten cookies for all of us—including James.

I could sense the surprise and happiness radiating off him. He clearly hadn’t expected them to get him anything. Was he used to receiving gifts on Christmas?

“Awh, you didn’t have to do that,” he said. “But thank you!”

“You’re most welcome,” Addison’s mom said.

“We’re happy to have you join us,” Addison’s dad added.

Addison’s eyes sparkled with delight as she unwrapped each sweet treat. Her parents’ love was evident in every carefully chosen confection.

My parents didn’t get me any candy. No sugar. Nothing unhealthy. Instead, they got me perfume and earrings.

As the exchange continued, I eagerly presented my parents with their gifts, a small token of my appreciation for all they had done for me throughout the years.

“Mom, Dad, I hope you like these,” I said, a hint of nervousness in my voice as they unwrapped their presents.

James watched my parents and I wondered if he ever gave his parents any gifts for Christmas. Did they bother to get him anything?

My mother’s eyes lit up with joy as she discovered the scented candles, their delicate fragrance filling the air with a sense of serenity.

“Oh, Keily, these are lovely!” she exclaimed, pulling me into a tight hug. “Thank you, sweetheart. I can’t wait to use them.”

Dad’s grin widened as he examined the coffee mug, its sturdy construction and simple design a perfect match for his morning routine.

“This is perfect, Keily,” he said, clapping me on the back. “Just what I needed to start my day off right. Thanks, kiddo.”

Across the room, Addison was presenting her own parents with their gifts. And my parents quickly joined them, wrapped boxes in hand.

James touched my shoulder and I turned to him.

“This is really nice,” he said.

I could sense the truth behind his words. He really liked this.

“I’m sure your Christmases used to be similar,” I said.

He looked away. Oh. Maybe they weren't...

"James?" I asked.

"Uh, they were not quite the same," he said. "Mom and dad traveled a lot."

"But what about when you were kids?" I asked. I know his parents were busy, but what about when he was younger? Most families spent Christmas together, especially if they had little kids, didn't they? "Didn't all of you celebrate together?"

"No," he said.

Wow, he really wasn't used to having big, warm family holidays. I figured that must have been incredibly lonely and empty. Clearly, his family wasn't as tight-knit as mine.

I took his hand and gave it a squeeze. Because he was here with me now. He was included, wanted, and spoiled.

"I have something for you," James said.

It's the exchange of gifts between James and me that filled me with the most excitement.

"Yes?" I asked.

He reached into his pocket and retrieved a small box. He handed it to me.

Curiosity piqued, I carefully opened the box, revealing a heart-shaped locket nestled within. My heart skipped a beat as I opened it to find a picture of us smiling back at me.

"James, it's beautiful," I whispered.

"Now I'll always be close to your heart," he said softly.

I let him fasten the necklace around my neck, a tangible reminder of our bond.

Returning the sentiment, I reached for the awkwardly wrapped present I had prepared for him.

"I hope you like it," I said, feeling a hint of nervousness as he eagerly tore away the paper.

His eyes widened in surprise as he beheld the football with our names emblazoned on its surface. "Wow, Keily, this is amazing!" he exclaimed, running his fingers over the smooth leather. "Thank you so much."

We kissed. It was brief. Neither of us wanted to make out in front of our parents.

"I also just made a very important decision," James said.

"What is it?"

"I'm going to attend MIT with you."

Did I just hear that right? A rush of emotions flooded through me. Overjoyed and incredulous, I couldn't contain my excitement. I almost jumped up and down like a little kid.

"James, that's incredible!" I exclaimed, clasping my hands together.

This news was the best Christmas present I could have asked for.

"You're really going to MIT?" I asked, as if having him tell me a second time would make it more real.

He nodded. A smile spread across his face. It reached his eyes and was contagious.

"Yeah, I want to be with you, Keily. And if that means studying at MIT, then count me in."

Though a flicker of concern for his ability to keep up with MIT's rigorous academic standards crossed my mind. Football kept him busy, which meant he didn't always have enough time to focus on his grades. I pushed it aside, overwhelmed by gratitude for his commitment to our relationship. He'd keep up, because he wanted to be with me.

"James, I believe in you," I said. "We'll tackle this together, okay?"

His answering grin was enough to dispel any lingering doubts, his confidence contagious.

The revelation of James' decision was followed by another pleasant surprise as my parents presented us with tickets to a nearby skating rink. The gesture filled me with warmth and happiness, a tangible sign of their approval and support for our relationship.

"Thank you, Mom, Dad," I said, tears of joy pricking at the corners of my eyes as I embraced them both. "I'm so excited to go!"

"A bunch of people from school would be at the skating rink too," Addison said.

She was a social person and meant this as a good thing.

A knot formed in my stomach, and a wave of insecurity washed over me. Thoughts of being James's girlfriend in front of our peers crept into my mind, stirring up a whirlwind of doubts and fears.

Whale.

Fat.

Pig.

I tried to push those insecurities down, but they just wouldn't go away.

"Okay," I said, forcing a smile as I shrugged off Addison's comment.

I told myself that we'll just focus on enjoying ourselves. But deep down, the nagging voice of doubt persisted, whispering that I wouldn't measure up. What if they didn't think I was good enough for him? What if they saw all my flaws and shortcomings? Everyone saw my flaws, after all.

Despite my efforts to silence those thoughts, they continued to gnaw at me. They cast a shadow over the excitement I had felt just moments before. But I refused to let them ruin our date. I plastered on a brave face, determined to show James—and myself—that I was worthy of his affection, no matter what anyone else thought.

Right?