

Keily Book 2: Dating My Enemy |

Skating Rink Struggles

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Smack!

I fell on my butt. The ice made its way through my leggings, turning my skin cold.

Embarrassment burned in my cheeks as I sat there, feeling exposed and vulnerable. At the skating rink, James offered me a hand. He gave me a reassuring smile as he helped me to my feet.

“You’re doing great, Keily,” he said, his voice gentle and encouraging. I let his words of encouragement fuel me. James believed in me, which meant I should as well.

I could do this.

I could.

I...

I wobbled and would have gone down if it wasn’t for James pulling me upright. I regained my balance, only to wonder if I would have cracked the ice, had I fallen. I clutched James’s hand harder.

I tried to focus on James’s patient guidance, on the warmth of his hand in mine. I wasn’t good at this because I didn’t have a lot of practice. I’d get better at it if I just kept going.

As I tentatively glided across the ice, I couldn’t help but feel a pang of envy as I watched others effortlessly skate by. Their movements were graceful and fluid. Would I ever be able to move like that?

But then James squeezed my hand, pulling me back into the present moment with his steady presence and unwavering support. This wasn’t so bad. If I stopped thinking about others, I might actually enjoy it.

I stumbled again.

My heart raced with a mix of embarrassment and frustration. But this time, James was there to catch me. His strong arms wrapped around me in a reassuring embrace. I leaned into him, grateful for his steadying presence as I fought to regain my balance.

He was so good at this.

When I stopped stumbling he let me go, but still held my hand. With a nervous laugh, I flapped my free arm awkwardly. I tried to steady myself as if I were a bird attempting to take flight. But instead of feeling graceful and elegant, I felt clumsy and ungainly, my movements awkward and uncoordinated.

Despite my best efforts, insecurity continued to gnaw at me, threatening to overwhelm me with doubt and self-doubt. What if I couldn't get the hang of this? What if I embarrassed myself in front of everyone? What if I pulled James down with me?

But as I glanced up at him, I saw nothing but patience and understanding in his eyes. He smiled reassuringly, his touch gentle and supportive as he guided me across the ice with infinite patience and care.

“Don’t walk,” he said. “Skate. Like this.”

He moved his skates and I tried to mimic the movement. With each stumble and falter, James was there to lift me up, to remind me that it was okay to struggle, to fall, to fail.

Despite my insecurities and fears, James never wavered in his belief in me. His unwavering support gave me the courage to keep going even when the ice beneath me felt like it might crack at any moment.

I might crack the ice.

We glided across the rink together, hand in hand. It would have been romantic if I didn’t struggle so much. After practicing for a bit, I was getting the hang of it. I started enjoying it.

James turned sharply and slipped. He let go of my hand and fell.

“Are you okay?” I asked.

His laughter was answer enough. I watched him get to his feet and take my hand in his. Okay, this was actually fun! At first I'd been really wobbly on the ice, but now I was more steady. I skated, one foot in next to the other. So far, I'd been holding James's hand for support. I knew he wouldn't drop me. I knew I could lean on him. But, did I still have to? We'd been skating for a while and I was clearly getting the hang of it.

I let go of James's hand.

And then I pushed myself forward and forward and forward. I was doing it! I was doing it all by myself.

"Wow, Keily! Looks like you'll outskate me," James teased.

"Don't be ridiculous!" I told him, although his words warmed my heart.

The other kids from school arrived at the skating rink. When I saw them walk through the door I felt a wave of self-consciousness wash over me once again. The fun had ended. They'd see me too. They'd judge me.

"I need a break," I told James.

"Okay," he said. He helped me to the edge of the ice, where I awkwardly climbed out of the rink. I felt as wobbly as a penguin when I walked.

That would be a great nickname to add to the list of whale, pig, fatty. Penguin fit right in.

I felt the weight of the school kids' judging gazes as I made my way to the bench. As I sat down, I watched with a mix of admiration and envy as James glided effortlessly across the ice. He moved with a grace and athleticism that seemed effortless, his movements fluid and precise.

Of course, he did. Of course he's perfect at this too.

As I watched him, I couldn't help but notice the other kids from our school, like Axel and Keith, had made their way onto the ice. Some of them waved at me and I waved back. They were showing off their own impressive skills. They moved with a confidence and ease that seemed worlds apart from my own clumsy attempts at skating.

I couldn't help but feel a pang of jealousy as I compared myself to them. My own insecurities were magnified by their seemingly effortless grace. What did they think of me, I wondered? Did they see me as just another awkward girl, struggling to keep up with the rest of them?

I looked at James and realized I could never keep up with him.

A heavy weight settled in my chest. I couldn't shake the feeling that I was holding James back. He had been so graceful and confident on the ice when he was teaching me, but now, without me by his side, he seemed to soar with even greater ease and agility.

A pang of sadness pierced through me as I watched him. His movements were fluid and effortless, drawing admiring glances from the other girls at the rink. I couldn't help but notice the way they ogled him, their eyes lingering on his every move with admiration and longing.

In that moment, I felt painfully aware of my own shortcomings, of the ways in which I couldn't measure up to their expectations of what James deserved. They probably thought I was just holding him back, dragging him down.

The voices of doubt and insecurity grew louder in my mind, taunting me with all the ways in which I didn't belong here, with James or with anyone else. Maybe they were right. Maybe I wasn't good enough for him after all.

Some sneaky glances and giggles were thrown my way.

I could guess what they were thinking. It wasn't hard to imagine—the whispers, the knowing looks—they all pointed to the same conclusion: What was James doing with someone like me?

And in the quiet recesses of my mind, I couldn't help but entertain the same thought. How was I, with all my fatness, together with someone like James? He was everything they all wanted—confident, athletic, charming—and I was... well, me.

James gracefully glided off the ice. A confident smile graced his lips as he made his way over to where I sat.

He didn't look like a penguin when he walked around wearing skates.

“Keily,” he said, his breath visible in the crisp winter air. “Want to go for another round? I can teach you some more moves.”

I forced a smile, trying to ignore the curious glances of our classmates.

“Actually, James, I think I’m done for now,” I replied. “I’m feeling a bit tired.”

I wasn’t feeling tired. Not one bit.

James’s expression softened with concern as he settled down beside me. Great. Now I was stopping him from skating and enjoying himself.

“Are you okay? We don’t have to stay if you’re not having fun.”

“I’m having fun!” I quickly lied. “I just want to watch for a bit. You can go skate some more.”

But he didn’t. He sat down with me. As we sat together, watching the skaters twirl and glide across the ice, I couldn’t shake the feeling of being under scrutiny. The weight of their stares pressed down on me like a heavy blanket.

As I thought about leaving, I looked at the doors. Addison and Sadhvi arrived. I hadn’t expected them, but was glad they were here. I couldn’t help but smile as they approached, their laughter and chatter cutting through the crisp winter air. I watched them collect their skates.

“Hey, guys!” James called out as he waved them over. “I didn’t know you were coming.”

Addison’s eyes sparkled with excitement as she and Sadhvi walked over. Her cheeks were flushed with the thrill of the cold wind against her skin.

“Hey, James, Keily,” she greeted us with a grin. “Sorry for crashing your date. We just couldn’t resist joining in on the fun.”

I waved off her apology with a chuckle. “No worries, Addison. The more, the merrier, right?”

But as I watched them lace up their skates with practiced ease, a twinge of apprehension crept into my chest. They were here to skate, to revel in the freedom of gliding across the ice, and I couldn’t help but feel a pang of guilt at the thought of holding them back with my own lack of skill.

James must have noticed the uncertainty in my expression because he nudged me gently, his eyes filled with encouragement.

“Maybe you’ll feel like getting back out there now that they’re here,” he suggested optimistically.

“My feet hurt,” I said quickly. The idea of embarrassing myself further was the last thing on my mind.

“Skates can be brutal on your feet, Keily,” Sadhvi remarked, her tone filled with empathy. “I totally get it.”

Relief flooded through me at her words. Okay, I was truly done skating for the day.

“I think it’s time to go home anyway,” I decided.

“Before you go,” Addison said. “I want to tell you about a big New Year’s Eve Party. Everyone is going to be there.”

A sense of dread washed over me. The idea of being surrounded by a crowd of people, all eyes on me and my rolls, filled me with a sense of unease. But as James’s eyes lit up with excitement at the prospect, I knew that I couldn’t dampen his enthusiasm.

I didn’t want to be a party pooper. Especially not after I’ve cut our ice skating date short.

“Sounds like fun,” James said eagerly. “Those parties are always a blast.”

I forced a smile, trying to muster up some enthusiasm of my own.

“Yeah, it should be a good time,” I replied, though my heart wasn’t really in it.

But deep down, I couldn’t shake the feeling of apprehension that gnawed at me. What if I made a fool of myself? What if I didn’t know anyone there? What if I ruined James’s night by being a total buzzkill?

I couldn’t bear the thought of disappointing James, of letting my own fears get in the way of his enjoyment. So, with a heavy heart and a forced smile, I resolved to push aside my worries and embrace the festivities, no matter how daunting they seemed.

After all, how bad could it really be?

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