

Keily Book 2: Dating My Enemy |

United Front

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It was the first day back at school. James and I had shown up together.

I'd driven us while he sat in the passenger seat, hand on my thigh. We walked through the school's doors hand in hand. I could feel the weight of curious eyes following our every move.

We made our entrance together, a united front against whatever the day might bring. The whispers and stares that followed us seemed to hum in the air, but I paid them no mind.

Instead, I focused on the warmth of James's hand in mine. For so long, I had grappled with insecurities and doubts, fearing the judgment of those around me. But as we walked together, I realized that the opinions of those really didn't matter all that much.

I didn't even know most of their names, so why should I care about their words or stares? And with James by my side, I knew that I didn't have to face the scrutiny of our peers alone.

Surely, he too saw the judgmental looks. Surely, he too heard the whispers. But he chose to ignore them because they didn't matter to him. And now, they didn't matter to me either.

In the end, what mattered most was the love and support that James and I shared. I squeezed his hand reassuringly, a sense of contentment washed over me. Who cared what the rest of the world thought? As long as we had each other, nothing else mattered.

With a smile, I leaned into James, feeling happier than ever before. I kissed him goodbye and wished we had every class together. I navigated through my normal school day.

It was class after class until it was break time. As my friends and I ate lunch at the cafeteria, we chatted. We talked about our plans after high school, a bittersweet atmosphere hung in the air.

Each of us was on the cusp of embarking on our own unique journey, and while excitement for the future buzzed beneath the surface, there was an undeniable pang of sadness at the thought of going our separate ways. “Lola, Matt, what are your plans for college?” I asked, turning to the inseparable couple with a smile.

Lola grinned, her eyes lighting up with excitement. “We’ve decided to stick together,” she said, her hand finding Matt’s beneath the table. “We’re going to the same college and living together off-campus.”

Wow, they were moving in together! I couldn’t help but fantasize about the day James and I did the same thing. It would be magical.

I wondered if I’d cook dinner and if he’d help me clean the dishes. What side of the bed would he sleep in? Would I hog the pillows every night? And what else would we be doing in bed?

Those thoughts made my face grow warm and I instantly pushed them aside. Now wasn’t the time or place to get distracted! Instead, I focused on Matt again.

Matt nodded in agreement to Lola’s statement. There was a proud smile on his face. I could see the excitement in the tiny crinkles in his eyes. “Yeah, we figured we’ve made it this far together, so why stop now?” he added, squeezing Lola’s hand affectionately.

Turning to Addison and Sadhvi, I thought about them telling me about wanting to go to New York together. They’d finally get out of the closet and make their relationship public knowledge. That must be scary, but also exciting.

I couldn’t help but feel a twinge of envy at their shared enthusiasm for their future plans. Was James as excited about our future plans? “What about you two?” Lola asked them.

Addison grinned, her eyes sparkling. “We’ve applied to the college in New York with a strong liberal arts program,” she said. “We’re hoping to soak up all the culture and diversity the city has to offer.”

Sadhvi nodded in agreement, her gaze distant, and I think she imagined the adventures that lay ahead. “It’s going to be amazing,” she added, a hint of excitement lacing her words. “And what about you, Lucas?” Sadhvi asked.

As the conversation turned to Lucas, I couldn't help but feel a pang of sadness at the thought of our group dynamic changing. Lucas and I were close friends, and we talked every day at school. I would miss hanging out with him all the time.

I'd miss his teasing. I'd miss his friendship. I'd miss having him jump out and scare me. Lucas shrugged, his expression unreadable. "I'm going to pursue football," he said simply.

I offered him a supportive smile, knowing how much football meant to him. It was the only thing he really wanted to do. "That's great, Lucas," I said, my voice filled with genuine encouragement. "I'm sure you'll do amazing things."

"Oh, I will." He winked at me. "I've been offered a scholarship at the same college as Myra."

I briefly wondered if he and Myra would get back together. Surely, they'd see each other a lot more once college started. I kind of hoped that they would. They were clearly serious about each other.

Before I could ask about that, James changed the subject. "And me? Will I do amazing things?" There was a hint of jealousy in his voice. Clearly, he hadn't completely let go of my and Lucas's flirting. He looked at me with big puppy dog eyes and pouted lips.

"You already are," I turned and kissed him. "Awh," Lucas teased.

The bell rang, signaling the end of break. I downed my orange juice, trying not to think about how much sugar it contained. I'd read several articles about diets but they all seemed to say different things.

I then switched over to fitness influencers on social media, but they couldn't seem to agree on anything either. I'd recently decided to switch the sodas I used to drink at lunch to orange juice. It was the healthier option and it contained vitamin C.

"What subject do you have next?" James asked me. "Actually, I have a free period," I said. "Me too!" He exclaimed. "How about we go to the library?"

"Sounds good. We can do some college prep."

We headed to the library where we settled into our seats. It was quiet and I pulled my laptop from my backpack.

James broached a topic that had been weighing heavily on his mind. "Keily, my dad wants me to go back to the football team once my injuries have healed," he confessed, his voice tinged with uncertainty.

I nodded understandingly, knowing full well the demanding nature of both academics and athletics. "It's going to be a challenge," I agreed, my mind already racing with thoughts of how we would juggle our responsibilities.

"But we can do it," James insisted, his gaze meeting mine with unwavering determination. "Together, we can support each other and make it through."

But could we? I didn't want to contradict him or be negative. Before his injury, he was playing both football and studying. Football had been the priority and thus his grades weren't too good. But if he wanted to get into MIT, his grades would have to be the priority.

"What are you thinking?" James asked and touched my cheek.

Before I could answer, there was a big commotion in the hallway. I heard people cheering, clapping, and making a lot of noise. Had a celebrity just walked into our school or something? What was going on?

The library door swung open, and in stormed Lucas. There was a wide grin on his face that hinted at something big. "James!" Lucas called out, despite knowing that one wasn't supposed to yell in a library.

He planted his feet at the door. His eyes sparkled with a mix of joy and mischief. "Guess who's back?"

"Who?" James's eyebrows pressed together.

"Chad!"

James's face lit up with an unmistakable happiness that I found perplexing. He jumped up and rushed to Lucas. "Chad? Who's Chad?" I asked, my confusion evident.

Lucas chuckled and glanced back at me. “Chad used to be one of our closest friends, part of the football team. He’s been studying abroad this semester, and he’s back today.”

Lucas and James hurried out of the library, and I tried to follow. My short legs struggled to keep up. I was panting by the time I reached the outside of the library. There, I saw a group of students surrounding one boy.

Tall, hunky, and exuding the typical aura of a cocky football player. This must be Chad. “Hey, fellas!” Chad boomed, enveloping Lucas and James in a bear hug.

The reunion was filled with laughter, backslaps, and a sense of camaraderie that only old friends could share. Lucas pulled free from the hug, leaving Chad and James clinging together. The embrace seemed to last several minutes, but maybe it was just me.

Maybe I already missed having James at my side. I couldn’t shake the feeling of being left out. I didn’t know Chad, and I hadn’t shared in the excitement of his return. I felt like an outsider, disconnected from the camaraderie between James and his friends.

Finally, James let go of Chad. He looked around until his eyes found me. Then he waved me over. I knew I had to try to fit in, to be a part of this.

With James’s help, how hard could it be? Even though I felt uncertain and out of place, his gesture told me that he wanted me to be a part of this moment. And if James wanted me there, then I owed it to myself to push past my insecurities and embrace the opportunity to connect with his friends.

I walked over to where James stood. “Chad, this is my girlfriend, Keily,” James said.

He sounded so proud. A rush of excitement and nerves flooded through me. He’d introduced me as his girlfriend — because that was who I was to him. Somehow it didn’t sound real, or completely right, to my ears.

“Nice to meet you, Keily,” Chad said. He didn’t offer me his hand and I felt like his tone was a bit cold. “Uh, nice to meet you too,” I replied, trying to sound cheerful and confident. I’m pretty sure I failed.

Chad's friendly demeanor was reassuring, but as our eyes met, I couldn't shake the subtle judgment in his gaze. As James turned to one of the football players, Chad eyed me from head to toe.

It was a look that spoke volumes. He was sizing me up. He was judging me. A brief look of disgust crossed his face. My anxiety flared to life, fueled by the realization that Chad wasn't just any acquaintance—he was one of James's closest friends.

The thought of not being accepted by someone so integral to James's life sent a wave of uncertainty crashing over me. What if Chad didn't like me?

Next Chapter

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