

Chapter 1

Start from the beginning □

"What happened?" Mrs. Doolittle said when I walked back to my locker.

'Nothing, someone told her I made a mistake. She'll change things around, so I don't get in anyone's way.'

She nodded as she read my response before smiling, her body slumping in relief. "Thank God, I really thought you were in trouble."

My heart warmed at her kind words. Mrs. Doolittle then walked away, and as soon as she reached her locker, the women who were around Jane crowded around her this time as she delivered the not-so-thrilling news. Most of them were annoyed at the changes to come because they were already used to where and how they worked.

I quickly changed and left the stifling atmosphere of the locker room. My aching legs carried me to my next destination. Another job. A part-time job that was closer to my apartment than my full-time job, but that was slightly similar.

I washed dishes in a small diner from eight to eleven. All I had to do was clean what they gave me. There was no communication needed with the busy staff in the kitchen. Luckily, the place was close enough to my apartment that I got home around midnight.

It was dark, and Jim wasn't home yet. I walked to the kitchen after locking the door, going to look for something to eat. But then I remembered I had to shop for groceries.

I sighed and slumped on a chair, holding my head in my blistered hands. Cleaning did that to your hands, even with gloves. 2

My feet throbbed from a full day of standing up. But I dragged myself to the shower after eating some cereal. It wasn't much, but it was better than staying hungry when the only thing I had all day was a dry toast and a peanut butter and jelly sandwich.

Be thankful I told myself as the warm water washed the tiredness of the day off, there are people out there who don't even have a drop of clean water. 3

I waited for Jim after my shower. I had to speak to him. He couldn't keep acting this way. I sent him a message, and he replied saying he'd be home in thirty minutes.

He arrived in an hour. 4

I was dozing off on the couch when he entered, the only thing alerting me to his arrival was the movement of the couch as it dipped when he slumped next to me.

"What's wrong?" he said, turning towards me so I could better read his lips. I gave him my phone, showing him the text from school while I rubbed my face tiredly. It was close to two and I had to be up at five.

Jim rolled his eyes before giving me the phone.

"It's no big deal," he said, running his hands through his blond locks.

'It is!' I wrote on the board in my lap, looking at him incredulously. He rolled his eyes again before huffing and standing up.

"It's not like they're teaching us anything important. I told you I'm just a sophomore and I" 5

He spoke too fast after that, so I couldn't read his lips. I frowned and held up my hands, making him stop talking.

'I didn't catch what you said,' I wrote. He read before huffing again.

"Never mind. You don't need to worry about school, I'll take care of it."

'I'm working my ass off so you can finish high school and do something with your life!'

My hands were shaking with anger and frustration while I wrote. He read it before frowning at me, then spoke while throwing his hands up wildly.

"I never asked you to work for me. If you're going to bitch about it just stop. I'll figure something out. You're not my mother." 6

I looked at him after he finished, not sure if I read his lips correctly, or maybe just wishing I hadn't read them correctly. He stared at me for a couple of seconds, his heavy breathing indicating that he had been yelling.

"Forget it. You'll never get it anyway," he said before stalking out of the apartment. He slammed the door so hard that I felt the vibrations, leaving me stunned into silence.

I fisted my shaky hands and stood up, walking to my room and locking my door before I curled into a ball under my blanket.

I gulped down the knot in my throat, but the tears still spilled, wetting the pillow under my cheek. Tears of anger and sadness, tears of frustration. 7

That was a feeling I was very well familiar with ever since I lost my hearing. I had thought it would go away with time, but I was wrong. It never did. It was always there, lurking deep inside, eating away at me like a disease.

I gritted my teeth and bumped my fist on the shabby mattress, again and again, then put my face in the pillow and screamed. Screamed hoping the pillow would stifle my cries.

But all I got in response was silence. Stifling silence that contrasted with the violent storm raging inside my heart. 8

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The next day at work everything went as usual, my little spot of heaven on the rooftop lifting my mood a little. Just a little before it dropped down again when I saw the note hung on the door of our locker room at the end of the day.

It was a note describing the changes Sadie had promised me. It was more of a punishment than a change, at least for me.

Instead of being responsible for half a floor and a flight of stairs like every other woman here, I was assigned to the stairs.

Just the stairs. 9

Only the stairs. From top to bottom. Of a thirty-eight-floor building. Oh, did I say just the stairs? How silly of me. Of course she'd give me something else. I also had to clean the ground floor glass walls, and to do that I had to be earlier than usual.

The ladies were all excited because most of them didn't have many changes. Some were glad because their workload had actually lessened.

My lunch hour was also switched. It was a couple of hours later than usual, which made it at one o'clock instead of eleven. 10

Great, I'm going to be starving, too. 11

I was probably going to have to buy something to snack on while I worked. One of the good points of working on the stairs was that there was no one in sight since all employees used the elevators. That was probably why Sadie assigned me uniquely to the stairs. I wouldn't meet anyone and thus wouldn't get in anyone's way.

Great, more isolation...Not that I minded it anyway, people are just a pain in the ass I thought, making my way to my second job. 12

Jim didn't come home that night until I was preparing for bed, around twelve-thirty. He caught my eyes, a flash of regret in his as he quickly ducked into his room, mumbling something to himself.

At least he's home. After putting next month's allowance for him on its usual spot on the kitchen counter, I went to bed. 13

It was not a big sum, but that was all I could afford to give him with the bills and the rent.

And I still had to go grocery shopping! Damn it! I forgot again!

Which meant another jelly sandwich as a lunch for me the next day. Three days in a row.

I slept dreaming of peanut butter and jelly sandwiches and woke up surprisingly well rested after four hours of sleep.

A rest that I most certainly needed since I left for work at four-thirty so I could reach there in time to clean the ground floor before employees started walking in.

Which I did, then started on the monstrosity that was the stairs. By the time it was my lunch break, I was spent and looking forward to my precious sandwich.

I hoped that the rooftop would be empty again. I actually didn't know if we were even allowed to go there. But since it was always open, I assumed it was okay.

With my sandwich in hand, I took the elevator trip to the top of the building. The rooftop was deserted, as usual, and the afternoon sun played hide and seek as the clouded sky cleared for a few minutes before clouding over again, repeating that game while I ate my sandwich.

But then it happened. Something that I didn't know at the time would change my whole life.

I was halfway through my sandwich, enjoying the everlasting silence. I had just opened my mouth and raised the bread in midair, when my hand froze.

My dark brown eyes met with sky blue ones that looked as surprised to see me as I was. I blinked up at the man, only the top half of his body visible as he froze in his steps while climbing the ladder.

Well, this is not what I expected from my new lunch break. 14

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