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Prologue

“Papa, where are you?” Screamed a six-year-old girl as she stumbled down the stairs wearing a beautiful frock covered in blood.

Just in time to see a tall stranger calmly walking out of their home, without looking back at the paralyzed little girl holding in her scream.

Tessi Furrow also had to die that night.

CHAPTER 1

Eighteen years later- New York

“We need your profiles, sweetie.” Said the bored looking casting director.

A hopeful Sury Glasby, with an earnest smile, gave her profiles. Little did she know that the audition was just a façade as the cast was already locked in for this movie. Lines and lines of hopeful actors giving it their best shot. *In vain.*

She rushed out from the audition room and saw a few familiar struggling actor’s faces who were waiting in the line and mentally started ticking off the list as she crossed each of them. Ok, so he hasn’t made it, she hasn’t gotten a project yet, the girl with tattoos is still here! Thank God, seeing all of them in the same boat made Sury feel better about herself.

“Here let me help you with that.”

She gave the guy who was standing next to the heavy oak door a confused look. “Huh.” Help her with what?

“The door.” He pointed. “It’s heavy.”

“It has handles. I’m sure I can manage.” She held the handles and pulled, but the door didn’t budge. She glanced at the guy who had a smudge look on his face and just because of that smudge look, she pulled again but it still didn’t budge. “Are you going in or getting out?”

“What do you mean?”

“Why are you standing here?” I’m sure to pick up girls. She cringed.

“I’m waiting for my girlfriend to finish her audition.”

“Oh.” Sury felt silly. “So, you were just being polite.” She said through gritted teeth.

The guy laughed. “Polite, yes. But you are gorgeous, so that could be one of the reasons too.”

She blushed. “Don’t let your girlfriend hear you say that.”

He crossed his arms and leaned back. “I wouldn’t be surprised if she is opening a few doors of her own.”

Sury laughed and pointed towards the door. “Thanks. I can use your help after all.”

Grinning, the boy opened the door with ease. “You’re welcome.”

Smiling to herself she skipped towards the bus stop.

She barged into her office building in a rush to get to the staff washroom, where she would then change into her janitor's uniform, remove all her makeup, and get back to the life which paid her bills. But instead, she saw a small hold up in the lobby by the security gate and only fifteen minutes left to punch in her card. Nervously, Sury looked around the group of people and spotted her fellow employee.

“What's the holdup, Jack?”

Jack Spa looked at her and his jaw dropped open.

Impatiently Sury peered at him and realized he might be confused as he had never seen her with makeup or in anything else besides her janitors' uniform. “It's me, Sury.” She rolled her eyes at him.

It took a second for Jack to snap out of it. “Suu-ry, *whaat*. Wow-” He was at a loss for words.

“Do I have a new face because of this makeup?” She asked drily.

“Oh no, you always looked good,” he quickly answered. “But right now, you look like you have stepped in from another world, simply extraordinary.”

“Ohk thanks. So why are we waiting?”

Jack coming back to his senses. “One of the top industrialists, Damian Dupot, is going to be our new boss and he is on his way here. This added security is for his benefit. He is a billionaire, thrice turned over, and no one knows how he made his money.” Jack mysteriously smiled at her.

Sury groaned. “How do you know all this?”

“Hey, I might be a mail boy at Jingles Co., but my ambition is to sit at the top. I make it a point to be aware of everything.”

“I’m so late, Jack. My monstrous manager is really going to get my goat this time.”

He looked at the slow-moving security line. “It’s not your fault that you are going to be late. Look at this line, it’s refusing to move. As if everyone wants to get a glimpse of the man.”

Suddenly, there was silence, followed by excited whispers. Sury looked the way of the commotion, and all the air left her lungs when she saw him commanding the presence of the entire room without so much as even lifting a finger.

Her eyes scanned his towering, six-foot-something, well-toned body. She missed no details as she took in the expanse of his chest, broadness of his shoulders, narrow hips, and long legs. A slim dark blue shirt tucked into a pair of low-sung, well-fitted dark blue trousers. She noticed his tie was frustratingly put on, not the formal kinds. A thought, which was later confirmed when he came closer and she saw his unruly, shaggy dark brown hair, cut short and slightly golden at the temples.

She gazed at his mouth, which stirred a deep sensation inside of her as he spoke slowly to the man on his right. There was something intensely male about his arrogant, uncompromising face set in hard lines. His dark olive skin and powerful jaw dusted with stubble added to his handsome appeal. A piercing set of glinting Hazel eyes, the reason for her tingle.

Jack squirmed next to her in excitement. “Ooo that’s him. That’s Damian Dupot!”

As if he sensed he was being hawked, he looked up and his piercing gaze caught hers. She drew in a sudden ragged, embarrassed breath.

Damian Dupot couldn't concentrate on what his vice president, Frank Weild, was saying. His eyes were on her, the *red dress beauty!*

His eyes moved over the curve of her cheek to her sinfully lush rose-pink lips, which were slightly parted and a set of almond shape, deep green eyes with a straight Egyptian nose. An enchanting warm skin color with long strawberry blonde hair, seductively framing her angelic face.

Perfect curves snuggled in her dress, showing off the delicate lines of her shoulders and collarbone.

As Damian Dupot got into the elevator with his vice president all he could think about was her. *Who was she?*

Standing in the staff's washroom, Sury Glasby, robotically pilled her hair into a bun and covered it with a mesh. Was he really looking at me, mesmerized by me as much as I of him? She gave a nervous laugh & scolded herself, *ya right* Sury, a man like him? She looked at herself in the mirror and sadly saw what the world saw, a girl wearing a jumpsuit style uniform, ten sizes too big, tightly secured hair, face bare of any makeup and gloved hands holding a cleaning cart.

CHAPTER 2

Sury knew there was no way she would get to see Damian Dupot again as the first shift janitor had already cleaned the office floors and her shift took her downstairs to the mailroom, cafeteria, and washrooms.

Jingles Co. took up the top six stories in a forty-story building right in the hub of Manhattan. Four years ago, a nineteen-year-old Sury with dream in her eyes had arrived in New York, confident about her looks and her passion for acting. She took up this job because of the apt location for auditions, plus she needed a temporary solution for her income. Little did she know, four years later, she would still be scrubbing this company, without a break on the floors or in acting.

Her mobile rang and absent mindedly she picked up the call. “Hello.”

“Sury, how are you?” Replied a crisp voice.

Instantly, she warmed up towards his voice. “I’m good, Dego. Long time?”

“Yeah, you know how it’s is work. I just wanted to check-in, as off-late I have heard little from you.”

Feeling guilty about not being in touch. “Sorry... I have been auditioning like crazy!”

Dego Salt chuckled on the other end. “You always shine like a star.”

“Well, in here I’m more like the brown dwarf star.” Sury complained. “Dead. Totally dead. Been auditioning since years and I can’t even land a small part of like hanging clothes in the background.” She let out a frustrated groan. “Is it me or them? Please let it be them.” She scoffed.

He chuckled. “Hang in tight kiddo. I need to get back to base, talk soon?” And Dego cut the call.

Sury thought back to her time in Denver. Growing up, she never had any friends. The only person she trusted with her life was Dego Salt. Somewhat of an adopted family, thrown together at the time of a crisis and they held on to each other ever since!

Sury was around eleven when she found comfort in theater. Her love for acting kept the darkness away.

As the day passed, Damian couldn't get her off his mind. Which was unlike him because he preferred his work, over women.

Never had a woman, even fleetingly ever crossed his mind, but here he was, like a sociopath wanting to check the cameras to see if she actually existed. So, what happened today?

Trying not to ponder over it, he threw himself into work.

If Damian knew one thing, that was work. When he was twenty-two, he started his freight forwarding company, which eventually led him to becoming a magnate in the shipping world. But the buck didn't stop there. He expanded his business portfolio by investing in various sectors like oil, steel, media, and technology. Which resulted in the rise of DuPot Group of Industries.

Belonging from an under privileged background, Damian knew what it felt to reach a point in life when one could do anything for money. The one promise he made to himself at a very young age, no matter what you do- *you thrive!* And that's what Damian did. He survived it all and today at the age of thirty-five he was at the top.

"Frank, we need to change the model for this ad." Damian commented when he saw Jingles Co's new promo for a prominent dairy brand.

Jingles Co. an advertisement company was Damian's latest buy. Just when this company was about to declare bankruptcy, he swooped in and brought it for peanuts. In order to turn the company around in under a year, he had to make certain changes as with power comes responsibility.

Frank was a little cautioned. "She is one of the top models. Changing her now means we need to not only reshoot but change the marketing campaign. Can we really afford that?"

"I know exactly what that means, Frank." Damian drawled. "She isn't fitting the bill of a girl next door and this ad won't help our client sell his

damn milk. What we need is someone fresh and wholesome. A person who looks like she belongs with this brand and not a model who is treating it like a runway.”

Frank was quiet for a minute. “I’m on it.”

“I also need the creative team in the conference room stats. Who is the creative head?”

Frank consulted his iPad. “Stuart Pool.”

“Let’s go give him the bad news.”

Stuart was silent. This wasn’t how he was expecting to meet his new boss. He looked around the boardroom and saw a few of his colleagues smirking at him and the rest were not meeting his eyes.

In truth, Stuart was less qualified with work and more qualified in bed. That’s how he had his ex-boss, a closet gay, wrapped around not just his fingers. Stuart was one of the reason the company was sinking. High production cost coupled with bad creatives led to clients seeking their competition.

“I will get working on the new creatives right away, Mr. Dupot.” Stuart commented.

Damian picked up his iPad and after scrolling through. “Let’s have Mina Jian head this shoot.” He looked at Mina as she stood up from her spot.

“Wh-at with all due respect, Mr. Dupot, I’m the cr-eative head.” Stuart stammered.

“Yes,” Damian said without missing a beat. “I’m surprised that you are the head when Mina is clearly more qualified. I’m looking over the ads which she has created, and they are fantastic. Your portfolio falls short in front of hers,” he continued. “In fact, starting immediately I would like to promote Mina to be the new creative head.” And nodded towards the HR personnel. “Let’s get the paperwork ready.”

After getting semi fired, Stuart was sitting in the cafeteria fuming and seeking comfort from his bed buddy Jean. “What does he think of himself?”

“Keep your volume low, Stuart.” Jean hissed.

“Ha, you really think the high and mighty Damian Dupot will come down here and sit with us commoners.” He sneered.

“It’s not him I’m worried about. Look around, we have a lot of bad blood here.”

But Stuart wasn’t listening. He wanted the world to know that he had been mistreated. “How could he demote me in less than a day and not even give me a chance to redeem myself?”

Jean, blinded by his love for Stuart, clearly felt this wasn’t justified. “Dupot is the devil.”

Upon hearing this, Sury Glasby drew in a sharp breath! She overheard their entire conversation while she was sweeping the floor next to their table. On the very first day cutbacks were made, what kind of person does that? Worried about the security of her own job, she scrubbed the floors a little more vigorously than needed.

Just as Sury was exiting her office building after her work, she bumped into someone on the pavement. “Sorry.” She grumbled, massaging her arm where the clash took place and slowly looked up but was unable to see his face because half of it was covered with a black hoodie and his eyes by dark glasses.

“Be careful, Sury.” Saying that, he calmly walked off.

She froze. How did the stranger know her name? She tried to place him but her memory didn’t support her. Shaken, she calmed herself down by logically reminding herself that she was standing in the building where she works with over two-thousand employee, someone might have recognized her.

Needing a cappuccino to get over this unpleasant moment, instead of heading home she went to a neighboring coffee shop.

“Hey wait up, Glasby.” Jack jogged and caught up with her on the busy pavement.

Sury looked at Jack Spa and smiled. “What’s up?”

“Haven’t you heard?” Sury frowned, and he continued. “Oh, you mustn’t have, well...” Jack took his time. “Jingles Co. is going to be casting a new girl for an ad. Auditions are being held soon.”

“Nice.”

“Yes, it is nice,” Jack said impatiently. “And you have to audition.”

She tried not to laugh. “How is that possible, Jack? Me, the sweeper in this office, auditioning for their prestigious ad! Get real.”

Jack was quiet for a bit, and then she started walking. “Hold up,” he said. “No one will know.”

“How?”

“I couldn’t recognize you today, you know that right?” He let out a shaky breath and continued. “I have a few friends in the top place,” boasting, he continued. “Will sign you up with a fake name, just go and audition!”

Sury thought about it for a minute. This opportunity was too good to miss. If she got this Ad, they wouldn’t care that she was a sweeper and if she didn’t, well then no one would be wiser.

In her head it was a clear win-win situation, but still she was cautious. “I don’t want you getting in any trouble.”

“Don’t worry about me.” Jack assured her. “Plus, it’s harmless. Every actor has a screen name anyway. Will let you know the date soon, just give it your best.”

Sury hugged him on impulse, teary eyed. Having someone go that extra mile for her made her feel loved.

CHAPTER 3

She was standing in the line to order her coffee and was facing a complex situation whether she should treat herself to a chocolate croissant or not? Ridiculously smiling to herself in excitement, she looked around the busy café and noticed that everybody's head was buried deep in their phones and it dawned to her how one tends to not enjoy the small moments in life. Owing to herself to make the most of her present time, she ordered the chocolate croissant and to enjoy it further, she decided she would eat it in the café and not take it to go.

She found a sweet spot next to a large window which was overlooking the streets. Sighing with pleasure as she looked out and saw people passing by, some busy, some strolling and lover's meeting.

New York was lighting up, and she was in the perfect spot to enjoy it.

Thinking back on her life, even though she was just a janitor, she loved it. Ever since growing up, Sury had this unspoken affixation towards this city. When she would see New York in movies or in sitcoms, she would envision herself living here through them.

Walking through central park or being at the times square during new year's or even just idly sitting in one of the busy cafes quaffing beers or sipping a coffee made her deliriously happy. Yes, she couldn't afford to do any of the things which she saw in Gossip girl or in sex and the city, but she didn't let the set back of being broke keep her from having a happy, fulfilled life in the city.

"Excuse me. Are you Sury?"

With a dreamy look on her face, she turned towards a sweet old woman standing near her table. "I'm sorry. Did you say something to me?"

"Is your name Sury?" She asked again in a British accent.

Oh, so posh, Sury thought. "Yes, why?"

The old lady smiled and pointed at the barista. "He has been waving at you and calling out Sury- Sury."

She let out a sheepish grin and quickly stood up. “Sorry, I have been daydreaming.”

“Ah. Let there be light in your night.” Giving her a pleasant nod, the old lady walked away.

“Thank you.” Sury quickly called out after the lady as she made her way towards the counter.

Mouthing a sorry towards the barista, Sury picked up her tray and walked back to her seat. Just as she was putting her order on the table, she looked out of the window, and almost dropped the tray because Damian Dupot was staring right at her. The Damian Dupot!

Her heartbeat quickened, with just the glass between them, she could study him so much more clearly. He carried an imperious nose well and his angular cheekbones carved down towards a concrete jaw. There was something so sexy about his face, covered in stubble which she was aching to touch so bad! He was more devastatingly handsome than any man had the right to be.

They continued to stare at each other, him with his fiery eyes. The waves atop his head were a few shades darker. His tempting unruly wavy hair moved with the wind and fell on his forehead and her hands automatically moved upwards wanting to brush it across his forehead.

Sury was spell bound, and didn't know how long they stood like that, just completely lost in each other. She finally let out a small, shy smile and waited with bated breath for him to smile back. Seconds trickled by but she got no response from him, his face was set in stony silence.

Embarrassed, she quickly lowered her lashes, fumbled with her chair, and sat down.

Biting her lower lip nervously, her thoughts running a mile, did she read the whole situation wrong? Or did he not understand the smile? Should she go out and talk to him? After a couple of minutes, she braved a quick glance at him, just in time to see him hug a girl. With his back towards Sury, she could see the girl looked gorgeous, wearing a beautiful

slim skirt with a satin top. She looked rich, someone who would be in his league, unlike her.

Feeling sad, she gulped down her stone-cold coffee. Why did this feel like a heartbreak? Why did she get her hopes high? Silly Sury. But why was he looking at me, staring at me like I'm the only girl in the world? Robotically she started eating her chocolate croissant, which now tasted bland. Her thoughts fumed in anger, hating him for soiling her excitement of eating the croissant. Angrily, she flushed it down her throat and left the café.

As she was crossing the café, she turned her head to look inside just so she could imagine how she would have looked to him standing under the beautiful café lights, and to her utter surprise, she was staring back at a reflection of herself! *What?* The glass from outside the café had a mirror tint, so there was no way that he could have seen her. Grinning like a fool and instantly getting over her heartbreak, she happily skipped her way towards the subway.

She was enjoying her forty-minute train journey to Brooklyn where she lived in a small two hundred sq feet, rent controlled apartment until it dawned to her that why would a man like Damian Dupot be with a girl like her? Remembering him in the arms of the rich skinny girl jolted her straight back to reality. But this was her reality, which she was very proud of.

Since she was nineteen, she had been living alone and paying her bills. Never had she asked Dego for help. Never had she cried herself to sleep and never had she pitied herself. She was proud of the fact that she was hardworking, albeit she was just a janitor, but she felt no shame in that. She was striving to make a better life for herself, and screw Damian Dupot if he was a power-hungry superficial *a-hole* who couldn't see that! Not that he even knew she existed, but currently the practical side to her was laid to rest in this matter.

Once again angry at Damian, she walked towards her humble abode.

After hearing a routine knock on her window, she opened two beers and made her way towards it.

Climbing onto the fire escape. “Hey.” Sury said, hugging her friend Amber, who lived right upstairs. Sury preferred keeping to herself, but the only exception she made was with Amber and was glad that she did because, over the years, Amber slowly turned out to be a loyal friend. But even then, Sury kept a huge part of her life hidden. A daunting secret which she stored away.

Amber scrunched up her nose. “Dayham, you look bad, gurl. FYI, this ain’t slang for you look good.”

Rolling her eyes at Amber, she exclaimed. “When one goes through two heartbreaks, what do you expect?”

“Heartbreaks?? Hold it. *You* were dating?”

Sury let out a sad, slightly dramatic sigh. “I met him today.”

“*Today!* Dayham, gurl, you work fast.”

“Not fast enough.... trust me on one thing, how much ever I would want this to be true, like take me on your white horse kind of true, it might never be...” And Sury told her the entire story right up till the looking glass.

Scratching her head, Amber said. “Damian Dupot. I know him, gurl..I saw him on some magazine cover. How is it a heartbreak when you not even met the fella?”

Sury took a hasty sip before replying. “That’s the heartbreak right there, Amber. How am I ever supposed to meet him again? I should have walked up to him, instead of playing googly eyes.”

“But he with a girl.”

Letting out a deep breath. “And that was my second heartbreak.”

That night, Sury woke up, terrified, unable to breathe and lathered in sweat. Helplessly she fumbled to switch on the bedside lamp and looked around her tiny bedroom with scared eyes, trying to understand why after so many years, her nightmares came back to haunt her. The same nightmares which she had put to rest. Forever!

Author's note

Hey guys...thank you so much for reading. I'm so happy, that you reached this point.

When I started writing, I wanted to share my story with the world, but honestly, even having just one of you read my book gives me unmatched pleasure.

I hope you enjoyed it and can't to know more about Sury's story in **A Hot Mess #af**. You can download the E-book from Amazon (Link is on my website). If you love the book, please do consider sharing it with your people, tag me (I always repost), and do leave your reviews!

A review and rating from you on Amazon can really help me. Your words are powerful.

If you would want me to be a part of your life, do consider subscribing to my newsletter & I also have a very cool provision for you to become my valued ARC (Advanced Reader Copy) reader. Easy to do on www.roaleeyryan.com¹

I'm also active on social media-:

Instagram **@roaleeyryan** (personal) **@roaleeyryranauthor** (only about my work)

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Lots of love,
Roaleey Ryan

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