

## Resent Reject Regret

### Chapter 6 You'll Bear Charlene's Crime

Deirdre was so happy about this that she almost cried. Gritting her teeth to suppress her pain, she staggered toward the front door.

It opened, its swing slow and creaking. She then looked, and her eyes suddenly glinted. "Bren!" She stepped forward, animated by her excitement. "Bren, listen! There's something you must kn—"

"Shut the hell up and follow me!"

At that moment, Deirdre noticed how bone-chillingly frigid he looked. She instantly froze. "W-What's going on?"

His stare could freeze blood. "Lena was out driving. She ran over someone by accident and killed them. Then, she ran."

Deirdre's mind went blank. "She killed someone in a hit-and-run? Then she should report herself to the authorities! What does this have to do with—"

A lump formed in her throat. Her voice broke and disbelief dawned on her as she fixed her eyes on him.

His words came out like a decree. "Take the blame for her crime."

Deirdre's eyes widened in horror, and she felt like her world was on the brink of collapsing. "No! No, no, no, no! Why? Why should I be the one to... to be imprisoned? To be sentenced to death? To suffer in her place?!"

"Because, Deirdre McKinnon, you pretended to be her for two years!" Brendan snarled. That woman's wails were so grating that he cringed. "They managed to snap a picture of her when she ran away, but the two of you look the same anyway! Everyone will think it was you. You have nowhere to hide."

"Then tell the world we're not the same person! Tell them that Charlene and I are two different people!" she yelled, her breaths heavy and labored. "And you're wrong about me pretending to be her. She's the pretender! She took away my life six years ago! I was the one who risked her life to save you from the fire, Bren! It was me!"

Deirdre had expected disbelief and shock, and yet to her surprise, Brendan hardly frowned. Something worse took over his features—disgust. "Lena was right. You found out about her rescuing me from the fire six years ago, and your sorry \*ss immediately tried to pretend to be her in that story! You really scraped the bottom of the barrel, Deirdre."

"What... are you saying?"

"If you really were the one who saved me 6 years ago, why didn't you blare it out like a f\*cking PSA over the past two years? It would be just like you to want the whole f\*cking world to know!"

Tears burst out of her eyes. God knows how much she had tried to tell him over the past two years, but he had never let her finish a sentence. He hated hearing her speak, and the only thing he could stomach was her face. His favorite version of her was that of a lowly mute.

"Look, I have had enough. Report yourself to the authorities without any funny business and I'll make sure you don't get the death sentence. You'll get a few years maybe, but by the time you're released, I'll compensate you for your time."

Just a few years maybe? A few years?!

Deirdre let out a broken laugh, her voice thick with tears. "Fat chance, Brendan Brighthall! Don't you even think you can make me do Charlene's time. She killed someone! She should pay for it with her life!"

"How... dare you!" Any ounce of pathos and goodwill had been burned out. A storm then overcame him. "Ah. I get it. You love it rough. You've always, always loved it rough, right? Good. I can play rough!"

He stormed away from her to destination unknown.

Deirdre's knees buckled, and she crashed on the floor. By the time she recovered enough strength to collect her phone, she instantly received a call. Her mother's name, Ophelia McKinnon, flashed on the screen.

Deirdre answered the call in a heartbeat.

"Dee Dee? Where are you, Dee Dee?"

Her mother's voice was so feeble. So vulnerable. Tears welled up in Deirdre's eyes.

Ophelia was cognitively underdeveloped, and her mind was on par with that of a typical child. Since Deirdre had agreed to become Charlene's placeholder wife, Brendan had moved her mother to a mansion where care and attention were given to her.

Her call was nothing short of unexpected. Deirdre sniffled and checked herself before answering, "Hi, M-Mom. I'm, uh, at home with Brendan right now. Why are you calling me all of a sudden? Where's Aunt Engel?"

Ophelia sounded lost. "Aunt Engel? She went away."

"Went... away?!" Deirdre parroted, feeling stunned. Her mother's nurse, Mrs. Engel, had never left her mother's side. "Where did she go?"

"I don't know..." Ophelia's loss evolved into audible confusion. "Dee Dee, is this house someone else's? There were people over here. They broke things and pushed me and

said they wanted me to get-the-fak-out. Then, they said they would make me spend my time in an asylum until I die. What did they really mean?"

What?! Deirdre was stupefied. Before she could react, though, she suddenly heard Ophelia's shriek. "Arrghhh! Get away! Why are you grabbing me?!"

"Mom?! Mom!"

The call was cut short, leaving only Deirdre's futile cries echoing into the void. She felt her heart palpating and leaped into action despite her dizzy head. She immediately stopped a cab.

She reached Ophelia's residence and yet found only a stranger locking the front door. There was no sight of her mother. Deirdre lunged forward, grabbed a fistful of his sleeve, and demanded, "Who are you?! Where is my mother?! What have you people done to her?!"

The stranger swung her hand away without showing a tinge of sympathy. "That nutcase was your mother?! God, crazy does run in the family! Those people should have taken you to the cuckoo's nest, too!"

"The cuckoo's nest?!" Deirdre's eyes widened in rage. "You people sent my mother to an institution and claimed this house as your own?! Who the hell gave you the authority?!"

"Who gave us the authority?" the man repeated her words mockingly. "The property owner, big-fat-duh! This house belongs to the Brighthalls, nutty. And now, Mr. Brighthall wants the house back and wants your mother hopping merrily away, okay? By the way, I know you're thankful for us sending your mom to a nuthouse. I mean, have you ever looked at her? She can't live another day without care. Yeah, you're welcome."

Just like that, the man got in his car smugly and drove away.

Deirdre felt her blood freeze. Her mind had begun to reconstruct scenes of her mother—scared, alone, confused—being manhandled and dragged to a mental institution of unknown reputation. Was this her punishment for refusing to bear Charlene's crime?

Something popped on the notification interface of the phone she had been holding. It was a video. Deirdre opened it and saw a middle-aged woman shivering in a corner.

It was her mother!

"Open wide, looney!" said a disembodied voice. Whoever was speaking was standing outside of the frame.

The camera turned to a bucket before zooming into its content. It was some kind of mushy chum so minced and gooey that no one could tell what kind of food it was supposed to be made of. There were even flies hovering above it.

The men scooped a bowl of it and flung it at Ophelia. "Food, looney! You were whining about being hungry, right?"

Ophelia shrank into her corner disobediently. She shot a look at the food and pinched her nose. "It stinks!"

"Stinks? That's your lunch, looney! You should be grateful to even have a meal! Stop being a picky sh\*t and eat up!"

Ophelia clearly jerked away from the man's bark. Still, she shook her head. "B-B-But I don't wanna! It stinks! It'll give me a bad tummy—"

The cameraman did not let her finish. He stepped forward and swung a kick at the middle-aged woman, stomping her hard enough that she spread herself on the floor. Then, he yanked her head up by her hair before slapping her across the cheeks over and over again. "When I say eat, you f\*cking eat! You're a f\*cking looney, yet you dare call your food bad?! Sh\*t, make her eat this! Down it into her and show it to Mr. Brighthall!"

A few more people appeared. They pulled back her lips and dumped everything in the bowl into Ophelia's mouth.

Deirdre screamed, "No! Nooooo!"

There was no use. She was out here, given the cruel position of a helpless observer outside the camera. All she could do was break down and cry.

The video ended, and an unknown number followed it up with a text: 'This is what you get for refusing to cooperate!'

Deirdre's face was tear-stricken. Nausea caused by her pregnancy welled out of her in vomiting spasms. Her vision blurred, and her mind returned to six years ago—when before a sea of flames, Brendan had sworn he would grant her a life with no pain.

But now, he was the one behind every single pang of pain she felt.

He was cold. He saw her not as human, but as a literal b\*tch he could summon anytime he felt the need. His words were acrimonious, but she at least understood why. He did not love her.

But to give such an inhuman order against her mother? To make her eat food fit for livestock and little else just so Deirdre would agree to bear Charlene's sin?!

Deirdre knew exactly when it happened. The moment the last ember of hope—long held out for him—died in her.

Brendan Brighthall was no human. He was too cruel. Too cruel.

There was nothing she could possibly wish anymore. This alone was enough to break her.

Deirdre wiped the tears off her eyes. Something had died inside her, but that did not stop her from moving fast. Her mother was confined in a dubious establishment. She was being tortured right now.

She called Brendan, who picked up with an impatient snarl, "I thought you said no! The hell are you calling me for?"

She listened to his every word and burst into tears. Six long years of love... gone in the wind like ashes.

"Do you hate me that much, Brendan? How much... How much do you hate me?"

"What the hell are you on about?"

"You want me to die—not just die, but die in despair and agony. That's the only thing that will make you happy, isn't it?!"

"What the f\*ck?!"

Silence. A beat later, Deirdre finally spoke in a voice interrupted by her tears. "I'll do it. I'll take her place and die. As long as... As long as my mom gets to live like she did before. I'll do exactly what you wanted and disappear from your life forever!"