

## Resent Reject Regret

### Chapter 9 You're Free

Deirdre's eyes did not focus. They did not react at all.

The doctor pressed her lips with a pang of pity. Faced with a woman whose face was in irreversible ruin, the doctor suddenly found it hard to form any words.

"E-Excuse me?" Deirdre asked obviously. "Are you still there, doctor?"

She reached out before retreating sharply, as if something terrible had unfurled in her mind. Her voice was shaking. "W-Where are the lights? It's so dark in here! I can't see a thing! Turn on the lights!"

She pulled the blanket away from her and leaped out of bed, knocking off the hospital trolley beside her. There was a loud cacophony of shattering glass as Deirdre crashed on the floor.

"Easy, there!" the doctor warned as she stepped forward to help her out. "There are trolleys around you. It's quite the walking hazard, alright?"

"Trolleys? Where?" Deirdre asked, her voice thick with tears. "Why can't I see them, doctor? It's pitch black in here, right? Right? There's a p-p-power cut, perhaps? I'll see again once the lights are back on, right? Right?"

The doctor's eyes reddened, but she did her best to comfort Deirdre. "Easy, easy. Let me check your eyes for a second, okay? It might just be a case of temporary blindness, which could happen when your optic nerves are under duress. It's curable as long as we treat it in time, so don't be scared."

Deirdre's lips were trembling. 'Don't be scared?'

How could she not be scared?! She had gone through hell and all kinds of tribulations for two months. Her baby was gone. Her sight was gone.

Abject despair weighed on her. "Doctor, p-please!" she said, her voice rough and jagged as though she had to drag the words out of her throat. "Please help me see again... I've already... lost so much..."

The doctor did her best as disappointment piled in her. The facility they were in right now was not equipped to do anything!

"I'm reporting this to my supervisor, miss. I'll do my best to ensure that they get you to an actual hospital for immediate treatment!" she declared firmly. "Please wait here!"

With one last encouraging clap on Deirdre's back, the good doctor headed outside to talk to the cops.

Alone, Deirdre shivered uncontrollably. She pressed her fingernails close to her abdomen and tried—but it was empty inside. The life that used to live there was gone. Brendan's relentless barrage had finally killed it.

It should not have existed, yes, but she had never imagined its life would end like this. She had been obedient; she had done exactly what had been demanded of her and had lost every ounce of dignity in the process. She had sacrificed everything, so why?

Why would Brendan not spare her even the smallest kindness?

Why did he have to throw her heart to the ground and crush it under his boots like that?!

Deirdre wrapped her arms around herself and sobbed. In between her own labored breaths, she heard something else beyond the room. It sounded like an argument.

She felt her way out of her bed gingerly, crawling across the floor, and felt for the doorknob. She twisted it and the sounds became clear.

"Why aren't we sending a sick patient to a special hospital?! She's in a critical state—the only way we could save her is by getting her to a hospital!—Listen! Our inaction is going to ruin a young woman's eyes for life!"

"Mercedes Jones, can you stop being so naive for once? Do you really think she got into this state by herself? It was meant to happen—because that man willed it so! How else could she have ended up like this? And have you already forgotten just how long it took for public fury to subside? If we leaked any news about Charlene at the moment, we'd be stoking the same flames again! Don't you get it?"

"I know but... Can't we do this in secret?"

"No." Finality reverberated in the man's voice. "These are Mr. Brighthall's wishes. Anyone who offends him will end up like this."

'These are Mr. Brighthall's wishes.'

'Anyone who offends him will end up like this.'

The man's words echoed in Deirdre's mind. All the pain and sorrow that could ever have sprung from deep within her chest surged forward. The boundless darkness that had recently enveloped her paled compared to the biting cold freezing her heart.

The frost hurt.

The pain chilled her.

Once again, she fell to the floor and wept. She then whimpered.

'I regret saving you, Brendan. Why did I save you?!

'I thought the man I rescued would honor his pledge. I thought he would see me as someone precious—someone who deserved to be loved. But I didn't save a man that day, after all.

'I saved the Devil.'

"Miss McKinney!" Mercedes cried out. Alarmed, she hurried toward her.

Deirdre's lips trembled. "P-Phone..."

"Sorry?"

Tears rolled out of Deirdre's unseeing eyes. "Phone... Please lend me your phone," she pleaded. "I need to call him... Call Brendan... So I can ask him... How? How could he be so cruel to me? Why does he hate me so much?! What the f\*ck did I do?!"

Even as tears ravaged her face, her eyes remained dull and unalive. All that was left on her ashen face was dejection.

She hated how unfair this had been. She loathed it down to her bones.

Then, she heard the man who had spoken before. "You killed someone in a hit-and-run! You should be grateful that the court revoked the death sentence!" he scoffed. "I can't believe you're screaming 'what did I do?' as if you've learned nothing. What did the person you murdered do... to deserve running into you?!"

"Conrad!" Mercedes hissed. She shot a glare at him and stuffed her phone into Deirdre's hand. "I'm sorry. I'm afraid there's little I can do. Miss McKinney? This might be your only hope."

Deirdre caressed the phone, feeling lost.

"God, I'm sorry! You can't see," Mercedes said hastily. "I'll help. What's his number?"

Deirdre would always be able to recite Brendan's number from heart. This was the first time saying it aloud hurt, though—like being stabbed in the chest each time she said something.

The call was connected, and Deirdre snatched the phone and held it to her ear.

Brendan's voice was frigid. "Who's this?"

Another voice—coy, feminine, and filled with feigned anger—called out to him almost instantly. "Bren, what about this one? This bridal veil is just gorgeous, right? It's a perfect match for your suit! We're gonna look so beautiful in our picture today!"

Any movement on Deirdre's face was suspended. The last of her tears trickled down her cheek. As she was going through hell, Brendan and Charlene were excitedly taking their wedding photos.

"It's amazing," he replied with a compliment.

Charlene laughed. Then, she sighed a little sadly. "I still think I've done Miss McKinnon dirty, you know? I can't believe she's in there doing time in my place right now... It's my fault, Bren. I shouldn't have run when it happened."

"Don't even mention her name," Brendan scoffed. His trademark impatience was back. "Today's a day for celebration, and I'm not letting her ruin it. What's there to talk about, anyway? She's already in prison."

Deirdre's heart was as cold as a pile of ashes.

It was true. He had never cared about her—dead, alive, or anything in between. How else could he have ordered people to ruin her face and kill the one thing holding Deirdre's deepest hope?

He would not care if she had turned blind. He would not even give a damn if she were dead—because it would be just another one of his wishes getting granted.

A long beat. Deirdre passed the phone, its screen black in inactivity, back to Mercedes. The doctor was a little confused. Why had she not spoken?

The only answer she could see was the woman's change before her eyes. While she had been palpably suffering from abject sorrow just seconds ago, something had displaced it.

Despair was oozing from her every pore. The woman had suddenly grown numb.

Mercedes was at a loss for words.

A while later, Deirdre finally spoke. "Please take me back to my cell."

"Back? Back there?" Mercedes parroted her request, sounding stunned. "B-But your eyes!"

Deirdre flashed her the most mirthless smile the doctor had ever seen. "It's okay."

It was her punishment for falling in love with the Devil. She had been blind since that moment; she just had not known it yet. It was the same blindness that had made her stay by that man's side unconditionally for two years.

It had all started the moment she had laid these cursed eyes on him.

'I accept my punishment, Brendan. I owe you nothing more.'

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Six months later, in a prison complex, a guard opened the door to one of its many cells.

There was no light inside the room, but one could make out the shape of a woman curled up against the corner. A revolting stench followed her, and on her scarred face, a pair of milky eyes were looking ahead. The sound of the door opening caused her head to tip slightly toward it.

The guard frowned in repulsion. "Charlene McKinney? Get out. You're free."

