

# Resent Reject Regret

## Chapter 10 Hero

The guard took Deirdre to fill in her release papers. Before she was finished, though, she asked, "Excuse me, can you help me make a call?"

"Sure."

She recited a string of numbers and waited, but no one picked up. Puzzled, the guard helping her wondered aloud, "Looks like this number belongs to no one, ma'am. Who were you trying to contact?"

"Ophelia McKinnon. She's... my adoptive mother."

"Adoptive mother?" Something about that name sounded familiar. He perused the death reports next to him and found that very name on one of the papers.

Deirdre balled her fists up nervously. "So? Is she doing fine? She's changed numbers, right? Can you give me her home address?"

The guard exchanged a look with his colleague.

"Please tell me her address. I'll go visit her," she added.

Deirdre asked the guards to help her into a bus heading to the eastern side of Neve. It was a journey fraught with faceless mutters and whispers, but Deirdre pretended to be deaf and held onto the rail. Hoping.

'Mom, I'm home.'

Brendan had failed to keep up his end of the promise. He had said she was only going to be in prison for five months, and yet the entire ordeal had cost her eight months of her life.

No. She could endure all that. As long as her mother was still alive. That was all she needed.

She disembarked, suddenly having no idea what to do. This unseen environment was new and unfamiliar. She listened hard for any signal that someone was passing by and reached out to someone. "Hello, excuse me, but can you—"

"Aaahhh! What the hell? Get off me!"

Deirdre heard a woman scream before a force slapped her stretched hand away. The momentum knocked her off her, and she fell on the road. Caressing her scarred face, Deirdre gritted her teeth and raised her head to try again, "Sorry, I was just hoping you would—"

Showing her face again elicited even more panic. A man who must have been with the woman joined the commotion by kicking Deirdre away from their path. “Where the hell did this nutcase escape from?!” he jeered in contempt. “Get out of the way, Freddy Krueger. Approach us again and I swear I’ll beat you all the way to kingdom come!”

The man brandished his knuckles and left with the woman.

Deirdre was used to it. She got back to her feet and continued to search for someone kind enough to help. Unfortunately, everyone she met was repulsed by her appearance. “God, what the hell is up with that face? Who let someone like this out?”

“Did she escape from some kind of institution or something?”

“God, I swear, if I were in her shoes, I wouldn’t be able to accept this. I’d rather take my own life!”

Take her own life?

Deirdre cast her lifeless eyes down and bit her lip. No, she could not do that—her mother needed her. They only had each other.

She mustered all her courage and tried again. She managed to catch the attention of another pedestrian, but this time, she hung her head low to avoid any attention to her face. “Excuse me! How do you get to the Prunus Estate in East Neve from here?”

As if worried that the stranger might find her sudden request irritating, she added, “I’m blind, sorry. I can’t read the signs on my own.”

Sterling Fuller paused mid-step. His face seemed to have frozen in time. “Dee?”

Deirdre’s heart skipped a beat. “Dr. Fuller?”

Sterling Fuller was a doctor who had once lived in the city slum for a few months. Deirdre had been a sickly young woman growing up, so Sterling had made quite a few house visits from time to time without ever asking for payment. He was the one who had helped her live.

He was her hero.

She had never imagined she would meet the doctor four years down the road, and the emotional weight of their accidental reunion dawned upon her. She sniffled.

Then, Sterling frowned. “Your eyes! What happened to them? What... What happened to you over the past few years that I’ve been gone?”

“I...” She choked. It was a living nightmare—all of it. She remembered the damage her face had sustained and lowered her head again. “It’s all in the past now. I’m here to look for my mom.”

"You're looking for Mrs. McKinnon, huh..." Sterling looked down on the bag he was holding. The urn was nestled inside along with a picture of Ophelia. He had been hoping to bring them home so he could at least give the woman a resting place of some kind.

He moved his gaze, this time with pity, to Deirdre. The truth sounded really cruel, so Sterling found himself telling a lie. "Well, you missed her big time. Mrs. McKinnon is currently abroad because of her condition."

"She's getting treated abroad?"

"Yeah! See, it was not helpful to let her stay in her current condition, so the moment I heard about this expert neurologist abroad, I arranged a flight to get her there and see if she could be treated. It happened just... a fortnight ago!"

"Really?" Deirdre was sad to hear that she had missed her mother, but she was also genuinely glad to know that Ophelia was finally getting treatment. "This is the greatest news ever! That means... she will be able to talk to me normally once she's back, right?"

A smile—a very rare occurrence for her—slipped onto her lips.

"Say, why are you here, Dr. Fuller?" she asked.

Sterling froze. Why was he here? Because Ophelia had had no one other than Deirdre and him on her contact list at the hour of her death. No one could contact Deirdre, so the police had gotten to him.

"Uh, Mrs. McKinnon called me before she went abroad about doing some minor housekeeping for her."

"I see, I see. Thank you. You're very kind." Deirdre bit her lips. There was something else she wanted to say, but she lowered her head even more at the belated realization that Sterling must have seen her face by now.

It disgusted him too, did it not?

Deirdre had no idea how wrong she was—Sterling did not care at all. In fact, it was as though he had not seen it at all. "Well, do you have anywhere else to be? If not, come with me! It's great to see you here. Let me walk with you."

Shortly after the two of them left, a Maybach pulled over to the side of the road nearby. Through the window, one could see Brendan frown, looking obviously exasperated.

"Mr. Brighthall? Do you want to collect the estate back now that Mrs. McKinnon is dead?" Steven asked tentatively.

"God, leave it. I don't give a damn," he snapped. A new thought formed in his mind, and he added, "And I want no news of Ophelia's passing leaked, you hear me? Don't let Deirdre know!"

That woman loved her mother more than anything in the world. After her ordeal in prison, hearing about her mother's death would send Deirdre into a possessed, hysterical fit.

“Already on it.”

Brendan’s temper subsided a little. “How much longer until she can be released from prison? No one’s paying attention to her anymore, right?”

There was a glint in Steven’s eyes, but it soon disappeared. “She was released today, but since the citizens of Neve still can’t forgive her for her crime, she’s practically a pariah in this city. I’ve arranged for someone to take her elsewhere so she can begin her life anew.”

Brendan’s eyebrows were furrowed in dissatisfaction, but he suppressed his rage in the end. “Fine. It’s probably better that way, anyway. We’ll wait until Ophelia’s thing is over before taking her back here. The baby should have already been born by now.”

Based on what he remembered about her, Deirdre would probably begin to try snaking her way back to his side now that she’d had his child. He might not love her, but he could still put on a show and pretend to care—especially after Ophelia’s accident. That way, that drama queen would not throw another one of her tantrums to gain his favor.

He watched his car window roll up. “Let’s go.”

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A year later...

It was a bustling day at the clinic, and the corridor was rather packed with patients waiting for their turn. Dr. Sterling Fuller held a stethoscope to his patient before calling out to his assistant in another room, “Dee? Acebutolol and Aliskiren, the usual amount! Thanks!”

“Okay!” a mellifluous voice answered. A while later, the door opened to reveal a woman in a simple, modest dress. She had her hair in a side ponytail, exposing the tracks of scars running across her face. Her eyes, though beautiful, were lifeless. Despite her initial appearance, one could not help being taken aback by her kindly, demure composure. It was enough to blunt any fear her face would have otherwise elicited.

She made her way to the doctor slowly but expertly. “Here.”

“Always a big help,” Sterling replied with a smile. As he gave instructions to his patient, Deirdre made her way to the courtyard.

There was quite a commotion, as some children engaged in loud, rough play. She felt her way toward them, her fingers gliding across the wall, and smiled. “Hmm. I seem to distinctly remember telling you kids to keep it down a little,” she said. “If you continue making a ruckus, I’m gonna have to put my foot down and close the yard off!”

As the kids’ toys were all Deirdre’s handiwork, they quickly realized the severity of her “threat”. They swarmed around her and raced to win her affection back. “Awww! Sorry, Miss Deirdre. We’ll keep it down.”

The other patients laughed. “There we go, Dee’s superpower in action! You’re the only one who can make a bunch of gremlins behave!”

Deirdre chuckled as a warm wind blew.

This was the slum where she used to live. A year ago, Sterling had decided that Deirdre's condition was too serious for him to leave her alone, so he had taken her back to the one place she was most familiar with and opened a clinic there. As the year had gone by, they had helped countless patients recover, and distracted by purpose and work, Deirdre seemed to have forgotten about the scar in her heart.

"Oh, you better be sorry! Come on, we're heading to the yard!"

"Yaaaaay!"

Outside the clinic, a luxury car stopped. Charlene McKinney emerged from the car in a vintage long dress, clutching her luxury bag and scanning her surroundings, her features cringing in contempt.

"Urgh, what kind of sh\*thole is this? And the air! It stinks! I think I'm allergic to the air around here," she moaned. "Bren, why are we seeing a doctor in this oversized dumpster in the middle of nowhere?"

A man materialized from the car. His fully-decked suit did nothing to hide his well-toned muscles, but it was his godlike features that attracted other people's eyes. Everything about him was magnetic. Just one look from him, and anyone's heart would thump.