

Resent Reject Regret

Resent Reject Regret by Aqua Summers chapter 193

Chapter 193 The Deceased's Belongings

Her unfocused eyes widened in surprise and joy. 'The police are actually at the door, mentioning Ophelia's name. Could this have been arranged by Brendan? Is he taking me to meet Ophelia?

Deirdre's smile grew wider without her noticing, and she took a step forward. "Are you the police? Is my mother here? Where is she?"

"Ms. McKinnon!" Sam's expression changed drastically, and his hand, which was clutching Deirdre's shoulder, shook once without him noticing. He pulled her back strongly and said, "You should go inside!"

Deirdre's smile was half-frozen on her face, and she refused to leave stubbornly. "What's going on? Sam, it's not easy for me to acquire information related to my mother. This is a good thing. Why are *you* asking me to leave?"

Sam could not explain why, but he could feel that something really bad was about to happen.

Especially since the matter involved Ophelia. Deirdre had attempted to commit suicide because of Ophelia, and the police was suddenly visiting her less than three days later.

He lowered his voice to conceal the uneasiness in it. "Ms. McKinnon, don't you find it strange that the police are here? They wouldn't know where your residence is, so it's highly possible that these are fake police officers."

The police officers were standing a few steps away, so they heard Sam's remark clearly. One of them could not help frowning and saying, "Sir, you shouldn't make irresponsible remarks like this. I'm a real officer with a badge number. You can verify my badge number with the station. I'm only here to deliver the deceased's belongings, and it's unnecessary for me to feign my identity to deceive someone."

The smile on Deirdre's face vanished abruptly, and her mind went blank. She responded to the situation by saying in confusion, "The deceased's belongings? What belongings?"

The police officer was confused as well. "Aren't you aware? Ophelia's belongings, of course."

Deirdre felt suffocated, as if a rope was tightened around her neck, and she could feel her body turning cold bit by bit from shock. It felt as if she had fallen into a dungeon and the coldness was overpowering her.

"Come again?" Her voice was shaky, and she ran to the door.
"What did you say? Whose belongings did you say these are?"

Sam's face turned ghastly pale instantly as well. He had not expected something like this to happen. He reacted to the situation by holding back Deirdre in a haste. "You should go inside, Ms. McKinnon! It's all fake!"

Deirdre could not breathe. Her eyes were wide in shock, and she demanded, "Tell me, quick! Whose belongings did you say these are?"

The police officer was startled by her sudden hysterics and her disfigured face. He fell back in a haste. "What the heck... Are you unaware of your own mother's death? Are you mentally challenged or something? No wonder no one came to claim the letter even though she's been dead for one and a half years.."

"Dead for one and a half years... Dead for one and a half years..."

Deirdre muttered to herself as if she was both possessed and deaf. The words were deeply ingrained into her mind, and she could not remove them from her head no matter how hard she tried. She clenched her teeth, and her entire body was trembling.

There was *no* telling how she mustered the energy to struggle free from Sam's grip at that very moment and grab the gate, her eyes bloodshot. "That's impossible! You're lying! She's still alive and well in the mental hospital, so how can she be dead? What do you mean she's been dead for one and a half years! You should speak properly!"

The police officer was agitated by her reaction. "Believe what *you* want. Ophelia committed suicide by jumping off a building one year ago, and our station has kept a *record* of her case. Why would I lie to you about that? She had a letter with her when she died, yet for some unknown reason, no one claimed the letter when they came to claim the corpse. I found this place after tracing the address, so I don't know anything else. I'm handing you the letter. I shall get a move on now!"

Perhaps the police officer did not wish to be implicated, so he tossed the letter and left in a rush.

Chapter 194 The Answer in Her Heart

Sam picked up the letter from the floor, and the sight of the writer's name signed at the bottom made him stop breathing.

The letter appeared to be old, and not in a fake way. It really was the letter left by Ophelia when she had still been alive.

He looked at Deirdre, who was standing in front of him. The woman had stopped moving as soon as the police officer had left and was now dangling from the gate just like before without moving. The jacket had already fallen to the ground during her struggle, and the back of her figure looked emaciated. The sight of her made pity fill his heart.

"Ms. McKinnon..." Sam felt uneasy deep down and spoke in an exploratory manner.

Deirdre slid down from the gate abruptly, her unfocused eyes bloodshot. She shook her head desperately and chanted, "It's fake... It must be fake! My mother is obviously still alive and well. I heard the voice clip of her saying she missed me. How could someone like her possibly have committed suicide a year ago? This must be Charlene's scheme!"

Sam was stunned. He had yet to figure out a way to console Deirdre when Deirdre dried her tears and made up her mind. "That must be it. The police officer was fake! He wanted to turn me and Brendan against each other, but I won't grant his wish. What would I do if I provoked Brendan until he was so angry that he didn't let me meet my mother?"

"Sam, am I right?"

Sam could not bring himself to answer. He looked at Deirdre's bloodshot eyes, rendered speechless. He thought to himself, 'Does Deirdre already know the answer in her heart at this very moment?'

She was only deceiving herself because this was the only way for her to persevere. She could not face any of the other outcomes.

"The letter..." She suddenly began to feel about the ground. "Where is the letter?"

Sam stopped Deirdre and handed the letter to her personally. Deirdre lowered her gaze and explained, "I would like to see if this forged letter feels real..."

Upon saying that, she left with the letter.

She soon returned to her room. Her hands were still stained with dust, so she wiped her fingers with a

towel before she touched the letter. The letter was scentless, with a tinge of moldy musk. It smelled like a letter kept with many other items in a dark place for a long time.

She felt rather disappointed that she was blind at that very moment. She could not read the letter and she could feel nothing with her sense of touch.

In the end, she placed the letter carefully on the table.

Brendan ran into the room just in time to witness the scene. He had assumed that the woman's face would be covered in tears and she would be hysterical. Or she would be experiencing an emotional breakdown and would threaten him with her life so he would let her meet her mother to prove that she was still alive.

However, she did not do any of that. Instead, Deirdre was sitting in the corner of the room in a daze.

She was too quiet. Her back was bent, her waist was slender, and there was no life to her. A light ray cast by the setting

sun outside shone down on the woman and made her appear even lonelier and more desolate.

Brendan's heart was aching at that very moment, and the pain left a profound impression on him.

He knew that Deirdre was sinister, unscrupulous, and wildly imaginative. There would be nothing good about Deirdre if he were to judge her, and she was a woman that no one would take an extra glance at on the street. However, he felt sympathy for her because he owed her something. He had failed to protect her mother, whom she loved deeply, after stripping her of one year of her freedom.

He adjusted his breathing and shut the door heavily. Deirdre was jolted back to reality. "You're back?"

Her eyes were lowered. "I'm sorry for not welcoming you at the door. I didn't realize that it was already so late that it was time for you to come home."

Brendan's expression was stern as he watched her unexpected calmness. He suppressed the agitation he felt in his heart and said in a deep voice, "Sam notified me that someone came today."

"Hmm." Deirdre nodded and said calmly, "A police officer came."

Chapter 195 The Letter is the Only Possession Left by Her

Brendan's sharp brows were tightly furrowed. He was about to speak when Deirdre said, "But I know that he was just a fake cop. Apart from the fact that he suddenly found the villa's location for no apparent reason today, he talked about almost the same things as that person the other day."

"What?" Brendan sounded alarmed. "What did he say?"

"He claimed that my mother Ophelia died a year ago after jumping off a building."

Brendan's entire body tensed up as soon as he heard the remark.

"Those people are all talking nonsense!"

"Hmm, I know," Deirdre said. "I believe that you wouldn't lie to me."

Brendan fell silent once again. After a long silence, he asked, "What's that letter on the table?"

He had come in such a rush that Sam had not managed to brief him on all the details.

Deirdre was stunned for a moment before she answered, "It's just a letter. It's nothing important."

The letter had come out of nowhere, so Brendan refused to believe that it was as unimportant as Deirdre had casually described it to be.

He stepped forward and grabbed the letter. He took one glance and saw Ophelia's name signed on it. He then furrowed his eyebrows deeply and said, "What is this? Why is Ophelia's signature here?"

Deirdre's expression turned stiff for a moment before she answered, "It was forged by the fake cop. He claimed that this was my deceased mother's unclaimed possession, the only thing left behind after she jumped off the building."

"Your deceased mother's possession? These people have lost their minds!" Brendan's veins bulged up, and he was determined to find the culprit who had stirred up trouble. He caught Deirdre off guard when he tore the letter into shreds. "It's fake, it's all fake!"

The very moment the letter was torn up, Deirdre's expression froze. She reacted by throwing herself at him. "Don't tear it up! Brendan! Don't... Don't tear it!"

Brendan's expression was icy, and he scattered the pieces of the letter into the air after destroying it fully. "Why do *you* care about it? It's fake anyway. I can give you as many forged letters as you want! Leaving this letter around will only make you grow more suspicious."

He had never heard about this letter or the deceased woman's belongings. Those items had all been claimed by Ophelia's enemy.

Deirdre's gaze was unfocused. She nodded after a long time and answered, "Yes, these are all fake, and it's useless for me to keep them indeed."

Before Brendan could speak, she raised her head once again and said, "When are you going to let me meet her in real life then? I've missed her."

"Don't worry. I've already made arrangements. I promise you that I won't go back on my own word. It will happen within two weeks."

"Sure, I believe you."

Sam came rushing over to Brendan after walking outside. He passed a document to him and said while breathing heavily, "Mr. Brendan, the result of the investigation is here. That person is a police officer indeed, and all the information he provided is true. None of it was forged."

"It was not forged?" Brendan furrowed his eyebrows. "What brought him here then, and what is with that letter?"

"The letter was real too and it was the only possession left behind by Ophelia."

Brendan grabbed Sam by his collar as soon as Sam made that remark, his dark pupils constricting. "What did you say?!"

Sam answered once again, "That letter... was the only possession left behind by Ophelia..."

Brendan shoved Sam away and stared at his hands closely. Had the item that he had torn up been left behind by Ophelia?

He felt an intense headache. He instructed Sam to take Deirdre to the living room while he headed to the room. He picked up the letter shred by shred and glued the pieces back together bit by bit.

Ophelia had been well on some days and bad on others. She had not behaved like a child at all times, nor had she cried all the time. She had only had short periods of soberness, though. Perhaps the letter had been written by her when her head had been sober.

Chapter 196 Return to What It Used to Be

The letter was positively crawling with wishes and hopes for Deirdre, and only a few lines described the mother's own state of affairs. She had clearly believed this was just another of many letters she would

pen

for her daughter in the future—she had thought she would get to write again.

She had not known, at the time, that she was writing the last letter she would pen in her life.

Brendan's chest tightened. He had just destroyed one of the most priceless things in the world... with his own hands. If Deirdre knew...

She would go mad.

He immediately called someone in to restore the letter.

Deirdre returned to her room shortly after he left. She instinctively got down on all fours, her hands grazing across the floor to feel for the pieces. To her disappointment, she could not find a single piece, even though she was sure Brendan had scattered it like confetti.

"Miss McKinnon, what are you looking for?" Sam asked.

"Can you help me look, please?" Deirdre replied with a request. "Are there any pieces of paper on the floor?"

"No," Sam answered matter-of-factly. "Did you drop something? Let me help you search."

For a noticeable second, Deirdre seemed dazed. Then, suddenly, she shook her head. "No. It's okay. It's

not important.”

Sam was nonplussed, but upon seeing the woman abandon her search, he let it go.

A few days passed while Brendan focused on creating a pristine replica of the original letter. Creating a copy of the letter’s content was not hard, but the devil was in the details. A perfect replication would take time.

Then, he received a call. “Mr. Brighthall? We found a candidate. She’s currently waiting downstairs. Do you want her to come to your office now?”

A glint flitted through Brendan’s black eyes. He clenched his jaw, and the words on the letter suddenly appeared distant and alien. “Bring her in.”

A few moments later, the door was pushed open, revealing Sawyer and a middle-aged woman in a nondescript getup. Brendan had never seen her before.

“She fits all of your requirements, sir,” Sawyer stated.

Brendan scanned the middle-aged woman. Her appearance was average and unremarkable, but that was not a problem. The only qualification she had to meet was having the right voice. “Speak.”

The woman was visibly disconcerted by Brendan’s overall composure. Even her voice sounded tight. “H- Hello, M-M-Mr. Brighthall...”

Manic glee dashed across Brendan’s handsome face. Her voice! Her tone! It was 90% close to Ophelia’s! No, scratch that. They sounded exactly the same!

Deirdre’s blindness was the biggest advantage he could ever have asked for. It would have been almost impossible to look for a doppelganger who bore an uncanny resemblance to both Ophelia’s face and voice. But since he only needed one over the other, the search for an impostor had become so much

easier.

“Have you read the documents Sawyer gave you?”

“Y-Yes.”

“Do you know what your job is?” Brendan followed up in his most professional tone.

The middle-aged woman looked visibly relieved. “I am to portray a young woman’s late mother and talk to her in character.”

He nodded in satisfaction. There were more things to being a perfect impostor than sounding like the original. This woman would have to replicate Ophelia’s mannerisms, proclivities

, attitude, and speech behavior. “Don’t worry. You have over a week to study your character. I’ll show you a video, and your job will be to mimic the woman in there. I want you to completely become her!”

Despite the middle-aged woman’s palpable apprehension, she gave him a firm nod of determination.

Brendan watched her leave and felt a weight being lifted off his shoulders. He felt his high-strung nerves finally relax. If he could solve the Ophelia issue once and for all, Deirdre would fall in line and everything would return to what it used to be.

He loosened his tie, rose, and grabbed his coat. He did not want to stay in his office any longer.

Brendan stopped his car at the entrance overlooking the mansion’s front yard. There, Deirdre was crouching on the ground with a pair of gardening shears, pruning a bed of flowers.

It was a very windy day. Brendan put his coat over her head before asking, sounding a little annoyed, “Why the hell are you outside in this weather?”

Chapter 197 Help Me Keep Up The Act

“Dr. Ginger’s suggestion,” Deirdre replied flatly. She let the coat hang on her shoulders. “He said a shut-in lifestyle wouldn’t help my recovery either, so he told me to go outside and immerse myself in the elements for a bit.”

I don’t think your sorry excuse of an outdoor getup was part of the suggestion, was it? How will you see Ophelia if you catch a cold?”

There was a plop as her gardening shears fell to the ground. Deirdre looked at Brendan in disbelief, her tool forgotten, her lifeless eyes quivering in their sockets. “What did you say?”

Her voice was trembling.

I said...” Brendan repeated himself with emphatic enunciation. “Ophelia is ready to return. She’ll be with us in ten days.

This meant more than the world to her. Her eyes reddened instantly, and she clawed at Brendan’s collar- despite already suppressing most of her violent excitement- and blabbered, “D-Don’t you dare do this to me. Brendan! Don’t! Don’t give me hope...”

Brendan fixed a strangely unyielding stare on her. “I have no reason to lie.”

She felt euphoria. Pure, unadulterated, and blinding- like a supernova lighting Deirdre up from within. She was so alive. So enraptured.

Suddenly, Brendan found himself wishing that his lie would last forever.

"She wasn't ready to step outside because she was undergoing treatment in the institution, but now, her condition is stable enough. She no longer regresses to being a child."

"Really?" Deirdre was grinning in relief. She rubbed her cheeks, and a shadow of anxiety took over her face. "No, wait! But what about my face? She's gonna go into shock if she sees me!"

"I've told her about it already. She thought it was a burning accident, and ultimately, she didn't care."

"Thank God! Oh, thank God..." Deirdre muttered to herself under her breath. Her voice gradually turned into a soft murmur. "I can't let her worry again. I shouldn't make her worry at all! I need to show her that I'm living the best life I could ever have. She needs to think I'm happy... because it's the only way to make her happy."

Brendan silently watched her murmur to herself. His eyes were grim, as the illusions Deirdre told herself to create and maintain weighed down on his chest. For some reason, he felt agony just hearing about them.

"You fret too much. She doesn't know what's happened to you at all," he replied. "As far as she knows, you're still Mrs. Brighthall. What's there to be worried about?"

"You're right." Deirdre breathed, lowering her head as her fingers unthinkingly caressed her damaged cheeks. She raised her head, as though she had resurfaced from an unfathomable thought, and smiled faintly. The fact that she knows about none of the things that have happened is a godsend. She's sick, Brendan. I can't let her undergo the pain of knowing what went down while she was being treated. She will be so... devastated..."

"Are you done licking your wounds?" Brendan suddenly snapped, frowning. "Who cares if your face is a little scarred? I don't give a damn! And neither does she—because that's just what mothers are like!"

Deirdre looked up at his face, but he could not read those lifeless eyes or see her thoughts in them.

Then, just as abruptly, she hung her head.

"Can you... do me a favor?" she asked softly, changing the subject.

Brendan saw her smile withering away and—unexpectedly—reached out to graze her lips. Confused, Deirdre raised her head as he finally registered his own action.

Still, he did not take his hand away. Instead, he remarked coldly, "Can *you* not act all woe-is-me when you're asking for help? It really ruins the mood. At least try to smile more often! Ophelia is coming to see you. Isn't that a cause for celebration?"

The man's tone might be icy, but his fingers were warm. Deirdre forced *the* corners of her lips to curve upward, but her effort produced something quite grotesque.

"I was hoping... you could help me keep up the act while she's with us. Is that... feasible?" she asked as she stared at him with unseeing eyes. "She's very sensitive, you see. It's probably because she has gone through a lot. She might sense the truth behind our relationship if we don't try."

Chapter 198 Back to How It Used to Be

"The truth behind our...?" Brendan's ire was palpable. "What's that supposed to be?"

Deirdre panicked a little. He knew exactly what she meant and had asked her this question anyway. How was she supposed to answer that?

Brendan closed his fingers around her wrist as his handsome face loomed close to her own. "We. Are. Husband And Wife, Deirdre McKinnon," he stated, prolonging each word. "You should remember that. I'm not some polyamorous man loving a harem of women. All you have to do is stay in your lane and stop trying to harm Lena—and I swear, you'll always have a shelter in me.

"It's not impossible for us... to go back to how it used to be."

Brendan stiffened. Had he really said that? Why would he say that?

Was this his deepest wish after all? To go back to that time?

Deirdre was so taken aback that she could not even reel out of her own shock. His voice—his request—reverberated within her brain like a cursed echo. What was the point of telling her this? Was he trying to explain the nature of his relationship with Charlene?

She felt like her head was about to explode. The gale was so strong that her headache seemed to pulsate along an unknown rhythm. It was so hard to think in this state.

She closed her eyes and felt Brendan pulling her into his arms. She then felt his coat wrapping her tight. Cold air had ceased to reach her, and it was his scent that surrounded her now.

A sense of discomfort coalesced, and she began to wriggle.

Brendan locked his arm around her waist. "Weren't you the one who asked for my help maintaining this facade?" he stated matter-of-factly. "I'm not some A-list professional actor, so don't expect me to know what an award-winning performance means. If you really want our act to work, then I'm gonna have to meet with you until you're satisfied starting today. That way, she won't be able to sense that anything's

amiss."

He made a lot of sense, but Deirdre was still unaccustomed to the intimacy between them. Her voice was trembling when she said, "Just acting like we used to be back then will be enough."

“And when is that?”

Deirdre had to push the next words out of her teeth.

“The two years following our marriage.”

Brendan froze a little. “But I wasn’t treating you right at all back then.”

Hell, he had been genuinely abusive. She had been his sexual outlet, a doll to receive him when he felt like it, someone he could walk away from when he was done. He would come back from work and not spare her more than a glance before heading straight to his study or Charlene’s room on the second floor. 1

“That was good enough,” Deirdre said calmly. She had not dared ask for more back then, but now, she would not dare ask for much at all.

Brendan’s eyebrows were furrowed as he scanned the young woman’s apathetic face.

A thought formed in his mind. Could this be it? The chance he had been waiting for—the opportunity for things to go back to how they used to be?

“I can do that... if I haven’t forgotten exactly how I used to treat you back then,” he argued. “Look. Let’s get inside before discussing this further. We’ll start by having meals together. You’ll remind me.”

It was too cold outside. Deirdre could not withstand it any longer, and in the end, decided to answer his call to return to the house. Dr. Ginger had prepared their meal by that point, so the two of them took their respective seats.

“What was it like back then... whenever we ate together?” Brendan asked.

Deirdre did not even need to consciously exhaust her memory—it came to her at the smallest of summons. They had never talked. The man’s focus had always been on his papers. The woman’s focus... had always been on him.

It used to be a moment of respite and warmth—which was why it hurt her like a knife. “I don’t remember,” she lied.

Brendan was not in a hurry. “Fine, then. You have ten whole days to recall anyway. No rush.”

Deirdre said nothing.

They finished their meal, and she went up the stairs and headed to her room. Before she could shut the door, though, a hand rested on the handle and his towering figure squeezed through the gap and went inside.

He closed the door, and Deirdre felt the air somehow become thinner. She froze before calming down. She had lost any regard for self-respect, so the first thing that leaped to her mind was removing her clothing. She had stripped down to her last article when Brendan suddenly stopped her hand. “What are you doing?”

She looked at him unseeingly, feeling confused. "Aren't you here for sex?"

Chapter 199 Nightmare

Brendan

would admit that he was feeling up, but he absolutely did not appreciate seeing her initial reaction to his arrival. It was as if she was accusing him of being nothing but a sex-starved animal!

"I came here to rest, Deirdre."

"Rest?"

"Yes. Rest," he replied slowly. "Look, it will be very easy for Ophelia to see through our current facade. You're repulsed by me, and that's so obvious even I could tell. The good news is, we've got 10 days to slowly phase into some semblance of intimacy. It'll look natural in the end."

Deirdre's face turned pale. Brendan, sensing a revolt, changed tactics. "If you object to it, fine by me."

Object? Deirdre felt the wind get knocked out of her. Her real intention was obvious, but this was not optional for her. She had to please him, not just for Ophelia's sake, but because she knew Brendan very well. This was the man who would do anything—noble or ignoble—to get what he wanted. Nothing she could say or do would change that.

She would rather not cause any conflict that could potentially rob her of the little happiness her mother's news had brought her. All she needed to be happy was to hear that her mother lived.

"It's okay. You can stay here if you like."

She changed into her nightgown elsewhere before returning to her bed, where Brendan had taken up space. At first, Deirdre was still repulsed by the thought of sharing her bed with him, but after a while, she calmed down and closed her eyes.

She still left some space between them, though.

As soon as she fell asleep, Brendan opened his eyes. Gingerly, he pulled her into his arms, wrapping them around her, his heart swelling with satisfaction.

But maybe the fear he nursed at the back of his mind had transformed into a nightmare.

It took Deirdre's form—except this Deirdre had blood-red eyes. She was choking his neck, and he suddenly could not move. Her tears turned to blood as she wailed and shrieked, "You murderer! You murdered my mother and you f*cking lied to me! I'll never forgive you! Never! I'll make you live in anguish for the rest of your life!"

She then jumped off a building.

“Nooooo! Deirdre!”

Brendan woke up. Even as he opened his eyes, he swore his throat felt constricted. He breathed hard, his heart racing wildly, and felt his arm growing numb.

He looked down and saw Deirdre nestling close to him in a peaceful slumber.

It had been a dream. It had been just a dream, thank God. But why had it felt so goddamned real?

He was bathing in cold sweat. This... This was what Deirdre would do if she discovered the truth.

She would hate him forever.

Then, she would kill herself because the only thing that had kept her alive was Ophelia.

Brendan suddenly found himself dreading the meeting between Deirdre and the impostor. What would happen if something went wrong?

They still had ten days left, and he already felt as if he was being defeated by the slow, unyielding trickling of time. He tightened his arms around Deirdre even more, which jolted her awake.

She had not expected Brendan to still be around. She wriggled out of his embrace and rolled out of bed. “What time is it?”

Brendan wiped beads of cold sweat away from his forehead and took a deep breath. “Nine in the morning.”

“Nine?” Deirdre was stunned. Should he not be in his office by now?

“What’s wrong?”

Brendan felt his heart skip a beat. His stare hardened a little. “What do *you* mean what’s wrong?”

“If nothing’s wrong, why aren’t you in your office?” she replied matter-of-factly.

Brendan felt a sea of relief wash over him. God, his nerves were too tight. He had really thought she had heard him cry out.

He hated this dreadful feeling. He yanked Deirdre into his arms and let it comfort his racing heart.

She froze, unable to decide how to process this. “W–What’s going on?”

“Nothing.” Brendan released her. “I’m skipping work today. Come on. I’m taking you out.”

Chapter 200 I’ll Lead You

Where to?

Not that she would receive an answer even if she asked. She rose and got changed. Then, when they reached the front door, Brendan removed his scarf and wrapped it around her neck.

They left.

Deirdre was a little uneasy by the gesture. She waited for a while before removing the scarf and holding it in her hand.

After a while, she heard him announce, "We're here." He removed his seatbelt, and Deirdre followed.

They were in some bustling place. She could hear traffic and crowds of people all around her, so they had to be in the middle of a busy street. He caught her hand and said, "I'll lead you."

Brendan displayed unprecedented patience. With her in tow, he weaved through the sea of people, her confusion growing and her mind going blank. Then, finally, she heard someone say, "Welcome!"

They had entered some kind of shop.

"Where are we?" she asked, feeling confused. He was not acting like himself today.

"You'll know in a while."

It did not take a while. She merely stood by the door for a few seconds before she was surrounded by a litter of puppies that started sniffing and panting around her legs. It was a dog cafe.

The shopgirl beamed at her.

"This used to be a shelter before Mr. Brighthall supplied us with the money and resources to turn it into a cafe! We're still receiving strays, but hey! We don't need to worry about funding anymore!

"Mr. Brighthall is a good man, isn't he?" she finished.

Deirdre's mind was blank. The air was chilly as it entered her lungs, but it did nothing to dispel the cloud of confusion over her head. Why would Brendan donate money to an animal shelter? He had always

hated animals!

Before she could recover from the shock, she heard Brendan's cool voice.

"Give me your hand."

She did as she was told—

and a puppy suddenly rested its weight on her elbow. It was soft as it panted.

Brendan examined it. "You said no when I tried to give it to you, so I had it stay here," he explained. "If you could just regain your sight for a minute, you'd notice how much it resembles Bliss. I know it cannot replace Bliss no matter *how* much they look alike, but it... really likes you. So you can come here and see it anytime you miss Bliss, you know."

The puppy seemed to be agreeing with what he was saying. It grunted along before putting its paws on her chest, docile and sweet. Deirdre's eyes reddened. "But why?"

She fought back tears. "Why did you bring me here? Why are you doing this?"

He could have pretended nothing had happened. That was what Brendan Brighthall would normally do- move on as though nothing had happened!

When he grazed the corner of her eye, a single tear made his fingertip wet.

"Because I'm sorry." He sounded calm. "You were in so much anguish when you lost Bliss, but what did I do? I mocked your misery. I was at fault for not protecting Bliss as well as I should have. But there is nothing I can do to reclaim what's been lost. The only option I have left is making it up to you now, in the

present... with all my effort."

He was talking about Bliss' passing, yet it sounded as though he was referring to something else entirely.

Deirdre felt the life in her arms. She felt its heartbeat, its minute activity—it was so alive.

She could not fight her tears anymore. She tightened her grip around the puppy and sobbed.

She just wanted an outlet to grieve and remember a lost life. She just wanted a chance to say she was

sorry.

Brendan removed his coat and covered her head with it. He knew she was self-conscious about expressing emotions, especially crying.

She had spent a long time with Bliss. The smog in her heart seemed to have dissipated, as though a strong gale was finally sweeping it all away.

"If you like it that much, you can bring it home."

Deirdre thought for a moment and decided against it, shaking her head. The puppy had friends here. This was where it belonged.

She felt at peace by the time she stepped out of the cafe.

On the bright side, her mother had been alive all along. They would be meeting each other soon.