

Resent Reject Regret

Chapter 311 Are You Willing to Go to Eastgene?

Deirdre was moved into silence. Her tongue failed her, and it took her minutes to recover her voice finally. "Tobey, I... I'm not worth it."

She did not deserve his concern. She was a hideous, blind, formerly-incarcerated ticking time bomb whose very presence could spell trouble at any time. She did not deserve to be with a man whose life was

on the ascent.

Tobey's tone darkened. "Don't you dare look down on yourself, Deirdre. Or was that a dig at my romantic preferences?"

Deirdre fell silent.

"You want me to tell you the ugly truth? Okay," he added. "Truth is, I'm taking advantage of the current you. You're at your most vulnerable, a lonely soul crying out for companionship and a place to belong. I'm merely seizing this moment. You know why? Because I know that even now, even when it seems like I'm at the height of my life, I don't measure up to even a fragment of the blinding splendor you used to

emanate."

Deirdre had always been their school's brightest star. Her destitute family background had done nothing to stop her academic excellence. She could have easily gotten a place among the nation's most elite schools if she had wanted to.

Then, there were the suitors. She was the belle to so many of his peers that Tobey literally had no chance.

Deirdre bit her lip, and her eyes turned misty. “No, Tobey, you’re wrong! I’m not half as good as you seem to think I am. I don’t want to be that thing that gets between you and your-”

“No, Deirdre. Nobody is half as good as you,” Tobey intercepted firmly.

A long beat of silence later, he asked, “Would you be willing to come to Eastgene?”

He broke the silence caused by her shock and continued. “My mom’s hale and hearty now, but I wouldn’t want her to stay in this place alone in the near future. I have a place and a job in this city now. All I need is the right time to get my mother over here so she can stay with me. If you like, you can come and join me. too. This will make it easy for me to care for you.”

Was he asking her to come to a city she had never been to?

Deirdre was stunned. She had not thought of this option at all, but now that he laid it out in the open, Deirdre could not help but recognize its merits. This could be a new beginning. A new, unfamiliar place- so pristine and unmarred from Brendan’s presence. Maybe this was where she could begin her life anew.

I’m not trying to coerce you into doing anything you don’t want, Dee. All I’m trying to do is to show you our future. See, my door will always be open for you even if you reject me.”

Tobey, I. I need to think.”

“Sure thing I’m kinda beat for the day, too! Gotta hit the hay soon. Good night!”

“Yes. Good night.”

Their call ended, but her emotional upheaval did not. Deirdre had come here because the familiarity of Ophelia's origin called to her. Telling her to jettison all of this was a very high order.

Further complicating the matter was her relationship moratorium. She could not decide if she wanted to accept a man into her heart—especially when she knew she harbored no genuine love for Tobey. She was still lost in thoughts when she heard a chorus of kids hollering from outside, “She’s not a

princess, she’s a freak! She’s a blind, unwanted pig! No princes will wanna fall in love! Kissing her will make you sick!”

Their merry insults went on for a few times until one of them muttered quietly, “Are you sure that man. isn’t in there? What if he suddenly comes out of there and kicks my *ss?”

“No way!” The leader of the pack brushed his concern off loudly. “My mom saw him driving away from the village in his car last night, so I bet he’s back to working in the city or whatever. He ain’t in there, you wuss! We can do whatever we like, and no one’s gonna stop us!”

“Really?” The rest of the crowd visually relaxed. Then, squaring off their shoulders and puffing their lungs, they chanted outside the door again, “She’s not a princess, she’s a freak! She’s a blind, unwanted pig! No princes will wanna fall in love! Kissing her will make you sick!”

Deirdre could tell from the voices that these were young kids who had not started their formal schooling. Their working parents left them at home, so their grandparents spoiled them into bullies with no concept of respect or empathy.

She did not plan to pay them any attention. Lowering her eyes back to the ground, she continued uprooting the weeds. The kids would leave her as soon as they got bored.

Suddenly, a lone rock coursed through an arc and slammed onto her forehead. A sharp pang jolted her.

Deirdre moved her hand and felt warm blood on her fingers. Her head swam in a dizzy sea of pain as she heard the children's remarks.

"We know you're in there, you freak! Don't pretend not to hear us! It's your eyes that are busted, not your ears! Haha, she thinks she can stay inside and say nothing, guys! Then we'll play try to hit the freak' with her!"

The children did exactly what they said they would Rocks began to shower at her, and the fact that every single one landed at her quickly removed the possibility of coincidences Her visage turned pale

Enough was enough. Deirdre was just about to rise when she heard the child's unkind delight turn awry. "H -Heeeey! Who the h- What are you doing!?"

There was a crash. Something was chucked onto the ground

Deirdre opened the gate and was immediately greeted by the sound of the leader's angry tears "How dare you lay your hands on me, you stinky outsider!? Just wait! I'm gonna tell Granny! She'll make you regret this, j*rk!"

He scrambled away. His sycophants followed suit, casting their rocks away before bolting away in a cloud of dust.

Deirdre took a deep breath, endured the sting in her forehead, and turned toward the gate. "Who is this?"

To her confusion, there was no answer. A jolt of realization broke her stupor, and she answered herself, " Is that you, Mr. Reed?"

Her intuition told her the man nodded. She heard him sidle up to her.

Before she could say more, she felt the strands covering her forehead parting before his fingertip grazed close to her new gash. He was careful not to directly touch her wound, but she inhaled sharply.

He stopped. Deirdre could somehow feel rage emanating from across her. “M—Mr. Reed? Are you... Are you angry?”

She stopped herself in disbelief. Why would he be angry? She could not fathom any reason to. No, she must have mistaken him.

Whatever the truth was, the man could not say it. He simply tightened his grip around her wrist before leading her in an unknown direction. Stunned, Deirdre frowned and demanded, “H—Hey, where are we going? S—Stop!”

She shook his hand away. “I’m not comfortable with this. Please let me go.”

The man, strangely, seemed to have left her alone. He walked away, to her surprise, but she did not pay it any mind. Maybe he was disappointed with Deirdre’s reaction and decided to leave.

Maybe she was in the wrong. Her attitude toward the Good Samaritan was pretty nasty for a woman who had just been protected from those bullying children. She might not have used harsh language, but she did not thank the man, either.

Her head protested in pain. Deirdre almost reached out to it before stopping herself. Her fingers were dirty with mud and soil.

She made her way back to the yard and resumed her work. She had just dug up a small mound when she heard the gate creak. Someone had pushed it open.

Looking toward it, she yelled, “Madame Russell?”

There was no answer, just footsteps pacing closer to her.

‘It’s Kyran Reed again.’ She was unsure what he was planning to do this time, but she could hear him. crouch. Then, she felt her jaw being gently lifted and the softness of a cotton ball dabbing around the ridge of her cut.

She would be lying if she claimed it did not hurt. She tugged on the cuff of the man’s sleeves reflexively, but he did not stop. After cleaning her wound, he dressed it up with a bandage, his movements. featherlight and delicate.

It was only then Deirdre understood what had happened. “When you were yanking me to, well, somewhere, were you just trying to help me with my injury, Mr. Reed?”

There was still no answer, but Deirdre’s heart softened. The man could not speak, so he could not express his concern for her injury. When he saw her fighting him, he decided to bring the first-aid kit straight to her instead.

His intention was altruistic, yet she thought the worst of him and guarded herself. Why? Because he reminded her of Brendan the first time they met?

Well, how was that fair?

“Thank you,” Deirdre said after it was over. “You’ve helped me twice... No, three times now. I wouldn’t know what to do if you didn’t help me, so... yeah. Thank you, truly.”

Deirdre lifted her head and pursed her soft lips into a polite smile.

She was mesmerizing. Despite the absence of life in her damaged eyes, something in her face radiated. It summoned a wave within Kyran's chest so violent that he had to press his lips thin to battle the urge.

He extended his fingertip and wrote on her palm, 'No need.' Then, a moment later, he wrote, 'Sorry for last

time.'

Deirdre stiffened a little, then she understood him. He was talking about their meeting during the musical. He had hurt her forehead.

"It's okay," Deirdre replied, smiling. "I misunderstood you, that's all. You just wanted to help. Besides, my forehead was pretty much healed by nighttime."

The man gave no response for a long beat before writing. I'm still sorry."

He knew how uncomfortable Deirdre was when a stranger touched her, so he had been writing on her palm with a tin layer of tissue between his finger and her skin. His fingertip lingered in the middle of her hand before waltzing around to form a string of words, tickling her.

Deirdre froze and realized how wrong she was of the stranger. Brendan would never apologize for something so trivial and insignificant. He would never treat her this gently, either. The Devil's only desire was dominance and possession—to equate Brendan to someone like Kyran was an unkind insult.

"Did you come here just to apologize?" She wondered aloud. It would make sense, after all. Kyran was not one of the villagers. He could not have possibly walked past her yard by chance.

The man tapped on her palm, signaling yes.

She giggled. “You didn’t have to, Mr. Reed. I should have thanked you instead! It was going to be a nasty fall had you not caught me right on time.”

‘Help you,’ he said.

He took some of her gardening tools and began to help out.

At first, Deirdre had wanted to stop him, but the man was already scooping up dirt and soil. She quietly thanked him and picked up the uprooted weeds.

His muteness made him a very quiet companion. The silence eased her, and she began to enjoy her rare break. Closing her eyes, she allowed herself to feel the warmth of the winter sun showering on her skin.

Suddenly, Deirdre felt someone watching her. Kyran had stopped his work.

She was embarrassed. How could she forget that someone else was with her? “Oh God, that was... Sorry. You were so quiet, I forgot you were here. I must have looked really silly to you, huh?”

The man thought for a moment and proceeded to write on her hand, “You are pretty.”

He thought she was beautiful when she threw her head back, closed her eyes, and enjoyed the sun. He thought she was beautiful in her authenticity—there was not a trace of pretentiousness or affectation in her demeanor, and it was just beautiful to him.

Deirdre was stunned. By the time she recovered, she realized belatedly that the tips of her ear had turned scarlet. It had been a while since she heard anyone praise her—Tobey never tried to compliment her outright of course, it was likely because she hated them since flattery only embarrassed her.

And yet, there was an overwhelming wave of sincerity in every stroke of his finger, as though he was

carving his words into her heart. His eyes seemed to be penetrating her own—his ardor was unencumbered nor disguised in them.

She retracted her hand, self-conscious. “T—Thanks.”

The man did not make any move. He simply stared at the reddening tip of her ears before returning to

work.

“Dee Dee? Time to take a break, hon. It’s lunchtime. I’ve made your favorite dish today—Aye?”

Madame Russell had strode into the yard from outside as she spoke, and as soon as her eyes befell on an uninvited guest, she faltered. Warily, she asked, “Who is this?”

Deirdre rose to her feet. “Madame Russell? This is Mr. Kyran Reed. He’s Mr. King’s friend.”

“Mr. King’s friend?” The older woman echoed as she surveyed the man. Not even his nondescript getup, rolled-up sleeves, and stint in the field could disguise his regality. Nobody could be fooled into thinking he was one of the ordinary masses.

Besides, the expensive watch on his wrist basically betrayed his social standing. And by God, the gap between him and the villagers was just too stark to miss.

Chapter 314 Love at First Sight

As for the man's looks....

The anxiety bubbling within her mind made Madame Russell frown. She had always believed her son to be handsome, so much so that he could sit comfortably among typical male leads in a romantic drama. But this guy?

He looked like what happened when God decided to show her just how premature her conclusion was.

Madame Russell quickly took up Deirdre's hand. "Mr. Reed?"

The man did not answer.

Deirdre spoke on his behalf. "He can't speak, Madame Russell. He's mute."

"Mute?" The older woman parroted. A new hint of pity colored her gaze. She could not help herself—she had imagined a man who looked as gorgeous as this young one would speak with a dulcet voice.

"Yea. He helped me, Madame Russell. Some of the kids in the village threw rocks into the yard while I was walking, and it was Mr. Reed who chased them away. Then he helped me plow."

At that moment, Madame Russell turned her attention away from Kyran to the bandage on her forehead. Her heart ached. "What the... What happened? Did those brats do this to you?"

Deirdre could not bear to stress her out, so she fibbed smilingly, “Oh, no. This was an accident on my part.”

Madame Russell was not going to buy a lie as undercooked as this one. “Oh, those punks are gonna get it this time! I’m telling the village head!” she snarled, gritting her teeth. “Trouble-making imps! Someone should glue their backsides to the chairs in a school!”

Deirdre smiled.

The older woman squeezed her hand and turned back to Kyran with a decorous grin. “Thank you for sticking up for my Dee Dee, Mr. Reed!”

The emphasis on “my” was both intentional and implicative. Madame Russell found it hard to believe that a stranger would help Deirdre out of pure-hearted altruism, and since Tobey had gone away, she had to make sure her appointed future-daughter-in-law did not become someone else’s girlfriend overnight.

Kyran’s eyebrows furrowed despite himself. He thinned his lips.

Madame Russell began to tug on Deirdre’s hand. The latter sensed the change in the air as well, but she did not resist the older woman. She nodded to Kyran and bid him goodbye. “Thanks for your help, Mr. Reed! You can leave the tools on the ground. That will do. Excuse us!”

Madame Russell’s pace was unnaturally frantic.

Deirdre found herself struggling to keep up. “S—Slow down a bit, Madame Russell! Why are we going so fast? Did you leave something in the oven?”

“Yep. That’s right. Something in the oven. Right,” she muttered under her breath, distracted. A moment later, she regretted being secretive and decided to talk it out.

“Dee Dee, what are your thoughts on this Mr. Reed?” she asked in a hushed voice.

Deirdre widened her eyes, nonplussed. “Er, he’s a really nice guy.”

A very well-mannered, ever-tempered guy, in fact. He was steadfastly gentle even in the face of her

Overreaction.

She could not possibly react to someone like that with apathy or cold indifference, could she? Deirdre’s

heart was not made of stone.

Madame Russell waved. “That’s not what I meant! I mean, do you like him?”

“Like him?” Deirdre was taken aback. She inhaled sharply and replied, “We’ve only met each other last night! You’re way ahead of me, Madame Russell.”

“No, hon. I’m pretty sure I’m not.” She patted the back of Deirdre’s hand. “When you’ve lived as long as me, you’ve seen what it’s like when a man falls in love at first sight. It’s especially easy to tell when a day has passed, you know?”

“I’m worried that this Mr. Reed is going after your heart, Dee Dee, and that you might say yes to being with him. But we don’t know who he really is, right? You should definitely not fall for him just because he displays some basic decency to you right now, okay?”

“Judging from his social status, he might as well be from an entirely different planet than the one we live

in!

“I don’t want you to get hurt, hon. At least I can tell, without a shadow of a doubt, that my Tobey will never mistreat you in any way!”

Deirdre was stunned. A moment later, she laughed. “Oh God, Madame Russell! You’re overthinking this. really!”

Clearing her throat, she asked, “How does Mr. Reed look?”

“Well! Tall and handsome. Wouldn’t you know?”

Chapter 315 He’s Just a Kid!

“Well, there you have it!” Deirdre chuckled. “He’s handsome and a friend of Mr. King, which means he’s also rich, isn’t he? Why would someone like that take a liking to a random blind woman in some

backwater village? It’s just weird! I mean, I doubt his disability hardly hurt his desirability. I wouldn’t meet his standard even if he lowered it!”

“Lord, I swear...” Madame Russell faltered. How was she supposed to tell her about Kyran’s stormy scowl the moment she emphasized on Deirdre being hers?

And which handsome, rich Prince Charming would deign himself with menial labor for a woman he just met? Aristocrats like these probably lived their entire lives without ever touching any kind of work tool!

“Come on, Madame Russell.” Deirdre cooed reassuringly. She wrapped her arm around the older woman’s. “Mr. Reed accidentally injured my forehead last night, so today, he came to apologize and help to make it up for me. He’s not interested in me, okay? And it’s impossible, too. My conditions and everything? So, let’s not think too much. Agree?”

“He hurt you? Oh, sweetie! Where?” Madame Russell felt a pang in her chest.

“Just my forehead. Don’t worry. It’s all good now.”

The older woman had not noticed Deirdre’s injury in the darkness of the night, so it came as news to her. Still, knowing Mr. Reed’s intention made her relax. It made sense for him to help her if it was just a means to apologize.

And maybe Kyran had frowned because Madame Russell herself was being rather hostile instead of... some other reason. Nobody would have liked her attitude!

The two entered the house and had their meal. Deirdre’s recovery was palpable—her appetite had returned, and she finished her meal completely. After they were done, she got ready to return to the yard.

“Don’t bother with that, Dee Dee. Help me clean these potatoes. I’m gonna sell them in the market and buy you some nice, new winter wear.”

Deirdre nodded and backtracked into the house. She had just started her work when someone banged on their door.

“Come out, Eilis, or so help me God!”

Deirdre froze in mid-action. Madame Russell cast the pail in her hands to the floor. “What’s the big idea? And to use Our Lord’s name in vain!”

She opened the door, but before she could see who it was, the stranger's hands broke in and shoved the older woman away. "Where is that blind good-for-nothing, huh? I want her here, now!"

Madame Russell scowled. "What in the name!?"

An old woman stood akimbo before her with a scowl as though someone owed her a year's rent. She had dragged her grandson with her, too, apparently.

"Why are you looking for Dee Dee?"

"Why? Lord Almighty, you're asking me why!?" The old woman yelled at the top of her lungs, "That blind she-devil of yours hit my grandson! Poor Bobby was sobbing the moment he came home! Well, I'll show her! How dare she do this to him!? I'm not leaving until she apologizes to my Bobby!"

"What!?"

Both Madame Russell and Deirdre were shocked. Deirdre-hitting Bobby? She did not even lay her hand

on his hair!

It did not take Deirdre long to figure out why Bobby lied. That sly little urchin knew he could not possibly offend someone of Kyran's station, so he decided to shift the blame on an easier target.

The old woman followed Eilis' gaze. Seeing Deirdre, she shoved Eilis away and stormed toward the young woman, scoffing. "So, you're that she-devil, ain't you? You're an adult! How could an adult hit a child, huh? Have you no shame?!"

"Mrs. Boebert! Just what are you doing?!" Eilis cried, shielding Deirdre. "We hardly know what really happened between them, so how about we rein ourselves in from those nasty accusations and insults? I don't think Dee Dee is even capable of hurting your grandson!"

"You don't think? So you're accusing my Bobby of lying, huh!?" Mrs. Boebert was incensed. Putting her hands on her hips, she bellowed, "How can he possibly lie? Bobby's just a kid!"

Chapter 316 Serves Her Right!

To Eilis' credit, she would not let some old woman walk all over her. Scowling, she rebuked, "Oh, really? Your Bobby is also the same gremlin who stole O'Connor's harvest and beat up other kids every few days. In a week, ain't he? How many people complained to the village head about this? I lost count. Now you're telling me the same lad is somehow incapable of lying?"

Mrs. Boebert's eyes widened in rage. Livid, she knocked over their potatoes to the ground.

Glaring, Eilis yelled, "What the heck!?"

Everyone in the village knew just how much trouble Mrs. Boebert posed. She had always been the type to bully others with her seniority.

"You just accused my grandson without proof, Eilis!" Mrs. Boebert shrieked. She yanked Bobby's arm and pulled him into the fray, her wrinkled finger training at a little sore spot on his forehead. "You see this? Bobby has never—I say never!—been bullied by anyone all his life, so how about one of you do some explaining right now before I drag this out all day!?"

Eilis was about to repartee when Deirdre tugged on her arm. "Allow me, Madame Russell."

"No, sweetie! Go back inside and ignore her," she whispered back. "Mrs. Boebert doesn't listen or talk sense. She's nuts! She isn't going to walk away no matter what you do unless it's exactly as she wants it. You won't win in an argument with her, guaranteed, so

leave her to me. Besides... I don't believe you have it in you to hurt a child, Dee Dee. I'm 100% confident about this!"

Deirdre's eyes watered. When was the last time anyone had that much faith in her character?

It was precisely that same unconditional faith from the older woman that compelled her to step in and stop the whole thing from spiraling out of control.

"I was the cause of this thing, so I'll settle it," Deirdre replied, her grip tightening.

Turning back to Mrs. Boebert, she raised her voice, "It was my fault that your grandson got hurt, ma'am. I think an apology for that alone is fair. But! Your grandson will have to say he's sorry, too."

She pointed at the bandage on her forehead. "Your grandson mocked me while I was minding my own business in my yard and threw a rock at me. He caused this injury. Doesn't that count for something?"

Mrs. Boebert's expression turned stormy. It was as though she had regained whatever misguided bravado she had at the beginning. "Who the h'll cares if you got a little cut on your forehead when the rest of your face already looks like an accident? Can you really blame kids for throwing rocks at you when you look like a freakshow?"

She scoffed mockingly. "H*ll, Bobby could whack you with a stick, and it still doesn't mean you can just hit back! You're an adult, for Christ's sake! You're literally the bigger person. So be the bigger person! Jesus, it's like you have no shame!"

Deirdre's face turned pale, but Eilis turned red. "So, that gremlin is the one responsible for your injury!?"

She yanked Deirdre away and shielded her with her body. Her voice was shaking in a fury. "Boebert, you dreadful bag of bones! There's being insensible, and then there's this! What

would happen if your tyrannical little gremlin caused a concussion to Dee Dee, huh? Do you even have the money to pay for her medical bills?"

Mrs. Boebert was almost choked into silence, but she recovered quickly enough to sneer. "Who the hell cares about what-ifs when that she-devil is obviously fine right now? Besides, you all made it sound like it's some godd med critical condition. How the hell am I supposed to know if that's true when you had

that all covered behind some bandage? Maybe you aren't even hurt! Maybe this is all a big, fat slander!" Deirdre drew a deep breath and yanked her bandage away.

Her gash—red, sore, and very swollen—laid bare in front of them. "Happy now? Was it slander? You tell me!"

A crowd had begun to pool around them. The attention somehow added fuel to Mrs. Boebert's fire. "What's this supposed to mean, huh? Oh, so this is what you're trying to do. You're trying to make a scene, so I'll look like the bad guy here! Aww, shucks! Who knew a young lady like you could be a world-class schemer? No wonder God took your mother away from you and punished you with that face! Serve you right!"

All colors were drained out of Deirdre's face.

Eilis's fury reached a boiling point. "How dare you!? Boebert, you crazy, heartless broad! I've been very patient with you only because you're an old bag of bones on your way out, but you sh*t all over my goodwill with that foul, disgusting mouth!"

"You hear that, everyone!?" Mrs. Boebert shrieked before falling on her butt and squeezing crocodile tears out of her eyes. "She thinks she can bully a helpless old woman just because her son's a college graduate with some fancy job in the city!

"She thinks she's better than me now! Did it occur to her that I was a widow very early on in my life? Does she care that my child's been working out there, leaving me alone here? Does it matter to her that my precious grandson is all I have now?"

“No! She’s probably glad that even a blind woman can walk all over me! Oh, God, why are my lots so bad? Have You no pity for meeeeeee!?”

Chapter 317 Extortion

Few could endure the optics of a bawling old woman. Naturally, some of the bystanders were compelled to mediate.

“Come on, Eilis! Look at Mrs. Boebert. She’s so old and can barely walk on her own these days. You can’t possibly think she came to you, despite the difficulty, just so she could slander you in public, right?”

“Besides, nobody wants an unresolvable conflict among ourselves, right? This is a small place, Eilis. Tell, uh, that girl to apologize and get this over with.”

“Amen to that! We are a tight-knit community. We know everyone here, drink the same water, and live under the same sky. It doesn’t do any of us good if the community splits because of something so trivial, right? Something as trivial as picking a fight with a little kid, too! If I may be frank, Eilis, do you really think that young lass is as trustworthy as you hope?”

Their comments were like thorns stinging Deirdre’s chest.

Eilis, however, was having none of it. That’s enough!” She erupted in rage.

Even if she did care a great deal about maintaining the village’s peace, she s... wanted to defend Deirdre. Eilis was fed up, and her face visibly trembled. “If you all want to frame this whole incident as my Dee Dee picking a fight with a kid, then why don’t you all also consider that Bobby is picking a fight with a blind. -woman?! Dee Dee can’t see a thing, people! She could not even harm Bobby unless that imp started it

first!

“And Lord Almighty, have any of you no shred of sympathy!? Why can’t you all just be a bit nicer to her after all the terrible ordeals she went through? Ask yourselves: when did her late mother ever mistreat any of you when she was alive, huh!?”

The bystanders suddenly fell silent.

Deirdre took a deep breath. She must not let Eilis alienate the rest of the village any further. As these people had said, everyone knew everyone else in a small village like this one. Next to everyone’s peace and co–existence, Deirdre’s thoughts simply did not matter.

“Madame Russell?” She spoke up and smiled softly. “Thank you for sticking up for me, but I think... I think I’m the one at fault here. It’s true. I shouldn’t have picked a fight with a child.”

“Darn it, Dee Dee! You got to stop being so nice, or everyone’s gonna wipe their boots with you, you hear me?” Eilis refuted hotly.

That tragic smile she displayed pained Eilis a lot. “They are lucky that all you got was an external wound. What if you ended up with head trauma, huh?”

Deirdre cast her blind eyes to the floor. “Which is why I’ve decided to leave this house as little as possible from now on.”

The crowd looked down uncomfortably.

Deirdre steeled herself and turned to the old woman. “Mrs. Boebert? I formally apologize to you and your grandson. I shouldn’t have picked a fight with a child, and I promise I won’t do this anymore. I hope that you and Bobby can forgive me.”

Mrs. Boebert, unfortunately, did not plan to let things slide so easily. “Ha, will you look at that! If an apology is all we need, then why do we need the criminal justice system and law enforcement?” Eilis saw red. “What!? You said you only wanted an explanation!”

Mrs. Boebert glared at her. “Oh, did I? When? Look at Bobby’s arm! It’s all sore and red! God knows this requires a medical examination, Eilis. I mean, what if his bone was fractured? You can’t possibly think a full body checkup doesn’t require expenses, right?

“Let’s just cut to the chase. 300 dollars compensation and we’re good. Otherwise, one guess.”

The answer was so obvious it did not need to be stated. She was not going to leave unless she received 300 dollars from them.

Everything about her proposal was preposterous. Even the well-manned Deirdre could not help but clench her hands into fists. She took a deep breath and raised her voice. “Fine.”

Mrs. Boebert’s face lit up. Before she could express more of her joy, though, Deirdre quickly added, “But your grandson hurt me too. I guess that means I should also do a medical checkup in the hospital, right? Your grandson injured my head, see. Even if it seems like I’m fine for now, I can’t rule out side effects in the future. To prevent unexpected problems with my brain, I will have to perform medical checkups every few months. Can you pay for all of that from here on out?”

“You b*tch!” Mrs Boebert shrieked. She leaped to her feet and lurched at Deirdre. “How dare you try to extort money from me!?”

Eilis quickly stepped between them. “Extort you, Mrs. Boebert? We could never! We’re just following your logic. If your grandson’s injury warrants a checkup, then Dee Dee’s injury is just as deserving, don’t your agree?”

Mrs. Boebert was shocked. She could not even find the words to refute them. “W—Why you—”

Suddenly, a steady rhythm of footsteps approached them. Declan King’s jocular tone sounded. “Whoa! What’s going on here? Are you guys having a party here?”

Deirdre clenched her fists instinctively. She could not help but be worried. Kyran could not possibly be with him, right? If he were... Bobby might suddenly switch his target and name Kyran, the culprit. Then, because the young man was mute, Mrs. Boebert would bulldoze him even harder with a one-sided argument!

To Deirdre’s relief, Declan added, “Okay. Why does everyone look so intense? Is this because I’m crashing the party or something?”

He said ‘I’, not ‘we.’ Declan was alone this time.

Mrs. Boebert had seized the chance to slink away from the fray with Bobby in tow. Maybe she was afraid of taking up Deirdre’s medical costs after all. Either way, the rest of the crowd broke off soon enough, leaving a slightly nonplussed Declan with Deirdre and Eilis.

Raising his eyebrow, he wondered aloud. “Uh... What just happened?”

Eilis relaxed. “Nothing. There was some petty quarrel in the neighborhood. Don’t trouble yourself with it. How can we help you, Mr. King?”

Declan smiled and handed her an invitation. “Our development plan is about to become official! To mark our first success, I’ve hosted a celebratory dinner in town, and I would love to have you join us, Mrs. Russell!”

“Oh, my Lord!” Eilis was surprised. She would have expected the village chief to be invited. “I don’t get it. I didn’t help much! I don’t think I deserve the honor.”

"This is just untrue, ma'am. You helped us a lot. Without you, we wouldn't have been able to finalize our traffic and road designs. Besides, you're one of the most senior members of Alnwick. We're only going to need even more of your help going forward. So, please, do attend the dinner!"

When someone was as earnest as Declan was, why not?

Eilis liked the young man enough—despite his wealth and social standing, he displayed not even a whiff of a superiority complex. But still, she could not help but be reminded of Deirdre's situation. Thus, she pushed the invitation back into Declan's hand.

"Mr. King, thank you for your kind invitation. But I'm afraid I can't. Deirdre's dinner depends on me, you

see."

Declan laughed. "Well, good thing I have another invitation extended to Miss McKinnon too, then. There, problem solved. Here you go, Miss McKinnon."

"M—Me?" Deirdre's mind turned blank. She shook herself out of her stupor and forced a smile, shaking her head. "T—That won't be necessary. You should go, Madame Russell. I'll heat something up for tonight."

Deirdre knew she was a liability to everyone around her. She was just not fit for events like these.

Declan churned his thoughts for a moment and decided to neither accept nor refute Deirdre's refusal. "I'll send someone to drive you to the venue by today's late evening, so there's time for you to consider, Miss McKinnon," he proposed, grinning

"Frankly, I think it's important for you to attend this event, not just because it'll delight me, but because my

friend will appreciate it as well. As you already know, he's mute and doesn't like these events. It makes him feel... alienated. You know, alone in the crowd.

"But if you're there with him, I bet he'll feel a bit more at ease. So, this is for my friend. If accessibility is your top concern, Miss McKinnon, rest assured that I'll do my best to accommodate you to the fullest!"

With that, Declan turned away and left.

For some reason, Deirdre's mind began to conjure scenes—Kyran, sticking out of the crowd, becoming the gossip of the event as people gawked at him. Declan would not have the time to explain Kyran's condition to everyone—he would be too busy checking in on everyone.

What would that leave Kyran to? People would flock to him, point out his "difference", "and hawk on him about it to no tomorrow.

And he would be helpless against it like she usually was, would he not?

Declan's driver came that evening, and Deirdre took the ride.

Chapter 319 I Really Miss You

No, it was not because she had the compassion of the Virgin Mary. Nope, it was definitely not because her heart bled for the pitiful and destitute. She only agreed to join the party as a form of thanks.

Yeap, definitely as a form of thanks for those two times Kyran helped her.

Deirdre had received Tobey's call by the time she got out of the vehicle. Standing by the roadside, she could not help but note the fatigue in Tobey's voice, no matter how gentle he was. "Going to a dinner tonight with my mom, Dee?"

Deirdre was not surprised that he knew. Madame Russell must have told him. "Yeah."

"Okay. Be careful, please. Don't drink. If I recall correctly, you aren't exactly a drinker. Just tell them you're allergic to alcohol, and they will definitely leave you alone in fear." Tobey quipped. "Go home as soon as it's over, please."

"I know, Toby. I know." She chirped. His voice was reassuring—the way a kind-hearted big brother's was. "Don't worry. I'll make sure your mom won't drink too much herself."

"Heh, thanks," he replied quietly. Then, quite suddenly, his tone took a slightly frenetic turn. "I miss you so much, Dee. I wish I could just abandon my work and come home to see you!"

Deirdre was stunned. Before she could answer him, however, she felt a strong grip clamping around her wrist. The force was so great her mind immediately conjured Brendan's image.

Her voice was trembling when she called out, "W—Who is this?"

Tobey caught onto her panic. "What's wrong?"

Eilis was caught in a conversation with the village chief at a distance, but she managed to notice.

Deirdre's predicament just in time. Alarmed, she strode toward her and raised her voice. "Mr. Reed, Dee

Dee! What's the matter?"

'Kyran?"

Oddly enough, the reveal soothed Deirdre. "No, it's nothing. Toby. Just a friend I've just made. He's a friend of the developer, too, and he's probably here to greet us," she said to Tobey. "Anyway, gotta go. Bye."

As the call died, Deirdre exhaled a sigh of relief. She honestly did not know how to react to what Tobey had said.

Kyran watched her hang up the phone, and his expression was unreadable. He reached out to her palm, his finger ready to write when Ellis snatched her hand away from his grip and shielded Deirdre behind her back.

"Uh—her, Mr. Reed? Please don't get too handsy with my Dee Dee here. It's not a good look for her, okay?"

Kyran frowned. Something in his eyes seemed to darken.

Deirdre realized it was a misunderstanding, so she wrapped her arm around Ellis' and tried to explain, " Oh, Madame Russell, he wasn't being disrespectful. I think Mr. Reed wanted to talk to me, but he can only communicate by writing on my hand."

"Oh, is that all?" Ellis replied, a little relaxed now. Then, she frowned again. "But honey, even though that was his intention, it was still plenty inappropriate! People are watching, you know. The villagers are gonna talk. You know what they'll gossip about."

Ellis was not wrong at all. Most of the villagers were unabashedly conservative enough that they would

start spreading nasty gossip over even harmless things.

Stuck, Deirdre could only flash Kyran an apologetic smile. She could not tell just what sort of expression the young man might be wearing.

Luckily for them, Declan—the extroverted social master—came to their rescue. He was as affable and chirper as always. “Mrs. Russell! Miss McKinnon! Perfect timing! We’ve been waiting for you inside. Your seats have already been decided for you, too. Come on. I’ll show you!”

Eilis was taken aback by how opulent the entire hotel looked from the inside. It was as though the entire building was gilded or draped in gold. “Mr. King, h—how much money does this whole dinner cost? Gosh!”

“Meh. About 2,000 dollars for a full—course meal, I think? Honestly, it’s worth it if it means we can all have a great time tonight. Come on. Your table’s up the steps.”

The group began to climb. Eilis held Deirdre close to her, their attention heightened by the potential hazard

Chapter 320 He’s Been Paying Attention to You

The stairs proved themselves to be almost a little too fancy. Sometimes it was a wide, flat platform. Sometimes, it had a series of narrow steps. And that was not counting the twists and bends, too!

Deirdre was hopeless against the stairs’ unpredictable aesthetics. She finally miscalculated and missed her step.

Before she fell, though, she felt a firm hand holding her tightly by her waist. It was warm and strong, and it helped her regain her footing.

Deirdre immediately knew it belonged to Kyran.

Eilis panicked so hard that her face turned white. She only sighed in relief when she saw Deirdre was all right. Patting her chest, she cried, "Thank God you're here, Mr. Reed! Thank you! She could have seriously hurt herself if she fell from here!"

Declan snickered. "Well, it's not like Kyran's famous for being seriously meticulous and observant... Or that he's been quietly guarding Miss McKinnon's six... Or that he's readied himself to catch her the moment she trips, right?" he teased.

Deirdre was a little stunned. Kyran had been standing behind her this whole time just in case she needed help?

Even the way Eilis looked at him changed. Sheepishly, she began to praise the man for being so amazingly attentive.

Deirdre listened to the older woman's effusive litany and found herself agreeing to every single praise. Even she herself might not have thought that far ahead.

But Kyran was attentive enough to care. This was a man who was mindful of the people around him. A man who would notice the little things. It was probably the biggest difference between him and Brendan.

Maybe, it was a trait developed from the sensitivity of one who saw the world differently, all because of his disability.

Suddenly, Deirdre felt like she resonated with him just a little more.

Declan led them along to their destination. He seemed to have reserved the entire first floor for the banquet, Eilis told Deirdre, because the villagers were not alone. There were other unrecognizable people, too, who all looked like rich businesspeople.

Eilis immediately took off to join a conversation between Alnwick villagers. Meanwhile, Deirdre found a quiet spot and made herself comfortable.

A few moments later, she felt someone sitting nearby. There was no prelude to a conversation, so she knew it was Kyran again. Her mind drifted to her incident at the stairs. She turned to him and said solemnly. "Thanks for saving me back there. It could have been a very nasty fall."

She could feel movement from the other side, so she instinctively reached her hand out and opened her palm.

He stiffened. Then, he rapped on the coffee table with his knuckles lightly as if to tell her he heard her. "So, what did you want to say to me just now? Why don't you write on my hand?" she asked.

There was no reply. Deirdre heard the sound of fabric being lightly grazed. Suddenly, a computerized voice spoke. "I don't want them to gossip."

It came from his phone.

Deirdre reeled in realization and giggled softly. He was actually worried about that? About what Eilis had said?

"Oh, I doubt they have the guts to say anything about you."

Kyran furrowed his brows. "I meant gossiping about you."

"Me?"

"I don't care about what other people think of me. But you're a member of the village. I will not stand for them to turn you into some dehumanizing form of entertainment."

Deirdre froze. Never in her mind had she imagined anyone—who was a complete stranger to her just two days ago—would care so much about her. Shaking herself out of her daze, she replied, “It doesn’t bother me.”

She laughed mirthlessly. She did not need Kyran to become the talk of the village. She was blind, and her face was ruined. And she got into hot water several hours ago. All that basically cemented her as Alnwick’s gossip target.

She was used to it.

Kyran seemed to be at a loss for words. He was tapping away on his phone at one moment only to delete the entire thing the next.

Deirdre tried again. “Hey, didn’t you have something you wanted to tell me?”

Before she could get her answer, a new crowd had formed around them. The leader of the congregation, face ruddy in the afterglow of his beer, pushed his mug close. “Yo, is that you, Deirdre? Mr. Reed! What are the two of you doing, squatting in this corner?”

“This is a paaaaartay! Woooooowoo! Where’s your godd*mned drink? Ain’t no one’s weaseling their way out of this one, especially you, Dee Dee. When was the last time all of us old mates got together? The last time we saw each other, you were just 18!”