

After Death 141

Chapter 141

Ewan hesitated for a moment before finally agreeing.

As we made our way to the asylum, my body trembled uncontrollably.

I couldn't understand why I felt so sad, but the image of that charred room remained etched in my mind.

The fire, the thick smoke, and the desperate cries replayed vividly in my thoughts.

When Steven and I shared a room, I immediately noticed the grotesque scars from the fire covering his entire back, as well as his hands and legs.

He must have endured so much pain back then.

"That asylum was later shut down, and the director was arrested because of reports of patient abuse," Ewan said.

During the journey, I looked up the asylum and came across numerous horrifying scandals.

The doctors derived pleasure from tormenting and abusing the patients, subjecting them to electric shocks, drowning, suffocation, and torture.

The darkest aspects of human nature were amplified within those walls.

As I sat there, a sudden realization washed over me. "Apart from the director's arrest and sudden death from a heart attack in prison, the other doctors, who weren't

convicted, seemed to have died one after another over the years," I muttered.

Were all these events truly a mere coincidence?

"Somebody online suggested it's payback for the lunatics at Saint Sahns Asylum," I murmured, feeling inexplicably uneasy as I scrolled through the thread.

If the deaths of those doctors wasn't a coincidence, could they be connected to the serial killings at the orphanage too?

My head suddenly throbbed, and I instinctively pulled at my hair, trying to keep myself composed.

Perhaps they were accidents. Maybe it truly was all just coincidences.

"I've always believed that the universe has a way of balancing things out," Ewan said as

he opened the car door for me after we arrived.

I sensed he was hiding something, but there were certain matters I knew better than to pry about.

The asylum had been sealed off, so we had to sneak in through the gates.

It felt just as eerie as the orphanage, instantly unsettling me upon arrival.

Recently, a popular livestreamer had explored this place, claiming it was haunted.

“This was Mr. Lincoln’s room. The Lincolns specifically instructed it to be a single room for his comfort,” Evan said.

But instead, it was like hell.

I pushed open the door and froze in place for a moment.

The walls were adorned with formulas and numbers, revealing his attempt to calculate something.

The room was oddly clean. For a moment, I could almost picture a teenager in a white patient gown, diligently scribbling calculations on the wall with a pencil.

I walked along the walls, gently tracing the numbers as I went.

At last, at the end of the room, I saw that formula. He was using calculus to calculate pi, endlessly working out every digit after the decimal point.

“What did he want to do?” I asked skeptically.

Steven was undeniably a genius in mathematics and finance. But what drove his obsession with calculating pi?

“The doctor who exposed the asylum scandal mentioned that Mr. Lincoln was eager to prove something. Everything, like pi, has a pattern that can be calculated to the smallest detail.”

He continued, “With the loop in time, everything can reset as long as we can figure out the pattern. Souls exist across different dimensions of life...”

Ewan also seemed puzzled.

Anything was possible in the world of madness.

I stared in shock at the wall of numbers, feeling as if I were submerged in icy water.

When everything followed a pattern, time could flow backward, and souls could be reborn.

I covered my mouth in shock. Steven wanted to prove that this world was illusory and that everything would eventually start anew.

“He’s a genius...” Steven was truly an otherworldly genius, or perhaps, a madman.

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No ordinary human being could understand why Steven was so adamant about his perspectives.

“Is that kind–hearted doctor still in Huma?” I asked, still feeling concerned,

I distrusted Steven because he was too bloodthirsty at times. When I asked him if he’d killed a man before, he hesitated and didn’t answer me, which showed clear deflection on

his part.

Did Steven actually kill people before then? Was it connected to the orphanage serial killer case?

“The doctor is still in Huma.” Ewan nodded.

I sighed in relief. Investigating the matter would be far easier now, especially with eyewitnesses from that incident still present today.

“Let’s go back.” I was scared Steven would get hysterical again once he woke up.

Ewan nodded. “Mrs. Lincoln, I brought you over because I hope you’ll better understand Mr. Lincoln... Mr. Lincoln didn’t have fortunate beginnings. He needs unconditional love and care.”

I understood Ewan’s intention. He thought I’d be the one to save Steve. We were husband and wife now, after all.

But... I could never be Steven’s savior. Steven wanted love, something that couldn’t give him.

I could only do my best to be kind to him and pray that Steven wasn’t one of the murderers from the orphanage murder case...

But after my visit today to the asylum, I was scared that Steven might’ve actually killed someone before. I was worried he might be connected to the serial killings.

What should I do if I found evidence that he was the one behind them? Should I hand him over to the police?

I kept on going through Saint Sahn’s Asylum’s records and articles from the past on the way back. The whistleblower was a kind–hearted doctor who reported the incidents for

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the patients’ sake.

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He ended up pissing off the asylum’s director and the other doctors in the process. In the end, the doctor lost his leg in a car accident and was now crippled.

But when some netizens asked the doctor whether he regretted doing what he did and putting himself and his family at risk, the doctor replied that someone had to do it regardless. Someone had to bear that burden and shed some light on the darkness.

“Mrs. Lincoln... we’re here.”

The car came to a stop while I was still in the midst of reading those articles.

Many people shared their hellish experiences at Saint Sahn Asylum. They claimed that the asylum director had a thing for watching attractive people be tormented, and those doctors he hired were the real psychos there.

I couldn't imagine what someone as handsome as Steven would've experienced there.

He was the kind of person who refused to yield and would continuously fight back. That would only agitate his tormentors and inflict more pain on him.

I was already trembling from how tense I felt after reading the articles.

I couldn't imagine how desperate Steven must've felt then... being tormented over and over again.

If I were in his shoes, I'd probably kill someone too.

"Stephie!" Steven yelled from the courtyard. None of the house helpers were able to restrain him as he searched for me, still barefoot.

Steven quietened down when he saw me. He came over and held me in his arms, saying hoarsely, "I'm scared, Stephie..."

In that instant, I suddenly felt like what Steven was scared of was nothing more than losing me.

"Stephany!"

Right when I was about to try and get Steven back to his room, Zion's car suddenly came to a stop outside the center. He exited the vehicle in a hurry. "Stephany! Have you seen Rachel?"

I replied, shocked, "Rachel hasn't contacted me at all today..."

"She's gone missing!"

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My heart dipped in my chest, and I hurriedly ran over to Zion. "Rachel's missing?"

"She's been spending all her time at the coroner's to look into Stephanie's death and examine bodies with Dr. Sparks so that she could try and find the truth. Rachel even nearly fainted last night, which was why I told her to go home and rest.

"She wasn't with the police force this morning, so I gave her a call, but no one picked up," Zion explained.

He continued worriedly, "I was dealing with another case then. By the time I went looking for Rachel at noon, she'd already gone missing. I've been looking for her all this time, and no one else has seen her."

"What about last night? Are you sure Rachel reached home safely?" I asked shakily while grabbing Zion's arm.

"The security guard was on shift last night, so he should've seen Rachel if she went back home. But he didn't, which meant she didn't go home. That means

she must've gone missing on the way home after leaving the police station," Zion said.

I looked back at Steven, worried. I needed to find Rachel.

Steven looked as if he wanted to say something to me.

"Let's go to my place to find her!" I exclaimed to Zion, suddenly recalling something." Oh, I meant... Stephanie Carlson's home."

I told Rachel that the murderer might have been at my home before. Could she have gone there instead of going home last night?

Zion was stunned before he gestured for me to get in his car.

Steven took a couple of steps toward me before he stood there, dejected.

I watched him from the rearview mirror, my heart hurting for some reason.

Was Steven upset? Or sad? Was he sad that I cared more about somebody else than him?

Or was it all just my misunderstanding...

"He depends on you a lot," Zion spoke up as he glanced at the rearview mirror.

I said nothing in response, feeling uncomfortable.

Why... did I feel so upset seeing Steven standing there alone, quietly waiting for me?

It was as if a voice was telling me to not make Steven wait anymore. That he had waited for too long.

My hands clasped together as I glanced at Zion. "Can I... bring Steven along?"

Zion was about to start driving. He looked at me and said, "Sure."

I hurriedly got out of the car and asked Steven, who was standing there barefoot in the courtyard, "Do you want to come find Rachel with me?"

Steven swiftly looked up at me, eyes bright. He said nothing but instead hurried over and got into the car with me.

I took his shoes from the housekeeper before getting into the car and putting them on for him. He was curled up in a corner, watching me carefully throughout.

"Have you... remembered me, Stephie?" Steven asked softly.

I shook my head, confused. I was only doing this out of sympathy.

Disappointment colored Steven's eyes again before he turned to look out the window.

We were silent throughout the car ride, though Steven never once let go of his grip on my hand.

Zion parked his car in the alleyway below my apartment before cautiously leading us upstairs. Now that it was dark out, the lights in the stairwell were dimmer than usual.

I instinctively protected Steven by standing in front of him. Meanwhile, his eyes never left me.

“Something’s wrong with the man hiding in Stephanie’s home,” I whispered, giving Zion the door key hidden under the floor mat..

Zion carefully unlocked the door and gestured for us to be careful.

It was dark and unlit inside. My portrait appeared quite terrifying in the dark. I was definitely the first person alive to be scared by my own portrait.

“Shh.” Zion suddenly gestured for us to be quiet with his finger and listened for any sounds from within the house.

All of a sudden, there was some noise from the bedroom.

“Rachel?” Zion called out cautiously and switched on the living room lights. He then slowly moved to the bedroom.

I carefully eyed the bedroom as well, praying Rachel was alive and well.

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“She won’t die,” Steven said confidently from behind me..

I glanced at him. “What makes you so sure?”

“Innocent people.” Steven meant that Rachel was innocent. This inadvertently meant that Steven knew that the serial killer wouldn’t kill Innocent people.

When the bedroom door was opened, there was no one to be seen inside. I checked in all the other rooms in the house and found no one else either.

A loud bang suddenly came from the bedroom again, this time from inside the closet. Zion and I looked at one another before we hurried over to open it.

Rachel was inside, her hands and feet bound together and a piece of cloth shoved in her mouth. Luckily she wasn’t in any danger, just mildly dehydrated.

“Rachel!” Zion quickly untied her and took out the cloth.

“That bastard’s threatening us... ” Rachel gasped before passing out in Zion’s arms. She

seemed to be in shock.

“I’ll get her to the hospital right now!” Zion carried Rachel in his arms and dashed out of

the room.

I was about to run after him when I suddenly turned around to look at the portrait in the

living room with fright.

I screamed in fear.

The original portrait of me ballet dancing had been replaced.. It was a photo of my body arranged as a life-sized puppet in a glass case after I was murdered by the murderer.

Zion stopped in his tracks, noticing the change too.

We hadn't noticed that the portrait was changed earlier when we entered. All our focus was on the bedroom.

Steven instinctively covered my eyes and said shakily, "Go."

I stood there trembling uncontrollably, rooted to the ground.

Zion gave his colleagues a call to have them come over and secure the place.

"Blood is... dripping off of the painting," I stammered. Even though Steven had covered my eyes, I could still smell the rich iron of blood.

The dress of the portrait was smeared in fresh blood...

"The blood's still fresh, which means the murderer hasn't gone far yet," Steven said hoarsely before turning to examine the room.

"The murderer was able to predict how long it'd take for us to arrive and when we'd see this portrait. Someone as intelligent as him would no doubt hide nearby to admire his handiwork..."

As Steven spoke, he kicked the washroom door open. He was slowly spiraling out of control.

Zion set Rachel down on the couch and tasked me to take care of her while he and Steven

searched the house for the murderer.

Steven was mumbling to himself, "The killer was able to calculate how long the victim had to live after he put her in the glass case. He's skilled in math and medical science..."

He then turned to look at the shoe cupboard by the front door.

Supposedly, no grown man would be able to fit in there. But Steven still went over to it.

"What are you guys doing?" M

voice rang out from the front door. He sounded displeased. He had several other men with him who looked to be from a moving company.

"Go away!" Steven cried, wanting Michael and the others to leave and not ruin the crime.

scene.

But Michael was hostile to Steven. “This was Stephanie’s home, and she was my fiancée. Now, I’m the one who legally owns this place, so you guys should be the ones leaving!”

Michael then said to the movers, “Move everything out of the house. Be careful.”

“Don’t touch anything!” Steven yelled all of a sudden, running over to try and stop

Michael.

But Michael’s bodyguards instantly subdued Steven.

“Michael Ford!” Zion and I both yelled at him. “Don’t let them in! We need to keep this place untouched!”

But it was too late, Michael’s men had already entered the house to stop us.

“There’s someone in the shoe cupboard!” Ferled when the movers started lifting the cupboard and blood poured out,

A strangely positioned human body was in the shoe cupboard. It fell out with a chilling think

Everyone grew silent in an instant, followed by someone dry heaving to the side.

“The man had been kneeling before he fell out. He was shoved into the cupboard.” It was a good thing I had noticed....

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“He’s not dead yet...” Steven shoved away the people around him and went to feel the man’s pulse. “He’s not going to live...”

Zion called an ambulance.

Michael quickly took several steps back, clearly never having seen such a bloody sight. before. Meanwhile, everyone else had run outside the house to heave their stomach contents out. They had pretty much ruined the crime scene.

“The murderer was able to calculate how long it’d take for this victim to die...

“Steven said in a panicked tone as he knelt on the floor. “He knew what time we’d arrive and what time we’d find this victim. He wanted us to watch him dic...

Just like how the murderer had done to Stephanie.

I walked forward, feeling numb as I looked at the body. “It’s the orphanage director’s husband.”

I had seen this man before in Steven’s photos.

“If the murderer was able to shove such a heavyset man into the shoe cupboard, then he must definitely be a strong adult,” Zion said sullenly.

That was the only way the murderer could’ve moved a body around and shoved a man on the verge of death into this small cupboard.

“Maybe... the victim climbed in there himself.” Steven pointed at the footsteps which Michael and the other movers had disturbed on the ground. “There was only one set of

footprints.”

“There’s something else that’s scary too. The murderer didn’t leave behind fingerprints, hair, or any clues. Even camera footage is useless because we can’t identify the murderer from his face.”

The person I saw the other day at home had an extremely scarred face from burn injuries. and looked incredibly scary.

I couldn’t tell what he originally looked like.

“The murderer is too intelligent,” Zion said. The murderer had been taking the police as

fools.

“Are you out of your mind?” I turned to Michael. “Why did you come here at this late hour just to move some furniture?”

Michael looked at me, displeased. “These are all my wife’s belongings.”

“Bullshit.” I went up and slapped him in the face. “Can you be more considerate for once?”

Michael glared at me warningly. “I told you, this house is in my name, so you guys are the ones who are trespassing!”

“Why did you bring movers here at this time of the night, Michael Ford? If you don’t give a reasonable explanation, I have reason to suspect you intentionally ruined a crime scene!” Zion warned.

“I met a fortune teller who told me... that Stephie died a terrible death and her soul is currently wandering unbound. The fortune teller told me to burn her furniture at midnight tonight,” Michael grumbled, looking away.

Wait, why would someone as self-centered as Michael who never believed in the metaphysical suddenly believe in this sort of thing?

I cast a suspicious look at him. “Something’s wrong with that fortune teller.”

It was too big of a coincidence.

“Where did you meet this fortune teller?” Zion asked.

“At the cemetery.” Michael had gone to Stephanie’s grave again today.

Now, I suspected even more that Michael had negatively affected my journey to the afterlife. He was tormenting me even after my death.

“Officer Landon!” The other police officers and backup had arrived.

But it was too late. The victim had already died, just like Steven said. There was no saving him even after Steven tried to stop his bleeding. Too much blood had been lost.

The medics took Rachel away, who had passed out from hunger and shock. I heaved a sigh of relief when they told me her life was no longer at risk.

“Why was he kneeling in the shoe cupboard?” I didn’t understand what the murderer was trying to tell us.

Steven murmured, “Redemption. He’s trying to redeem himself.”

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Zion looked at Steven and then at me. “Steven has always refused to cooperate with the investigation in the past. Why is he so active today?”

Steven had always been opposed to helping with the investigation even when the police questioned him. He would never so much as utter a word.

But Steven was clearly cooperating right now.

I realized this difference as well. Steven was particularly cooperative today.

Steven stared at the victim, mumbling, “Anesthesia... overdose. Hallucinations, poor wound clotting... One will slowly die without feeling any pain.”

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Zion looked at Steven in shock, then at the coroner who had just arrived.

Keenan took off his mask and turned to Steven. “You have a keen sense of smell. The victim must’ve struggled when the murderer injected him with anesthesia, causing it to stain his clothing. Anesthesia are strictly controlled drugs.”

Zion turned to Phil. “Search the area right now!”

But it would be difficult to find the murderer in such a short amount of time given the big field of search.

“Most of the usable leads are ruined now that the crime scene has been destroyed.” Keenan’s brows furrowed as he looked at all the footprints.

Michael looked away silently, feeling guilty. He was the one in the wrong here.

“The murderer is still in the area. They haven’t gone far.” Steven suddenly looked out the door confidently.

“Who’s there?” Phil ran out with some other men after hearing some noise outside..

“Clear the area and lock the place down,” Zion ordered his men.

I held Steven's hand and walked out into the hallway so that the police could perform their investigation.

Steven seemed to be trying to piece something together. He crouched on the floor, mumbling, "The next one... Time and date."

Was he calculating when the murderer would strike next?

"What a freak," Michael sneered, insulting Steven.

Steven gazed at him coldly. "If you hadn't brought those men and barged into the house ... I would've found him."

If Michael hadn't interfered, Steven would have successfully used the clues to find out who the murderer was. But they'd stirred up the hornet's nest now.

"Stop with the fear-mongering. You could very well be the murderer too. How else would you know what drug the murderer used and deduce his actions?" Michael glared angrily at Steven, wanting to attack him.

I went up and shoved Michael away, standing defensively in front of Steven. I even slapped Michael again. "Shut up!"

Michael would've made me regret hitting him twice in the past. But now that I was Stephany, he couldn't threaten me like he used to back when I was Stephanie.

Nor would I be afraid of his tactics anymore.

"Stephany..." Michael said darkly before sneering. "You're pretty good at pretending to be Stephanie."

He could probably see Stephanie in me.

"Hmph... How shameless." I scoffed, suddenly feeling like I'd touched filth by slapping.

him.

"Since you want to be Stephanie so bad, I'll give you a chance to act the part," Michael threatened coldly.

Chills ran down my spine. I had no idea what he was trying to do.

Whenever Michael showed this expression in the past, I knew he'd... "punish" me.

His punishment was always to force me into a corner, making me have no choice but to compromise.

Michael suddenly grabbed my arm and pulled me to him. "What can you get from marrying a lunatic? The Lincolns are already at the end of their prime. It'll be extremely difficult for you to try and fight against Martin Lincoln.

“I can give the Larson family whatever you’re seeking from the Lincoln family. Divorce this man. I’ll let you be Stephanie Carlson and stay with me. You just need to play your role well.”

Michael even shot Steven a challenging look, as if certain that I would give up Steven and be with Michael all for personal gain. This was because Steven had no power when it came to the Lincoln Group.

Steven gazed darkly at Michael, restraining his killing intent. Steven’s voice was trembling as he hissed, “Give her back to me...”

Steven wanted to use his handgun but didn’t, probably out of fear of hurting me.

But Michael deliberately goaded him further, grabbing the back of my neck and pulling me closer into his arms. “Who do you think Stephany will choose, you lunatic?”

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Steven stood there helplessly while suppressing himself. He wanted to take action yet. was afraid I might get hurt. My misunderstanding from earlier today when he hurt that pervert on the train must’ve frightened him, making him think I might get upset again if he acted too drastically.

Steven seemed really, really afraid that I might choose Michael over him.

“Stephie...” Steven called out nervously, wanting me to choose him.

I gazed at him, feeling overwhelmed.

When Michael saw how I didn’t struggle, he said coldly, “You’re lucky you resemble Stephanie Carlson.”

I gritted my teeth, wanting to punch him in the face.

Raising my head, I headbutted Michael in the face before turning around and hitting him. I had really wanted to punch him for a long time,

It wasn’t that I didn’t want to in my previous life; it was just that I didn’t dare to. Michael often threatened the lives of those around me. That was what he did best.

I couldn’t cross Michael then. And with the addition of the debt I owed him, I had no choice but to swallow it all down.

But now... I’d already died because of him, so screw that debt.

Steven was stunned. He swallowed nervously as he looked at me.

“What are you standing there for?” I called out to Steven. “Come over here and beat him up with me!”

Steven ran over excitedly and was about to toss a punch at Michael when Zion grabbed him by his shirt collar. “Come with me for a bit, Steven.”

Steven glared at Zion and turned back to me.

“Let’s go together,” I said, ignoring Michael who was still clasping his injured nose. I then went up to hold Steven’s hand.

Steven was shocked. “Don’t... choose him... Stephie...

“He’s not even a choice for me,” I consoled Steven, though I still felt confused inside.

Steven’s emotional state was unstable, so I had to continuously console him. But this was just pity on my end, I had to leave the Lincoln family sooner or later.

I couldn’t stay by Steven’s side for the rest of my life, after all...

What should I do if he was too dependent on me?

Steven seemed to be in a really good mood. He was eagerly helping Zion analyze the case. “Serial number. Every child in the orphanage had a serial number. It was a... sequence of who would die first. But the director’s family wasn’t in the sequence.”

It was clear that Steven hadn’t expected the murderer to suddenly stop killing the people from the orphanage and turn to the director’s family members instead.

I gazed at Steven. He seemed to really understand the murderer...

“When I asked you to cooperate in the investigation previously, you always refused to say a word. What’s gotten into you today?” Zion asked Steven curiously.

Steven lowered his head and looked at me for a long time. “Stephie....

“Hm?” I didn’t know why he was looking at me all of a sudden.

“I only listen to Stephie,” Steven said. He meant that he’d only come along and cooperate because I asked him to.

If I hadn’t asked Steven to come along and left him back at the Lincoln residence, he wouldn’t have cooperated.

I didn’t know what to say.

“Is the next victim the director?” I asked. Would it be that woman?

“No...” Steven shook his head. “Alive. Worse than death.”

My heart sank.

Her husband and daughter had died. Coupled with all the orphanage children who died one after another, that kind of fear arising from all those deaths would drive one mad.

Leaving her alive was the best punishment for her.

What did the director actually do to the murderer all those years ago?

“Did Simeon... really die all those years ago in the orphanage fire?” I had already

suspected Simeon didn’t actually die during that fire,

“The face of the man I saw at home was so badly burned I couldn’t tell what he looked like before. If Simeon’s still alive, he’d have a motive to kill, wouldn’t he?”

The police would surely face difficulties trying to look into someone who had faked their own death.

“We’ve long suspected this.” Zion lit a cigarette. He seemed exhausted.

“We’ve considered every single possibility you could think of and looked into each one. Simeon Kent is really deceased. My mentor was the one who investigated the fire all those years ago.

“Steven was the only person left alive. There was only one other body found at the scene, and it was burned to a crisp.”

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My mouth fell open in shock.

If Simeon really was dead, that meant he wasn’t the murderer.

So who was?

I glanced at Steven, noticing how strange his expression was.

He kept on mumbling. “Simeon’s dead... Simeon’s dead...”

“Are you certain that body was Simeon’s?” Based on the murderer’s level of intelligence, the only two people I suspected to be the killer were Simeon and Steven.

So if Simeon was dead... Was Steven...

I looked at Steven nervously. Though he had no window of opportunity to commit a crime throughout our time spent together, it was still...

“I told Steven to come here because I wanted him to be honest with me.” Zion took a

long drag from his cigarette as he looked at Steven. “What connection do you have with the murderer? Why did you go to the police station and confess to killing people?”

Zion’s gaze was intense. “I’m asking you this now and not bringing you to the station right away because I trust you, so you’d better tell me the truth.”

Steven looked away silently.

I had asked him these questions in the past too, but I only got vague answers in response.

“Steven... We can't let anyone else die.” I looked nervously at Steven, wanting to coax him to speak up.

“I couldn't find Stephie... All clues pointed to the orphanage... I wanted to save Stephie, but I couldn't find her.” Steven suddenly looked panicked, as if he was blaming himself.

“I lost...” Steven cried, tearing at his hair hysterically. “I lost his game.”

“What do you mean? What game?” Zion looked cautiously at Steven.

“Someone put a letter in the room I was in the day Stephie went missing. The murderer said he wanted to play a game with me, for me to find Stephie... He would give Stephie back to me if I correctly calculated where she was within the specified time.”

That psycho wanted Steven to accurately pinpoint someone's location?

“Psycho...” I hissed.

“He lied to me. I had already calculated the correct coordinates...” Steven's voice was trembling. “But when I went to that cabin, I didn't manage to find Stephie. I didn't know there was a basement.

Steven was blaming himself. He was tearing his hair out as he crouched in a ball on the floor.

He had clearly calculated the right location and went over in time. But he couldn't find Stephie.

“I lost. It's my fault,” Steven said, his emotions unstable. “She died because of me.”

I held his hands, stopping him from further hurting himself. “Don't be scared.”

“I tried so hard to find the murderer, but I only found a second letter telling me to go to the place the police suspected to be the crime scene and pretend to be the killer. He said. he'd give Stephie back to me if I confessed to the crime.”

That psycho did return Stephanie to Steven...

“No wonder. Someone had intentionally led the police to discover the basement that day,

Zion said with furrowed brows.

The moment Steven confessed to the crime, my body was found.

“The basement wasn't freshly dug. Steven didn't even know it was there, which means... only a few people knew about it...” I murmured before looking up at Zion. “I'm sure the orphanage director knew what the basement was used for.”

I had a feeling the murderer didn't put my body there by random chance. There had to be some dark secret surrounding the basement.

"If the murderer is neither Steven nor Simeon... Then who else could it be?" I said to

myself.

Based on the murderer's modus operandi, he was definitely some kind of genius.

Steven stayed silent. He had perfectly explained why he'd been at the crime scene. But was what he said really the truth?

Could we really trust Steven?

"Officer Landon, they've tricked us! The hospital just called to inform us that Yasmin is missing!"

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"Yasmin's

in's serial number at the orphanage was number 37. They numbered the orphans based on when they joined regardless of age. But children of the same age would be grouped together, so their serial numbers were mixed up.

"Based on the photo from the orphanage and after we arrange the serial numbers, the next person should be Yasmin," Zion said.

He then looked at Steven and asked, "Are you able to pinpoint where Yasmin is?"

"Why were all the previous victims female? Stephanie Carlson wasn't from the orphanage," I said, confused.

"Because most of the orphans were girls, and there were very few boys. That's why the previous couple of victims were women," Zion explained.

"I think the murderer seems to be sacrificing the victims. The way he killed Stephanie Carlson was completely different compared to the rest of the victims.

"Stephanie was injected with an anesthetic and barely went through any pain throughout the process. All the other victims besides the one kneeling in the shoe cupboard went through great torment and pain. Some even died from shock."

Steven suddenly seemed to recall something and snatched away the notebook and pen from Zion's hands. "The 12 horoscopes are in different positions. The last victim was found at the South Bay docks... toward the southeast.

Steven drew a circle on the notebook and then began plotting a location. "If the orphanage is the center... then the location is... the South Bay docks. The next one would be Neinstreet, West Quay!"

Steven had calculated the location where the murderer would dump the next victim's body. "He's going to dump the body here, which means he'll be killing them nearby. He wouldn't dare to take action too far away.

"The only suitable place to kill someone would be this abandoned pharmaceutical factory.

The development in Fleetfield had forced a lot of factories to move out of the area, but no actual development had actually begun there.

"Hurry up and go to the factory!" Zion turned to Phil. "What are you standing there for?"

Phil still hadn't recovered from his shock. He quickly gave Steven a thumbs-up, finding him incredibly impressive.

I looked at Steven in shock too. He really was pretty amazing for being able to calculate where the serial killer would kill his next victim and dump the body.

We went to the pharmaceutical factory in Zion's car. The abandoned factory looked quite desolate.

Yasmin was tied to the roof, which was an incredibly obvious spot. She was pale with fright and calling out for help. There was a rope around her neck with a lit candle at its other end. If the flame burned the rope through, Yasmin would fall due to gravity and be hung to death.

The murderer was using this method to make Yasmin, his victim, suffer the most pain and despair before her death.

"Michael, save me!" Yasmin cried out when she saw us.

I sneered.

True love, indeed. She still remembered to call for Michael's help even in such a circumstance.

Michael had come over with the police, his nose still bruised. He hurriedly rushed forward to try and undo the rope around Yasmin.

Steven silently watched Michael, neither saying a word nor stopping him.

Michael didn't know that if someone undid the rope around Yasmin right now, she would fall and hang to death. With how much Yasmin weighed, falling from such a height would snap her neck right away.

The murderer had accounted for all this to happen.

I saw through Steven's intent. He wasn't stopping them because he despised Michael and Yasmin.

"I'd advise you not to simply touch anything, Michael," Zion said.

Steven and I could hate Michael and Yasmin all we wanted and stay silent, but Zion wasn't going to sit by and let tragedy happen.

"What are you just standing there for, then? Save her!" Michael exclaimed angrily.

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"We still have a chance to save Yasmin before the candle burns through the rope." Zion walked over and pointed at the countless knots and ropes all tied to Yasmin.

This warehouse had a very high roof, about three stories off the ground. Yasmin was now hanging on top of it. If there was no way to secure her, she would die from the fall.

Yasmin would die from undoing the wrong knot or the rope being burned through. The same fate awaited her whether she remained hanging from the rope or falling from it, being cut.

Michael was frantic. "What are all you police officers doing just standing there? Hurry up and find a way to save Yasmin! You promised to keep her safe!"

I sneered. Michael knew to panic now.

"You should've been able to tell that the murderer is very intelligent by now. We're just the police, not geniuses. Give us some time to figure this out." Zion found Michael irritating.

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Zion stared at the rope, sweat already beading on his forehead from anxiety.

"The murderer is way too smart... If the candle is moved out of position or extinguished, the direction of the breeze nearby will change and make the iron beads fall like dominoes. The blade positioned above will fall and cut the rope and Yasmin will die."

If the beads were taken away prior, there would be uneven weight distribution.

Yasmin didn't dare move an inch while hanging on the roof.

"Michael... save me. I'm so scared." Yasmin sobbed.

"I'd advise you to not speak so loudly. These ropes and systems are balanced very delicately. The more you yell, the sooner you'll die," I warned.

Yasmin's face reddened with fright. She didn't dare cry out anymore and only sobbed quietly.

As I looked at Yasmin hanging there, I felt... delighted, for some reason.

I had to admit... I had the evil thought of not saving her. I knew Steven could save her, but

I didn't want him to.

Zion looked at Phil and the rest of the police force. "Whatever we move now will put Yasmin at risk. When will backup arrive?"

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They had arranged for a helicopter to rescue Yasmin from the roof.

"But it'll take at least 20 minutes for the helicopter to arrive here at this developmental

area...

Yasmin clearly couldn't wait that long.

"What do you mean 20 minutes? The rope will have already snapped by then!" Michael roared at the police.

He turned to look at Steven, targeting him. "Was it you? Did you do this? Did you lure us all here on purpose? You're the murderer! You must be!"

Steven looked at Michael coldly, staying silent.

"Don't you go around accusing people!" I warned Michael.

"If Steven hadn't discovered where Yasmin was, she would've already been dead," Zion

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warned as well, making Michael calm down.

Steven continued standing where he was, the air incredibly tense around him.

I wasn't sure if I saw it right, but there was a hint of delight in Steven's eyes.

I probably saw that wrong, right?

"It must be him! How else would he know Yasmin would be here?" Michael was still

angry.

"I suggest you calm down, Mr. Ford. The only person who can save Yasmin before she dies is Steven, so you'd better beg him to help save Yasmin!" Zion yelled, grabbing

Michael by the collar.

"You want me to beg him? Bah!" Michael clearly wasn't going to do that.

Steven leaned against a pillar coldly, not saying a word.

"I promise you Yasmin will not survive for long." Zion's brows were furrowed.

“Looks like Yasmin’s not that important to you, huh?” I sneered, feeling gleeful at my once-in-a-lifetime chance to threaten Michael.

“Are you able to save her, Steven?” Phil asked frantically as he looked at Steven.

Steven stayed silent. I knew that he wouldn’t save Yasmin if I didn’t ask him to.

In the end, Michael still spat out the words, “What... will it take for you to save Yasmin?”

Steven straightened up and said darkly, “I’ll save her... if you kill yourself. You have three minutes to think about it.”