

After Death 161

Chapter 161

The boy ran over to hug my leg when he saw how dazed I was.

He held on tight, refusing to let go.

“Why don’t I take you back, little boy?” The female police officer coaxed.

The boy shook his head as he sobbed and continued holding onto my leg.

I helplessly looked at Steven. And at the same time, I felt incredibly shocked.

These two boys—the teen who’d been instructed to kill Yasmin, and the little boy in front me—definitely knew who I was.

“He likes you. You can take him back.” Steven walked up to me and blocked me from

Zion’s view.

I felt guilty and was concerned Zion might see through me.

“If the boy likes you so much, you can take him home first if v
relented.

want to,” Zion also

I heaved a sigh of relief and held the boy’s hand. “Do you want to go back home with me?”

The boy obediently nodded.

Then, I crouched down and asked him, “What’s your name?”

He gazed at me with wide eyes for a moment before saying, “My name’s Jean.”

I smiled. “What a good boy you are, Jean.”

Jean held onto my hand as we walked, not letting go even once.

After Zion and the female officer left, I called Ewan to have him come fetch us.

“Stephie...” Jean hid behind me once the police left. He was fearfully gazing at Steven.

He seemed scared of him.

Meanwhile, Steven stared back coldly at Jean.

“You don’t like him?” I cautiously asked Steven.

Steven looked away. Then, in an effort to show how kind he was, he innocently said, “No,

I took care of those stray dogs, didn’t I?”

But based on how Steven compared Jean to stray dogs, I could still tell that he didn’t like

Jean.

Jean didn't like Steven either, and he kept cautiously watching him.

"Mr. Lincoln, Mrs. Lincoln," Ewan greeted when he arrived and gestured for us to enter

the car.

I was about to get into the car with Jean when I noticed Steven standing where he was, unmoving.

His head was down as he stood there, seemingly unhappy.

"Get in the car," I said in confusion.

Then, Steven suddenly extended a hand out to me. "You said you wouldn't lose me again.

How dare I hold someone else's hand.

I felt exasperated, but Steven's condition was different. So, I had no choice but to coax him, "Come on, let's get into the car."

Steven held onto the hand I extended to him. Then, he turned around and challenged Jean, saying, "Let go of her hand. She's mine."

Jean trembled fearfully as he hid behind me. Yet, he refused to back down. "No way. Stephie is mine."

This time, I was certain that this boy knew who Stephanie Carlson was.

I was afraid Stephanie's secrets would be exposed, so I quickly led both of them into the car.

"Stephie, can you tell the police to let my brother go? He was just trying to get money for my sickness," Jean tentatively said.

I looked down, unsure of what to say.

As the car drove on, I whispered, "Jean... How did we come to know each other?"

"Stephie?" Jean looked at me before whispering back, "Do we have to pretend we don't know each other now too?"

My heart lurched.

Well shit.

Not only did Jean know Stephanie, she had even made the boy pretend to not know who she was in front of other people.

Now, I was even more certain that Stephanie Carlson was connected to the serial killer.

When we reached home, Mr. Moore had someone prepare a scrumptious breakfast for us. And by the time we finished our meal, the sky had turned bright.

From the way Jean wolfed down his food, one could tell that he'd been starving for a long time.

Meanwhile, Steven silently ate his own food and glanced at me from time to time.

"Stephie... Can I take away what we can't finish?" Jean pointed at the unfinished food on the table, not wanting to leave yet.

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I nodded and had Angel to help pack up the food for Jean.

I wanted to know what other secrets he was keeping. I needed to uncover all of them.

After breakfast, I coaxed Steven to finish his food and go to sleep.

After Steven fell asleep, I secretly trailed behind Jean as he left the Lincoln residence.

I saw him run into an alleyway and a long way further.

However, my legs were getting sore as I followed him.

Finally, we reached an abandoned factory where several other children about the same age as Jean were residing.

Most of them seemed to have been born crippled—some had only one arm while others were mute or blind.

"I brought you guys food," Jean said to the other children. He acted like an adult.

I was stunned.

Why didn't these children go to an orphanage? Their orphan intake had improved in the last couple of years.

"Where did you get all this food, Jean?" a little girl happily asked.

Jean said proudly, "Stephie gave them to me. But you can't tell anyone else. You have to pretend to not know her when you see her too, understand?"

I hid in the doorway, feeling both anxious and saddened.

These children seemed to really respect Stephanie.

What was her connection to them?

"When will Grandma Rosie leave the hospital? Will she get better?" a boy quietly asked.

"She'll get better," Jean said sadly, sitting to one side. "Grandma Rosie will definitely get better with Stephie around."

I listened to the children in shock.

Grandma Rosie? Was that Stephany's grandmother? The woman Brandon was using to

threaten people with?

I suddenly recalled that I hadn't once visited Stephany's grandmother ever since I was reincarnated.

But it wasn't that I didn't want to—I just didn't dare to.

Our closest loved ones were often the ones who could identify the minute changes in ourselves.

So, Stephany's grandmother was bound to realize that I wasn't actually Stephany no matter what lie I came up with.

But maybe I really had to pay her a visit now.

These children, Stephany, Stephany's grandmother, and Jean's brother were all connected to the serial killer.

Everything seemed to align now, and anyone in this alignment had the possibility of being the killer themselves.

No one could escape suspicion.

I left the alleyway and was about to head straight for the hospital when a black car came to a stop beside me.

As the car window rolled down, I saw Michael sitting in the backseat.

Was he following me

Had he actually lost his mind?

“What are you trying to do, Michael Ford?” I questioned.

First, he forced me to see him at his office yesterday. And now, he was stalking me.

Did he have too much time on his hands?

Michael seemed to have expected that I wouldn't go see him at his office no matter how much he threatened me.

So, he calmly said, “Get in the car.

But I turned to leave.

“If Zion finds out that you've been supporting these children in secret all this while, don't you think the police will take you in for investigation?

“Won't you become the prime suspect for the person who told these children to kill Yasmin?” Michael asked darkly. He seemed confident that I would do as he said.

I halted and turned to look at Michael.

He must've done his investigation if he could say all this with such certainty.

"I have no idea what you're saying," I tried lying my way out as my hands balled into

fists.

"After your adopted parents passed away when you were 10, your grandmother, Rose Briary, raised you in the countryside all by herself. She brought you to the city to help you track down your birth parents and took care of you using whatever scraps she could

scavenge.

"Your grandmother has helped most of these children before." Michael tossed out a pile of evidence from the window.

I picked up the photos.

They all depicted Stephany and the children together.

"The Larson family found you when you were 18. But then, you started stealing things. from home and selling them in order to support these children, am I right?" Michael coldly gazed at me.

He continued, "It wasn't a big deal for the Larson family to lose things here and there, but your sister, Ann, caught you stealing and threatened you with it. She even reported you to the police and humiliated you.

"And ever since then, you became the infamous ugly-duckling-turned-swan who embarrassed her family and made them loathe having a daughter like you."

Then, Michael said, "Two months ago, a scrawny little kid took advantage of a woman's sympathy and fooled her into going into an alleyway. After that, the woman disappeared, but her body was found a little while after."

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My expression grew uglier by the second.

I looked up at Michael and said, "Stop it!"

I was afraid that Stephany really was connected to the killer in some way and that she'd been using these children for that purpose.

Right now, I was Stephany Larson. So, it would be hard for me to discharge myself if Stephany was found to be an accessory to the murders.

"Now will you be good and get in the car?" Michael threatened.

I ground my teeth and got in. I wanted to know why he was threatening me in the first place. you want?" I firmly looked at him.

“What do you

“I’m the only person who can help you, not that lunatic, Steven Lincoln.” Michael looked coldly and proudly at me. “I want you to divorce him.”

I clenched my hands together. “Why are you so insistent on my divorcing Steve, Mr. Ford? I’m pregnant with his child, you know?”

I purposely mentioned my pregnancy in order to make Michael stop targeting me. But that only made him sink more into his madness.

Michael gazed feverishly at my stomach. “Stephie... was pregnant too.”

At that moment, I suddenly found him to be far crazier than Steven was.

“The Lincoln family no longer has any heirs—Mr. Ignatius had a stroke and James will never reawaken. Who cares about the baby in your belly?” Michael sneered and clasped my chin. “You should feel lucky for having a face like this....

Michael just wanted to keep me by his side as a substitute for Stephanie.

“My face? I don’t look like Yasmin at all. Plus, she’s not dead yet.” I intentionally provoked him.

Michael’s gaze was icy. “That’s not something you should speculate about.”

I clicked my tongue. I felt that Michael was just as overconfident as usual.

“Were you this composed last night when my husband unleashed those dogs on you, Mr.

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Ford?” I asked..

I was kind of angry that Steven didn’t wake me up last night to go along with him. Oh, how I wanted to see something other than pride and coldness on Michael’s face. Michael ground his teeth together. “I’d advise you to take the smarter route. I know you’ve had some dealings with the killer in order to successfully marry into the Lincoln family and help the Larsons through their troubles.”

Michael had clearly uncovered some more information.

“Are you threatening me?” I met his gaze.

Michael pulled me closer to him. “You could say that.”

“What do you plan to do after I divorce Steven? Protect me with your resources? If I’m truly a murderer, you’ll be committing a crime by harboring me.” I shot Michael an innocent yet serious look.

“You don’t need to worry about that.” Michael reminded me to not stray from the topic, saying, “Just come find me after you divorce Steven.

My guess was that Michael had already drafted an agreement for me to sign after I divorce Steven.

“Harboring criminals is a grave crime. We’re technically in the same boat now, aren’t we?” I asked sweetly.

Michael’s brows knitted together, displeased.

“I’m sure you know how important a president’s reputation is to their company, right,

Mr. Ford?” I asked.

By this time, the driver had stopped nearby the Lincoln residence, and I got out of the car.

Then, I waved my phone at Michael. “I’ve already recorded the conversation we had. earlier about harboring me, so if you really plan to threaten me, I’ll drag you down with

1. me. We’re in the same boat now, after all.”

Michael’s expression darkened, but he remained composed and unreadable as usual.

His gaze was so deadly that it felt like he might lunge at me in the next second.

“So, from now on, please don’t trust women so easily,” I said with a smile before leaving.

The only way to deal with people like Michael was to give him a taste of his own medicine. They had to experience this no matter what.

I used to just let Michael do as he pleased, given the debt I owed him. However, he ended up getting more and more out of line,

Moreover, after dying once, I came to understand this one thing—I could still live my life without him.

Besides, I’d already paid off what I owed to him with my life. Wasn’t that enough?

I could feel how angry Michael was in the car even without looking back. His eyes were practically burning holes into me.

“Mr. Ford...” The driver turned to look at Michael nervously.

Michael said nothing. Instead, he chuckled. “Let’s go.”

“If Ms. Stephany really shares that audio recording...” The driver was worried Michael’s reputation would be affected.

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“She wouldn’t dare,” Michael said confidently. “I have my ways of making her come and beg me for help.”

Meanwhile, I was hiding behind the door and only sighed in relief after Michael’s car drove away.

Michael was someone who would do anything to achieve his goal. So, even though I may have escaped his clutches this time, I might not be so lucky next time.

My guess was that Michael had found out about the connection Stephany had with the orphaned children. But he still didn't have anything concrete between her and the killer.

I took a deep breath. I could already feel a headache coming on.

What sort of relation did Stephany Larson have with the killer?

Did she help and feed those orphans to have them kill other people? Was Stephany such a terrifying woman?

Based on the school reunion before, I could tell that Stephany herself was a cowardly woman who was easily manipulated and had low self-esteem.

Could she have grown cruel and malignant after being pushed around for so long?

I was worried that if I continued looking into this matter, I might not be able to recover from Stephany's dirty laundry. What's worse, I might end up getting imprisoned myself before we actually found the killer.

That would really be too terrible.

"Stephie..." I saw Steven the moment I entered the living room. He seemed anxious, and it was probably because he couldn't find me anywhere after waking up.

"I'm here." I quickly calmed him down.

Steven ran over and hugged me tight. "I thought... you didn't want me anymore.

He was trembling along with his voice, as if he lived in fear every single day of his life.

"We deserve an explanation for this. We need to sustain ourselves too even though Mr. Lincoln Senior can't make the decisions anymore. What right did he have to stop providing for us?"

"Yeah. What right does a lunatic like him have to cut us off from the Lincoln family's wealth?" someone was calling out amid the commotion from the living room.

Only then did I realize that the Lincolns had come to trouble us again.

But this time, other Lincolns had come instead of Martin.

They were here for their monthly allowances.

I'd heard from Ewan that Ignatius would give these relatives allowances every month for their relation's sake, depending on how close or far-related they were.

Did Steven cut all of them off after Ignatius fell ill?

No wonder they were here causing such a scene.

I gazed at Steven, confused. “Did you stop their monthly allowances?”

Steven nodded innocently. “Why should we give them money? Spending money on dogs. is better than spending money on them.”

I took a deep breath, wanting to give him a thumbs up in agreement.

Even dogs knew to protect their owners. But these Lincolns only knew how to leech off of the family.

Plus, the Lincoln family was never responsible for supporting these people in the first place. Yet, they’d become reliant on them.

Not to mention, the Lincoln family supported them for such a long time too, but it was only for them to end up with nothing in return.

“I’m telling you, Steven, we no longer see you as part of the Lincoln family. Get out of this house right now, you lunatic, and give us everything we deserve! We won’t let you off so easily otherwise!” an elderly woman who stood at the lead yelled.

She seemed to be Ignatius’ cousin.

“Yeah! We can barely survive. You need to pay us!”

“Give us the money or I’m going to end myself!” the other Lincolns begin insisting.

Steven stood before me and gazed coldly at them. “If you can live on, then please do. But if you can’t, then die.”

The Lincolns were taken aback.

They wanted to get angry at Steven, but Steven’s crazed and fierce air was too frightening.

“You all should’ve died, but you didn’t. You guys are just like a bunch of maggots.

“Can’t you guys just go die already instead of bothering us every now and then? Do you need my help to kill you?” Steven cocked his head and gestured for Ewan to shut the front door.

It felt like Steven might start killing people the moment the door shut.

I swallowed nervously.

Steven wasn’t actually going to kill them, was he?

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Everyone was stunned.

They were clearly panicked and scared now, and they couldn't tell what Steven might do next.

Silence filled the living room.

But the silence only lasted for a few seconds before noise broke out again.

"What are you saying, you psycho?" The old woman's son-in-law wanted to strike Steve.

"The Lincoln family has no responsibility to support you guys. You've taken their kindness for granted and even come knocking down the door for the money. How thick-skinned are you guys?" I stood defensively in front of Steven.

Just then, the man who spoke earlier tried to shove me away.

However, Steven swiftly and protectively held me in his arms and kicked the man away. Don't touch her!"

Steven's fierce air was incredibly strong as he gazed coldly at the man who'd been kicked to the floor. "I can grant you the death you seek."

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Steven then took a golf club from nearby and aimed it at the man.

"Ahh!" The man yelped and flinched. "Crazy, he's crazy... He's fucking crazy! He's going to kill me!"

However, Steven's golf club didn't land on the man. Instead, he held back as he shot me a look.

He would've probably struck the man with the club if I wasn't here.

Was Steven worried that the blood and violence might scare me? Or was he worried that I might be scared of him in the future?

The old woman was scared now too. She pointed at Steve and stammered, "Y-You psycho!"

Steven sneered and used the golf club to prod at the old woman until she sat back down on the couch.

She was so scared that she was nearly getting a heart attack.

”

Steven then struck a glass pane with the golf club with all his might, shattering it.

The other Lincolns grew pale with fright and longed to escape the more hysterical Steven behaved.

"Don't go yet... Didn't you guys not want to live anymore?" Steven grinned.

It was a frightening sight.

Steven then continued breaking everything else around him.

He'd rather shatter these things into pieces than let the other Lincolns take them away.

After all, he knew they had come here today to steal things from the house.

The other Lincolns screamed and tried to escape, afraid that Steve might lose control and strike them to death with the club.

Meanwhile, Steven continued smashing the things around him hysterically.

"Do something about him, Ewan! He's lost his mind!" the old woman's daughter yelled

at Ewan.

But Ewan simply stood calmly with the other bodyguards, blocking the door.

He said apologetically, "Mr. Lincoln is certified to be insane. No one can control him once he loses his mind."

Then, Ewan calmly took out a document verifying Steve's insanity from his coat pocket.

The other Lincolns were scared out of their wits. They screamed and cried and tried to run to safety.

The old woman's son-in-law especially, had become extremely frightened the moment Steven shoved him to the floor.

"He's crazy, Mom! He's crazy! Run for your lives!"

The living room was in chaos.

The son-in-law shoved Ewan away and ran out the door, abandoning the old woman and his wife.

The old woman was then supported by her daughter as they fled to safety.

"You psycho! The Lincoln family is ruined in your hands, you madman!"

"It's ruined for good!"

Silence soon befell the living room as everyone left.

I silently opened my mouth before giving Steven a thumbs up.

Only madness could defeat madness, it seemed.

Steven tossed away the golf club he was holding. Then, a pitiful look immediately surfaced in his eyes as he said, "I'm scared, Stephanie... I'm scared they'll try to steal our things."

My lips twitched.

Who was the one who should be scared right now?

I know I sure was.

Ewan then explained, “Mrs. Lincoln, these other relatives of the Lincolns have always been taken care of by the family. They used to get monthly allowances ranging from ten thousand to fifty thousand a month when Mr. Lincoln Senior was around.

“But it’s a pity they weren’t grateful for what they were given. So, Mr. Lincoln cutting them off was a reasonable action.

I nodded. “You’re right to not give them the money. There’s no point supporting them. given the way they are.”

Ewan nodded.

“But they’re still part of the Lincoln family. If they go and support Martin instead... “I

looked at Ewan.

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“Rest assured, they’re just nobodies to the Lincoln family,” Ewan replied in an indifferent tone.

Meanwhile, Steven was still holding my hand, feeling upset. Then, he deliberately showed me the cut that he got while smashing the glass. “Stephie... It hurts.”

I took a glance at the wound on his hand.

It was bleeding, but it wasn’t as serious as the wounds he’d inflicted on himself the last time.

“I’ll get the first aid kit,” I said.

Then, I led Steven to the couch and sat him down before carefully tending to his wounds.

But suddenly, Steven leaned in close to me and sniffed.

At the next moment, a menacing glint appeared in his eyes for a brief moment before quickly disappearing. “Stephie... You met up with Michael.”

I stared at Steven in disbelief.

How did he know that?

“You got his smell—bad smell.” Steven frowned.

I sniffed myself and glanced at him.

Did he have the nose of a dog or something?

“He...” But before I could explain, Steven suddenly pressed my head to his and kissed me.

I struggled to push him away, aware that Ewan and the others were still present with us. However, Ewan nonchalantly turned around and led everyone out of the room. He even closed the door!

I continued to push Steven away. But after failing to, I found myself struggling for breath. from his kiss.

But it wasn't even a kiss! It felt more like a punishment that left me gasping for air!

"Steve... "I called his name, getting a little nervous and scared.

Something was wrong with him.

"Steve" exclaimed in annoyance, still unable to push him away.

However, Steven simply lifted me up and headed upstairs despite his bleeding hand.

"Steve" I cried again. But for fear of falling, I dared not struggle too much. "I just happened to bump into him on the street. It's not like I wanted to see him or anything. He's just like a lingering ghost!"

I tried to explain myself to Steven, but his mood remained gloomy.

I knew that he could be emotional and sometimes unpredictable, but... he was really frightening me now.

"Steven... What are you doing?" I cautiously asked, worrying that he might lose control if I somehow provoked him.

Michael was right being with a lunatic meant that you'd never know when you might end up getting strangled to death by him one day.

But despite my cries, Steven simply ignored me and carried me into the room.

After that, he started to take off my clothes in a fit of pique.

"Steve" I struggled, impulsively slapping him on the face in the process.

Suddenly, Steven stared at me, looking aggrieved. Then, he tightly hugged me again, saying.

"Stephie... you're mine, mine..."

His voice was trembling as he lifted my face. And as he did so, the blood from the back of his hand stained my skin—feeling both searing and scalding.

For some reason, Steven's quivering and pleading eyes deeply broke my heart.

At the same time, a voice in my mind kept telling me to hold him and soothe him, telling me that he was actually easily pleased.

Then, Steven suddenly lost control and clutched me as tight as he could. He then apologized, mumbling, "I'm sorry, Stephie... It's all my fault. They locked me up, so you went to look for me, didn't you? But you couldn't find me anywhere... So, you're punishing me now, aren't you?"

Was he referring to the time when he was locked in the asylum for one and a half years?

“Stephie... They deserve to die... They deserve to die!” Steven cried.

I originally intended to pet his head to calm him down, but at his words, my fingers

stiffened, and my hand froze in mid-air.

Despite his uncontrollable shivering, his violent demeanor continued to frighten me.

“Steve... Have you ever... been involved in killing people before?” I asked in a hoarse voice.

But Steven didn’t answer and simply kept tightly holding onto me.

“Steve, I’m suddenly... curious to know more about you,” I said as I put my hand on his

head and stroked his hair.

His hair was soft, and it smelled like shampoo.

Just as Steven had said to Zion—what was the murderer’s motive?

Perhaps I had been heading in the wrong direction all this while. I was too fixated on identifying the murderer. But perhaps I should’ve focused on uncovering the motive behind the killings instead.

I needed to unravel the truth about the fire at the orphanage. I needed to pay the doctor at the asylum a visit and find out what Steven had really gone through all this time.

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Suddenly, I grew curious about Steven and the history we had between us.

While I was certain that Steven knew Stephanie Carlson, I had no memory of him myself. In fact, not only had I forgotten about him, but I also couldn’t recall anything related to the orphanage.

When did I start losing my memory? And when did I ask Steven to wait for me at the orphanage?

Did I have something to do with... whatever Steven had gone through?

There were so many questions waiting to be answered.

Meanwhile, trouble was brewing within the Lincoln Group.

Since both Ignatius and James were unavailable, Steven was the only rightful person to manage the Lincolns’ affairs.

However, Martin and his associates wouldn’t easily allow Steven to take over the company.

Hence, Martin had deliberately spread rumors within the company that Steven was mentally ill and rallied all the executives and directors to oppose Steven together, intending to force him to relinquish management control.

“Mr. Lincoln, there’s an urgent matter at the company that requires your attention. I’m afraid you’ll have to come with me,” Ewan stated as he knocked on the door.

Steven reluctantly lifted his head and looked at me. “Stephie... They’re annoying,” he said impatiently, as if he wished for all those people to disappear for good.

“Do you want me to go accompany him.

with you?” I tried to get up and put on my clothes so I could

But Steven shook his head, the red marks of my slap still starkly apparent on his fair complexion. “Stephie, wait at home.”

So, I looked away and said, “Just listen to whatever Ewan says, and don’t be stubborn or rash.”

Steven nodded and left the room.

I was now certain that Steven’s sudden change of expression wasn’t merely my imagination.

He definitely displayed a different demeanor with me compared to when he was with other people. Even the air around him would change.

As Steven stepped out the door, even his silhouette seemed imposing.

Suddenly, my phone buzzed.

It was from an unknown number.

I answered the call.

“Stephany, it’s me, Yasmin.”

I was surprised that Yasmin had called me.

Her voice shook with rage and hatred as she said, “Are you with Michael? You shameless woman! Do you think you can steal him from me by pretending to be Stephanie Carlson?”

“He’s not answering my calls! Tell him to pick up!” Yasmin shouted hysterically, demanding to see Michael.

“You called me to ask for Michael? Are you nuts?” I sneered.

I had never seen Yasmin in such an uncertain and insecure state before.

But served her right!

When she used to taunt me, she would brim with confidence, convinced that Michael would always love her and only her.

But too bad for her, she now had a formidable opponent, and this meant that she couldn’t be as domineering as before.

Finally, she got a taste of what I had endured!

“Get Michael on the phone!” Yasmin shouted in a panic, almost as if she was threatening

1. me.

I chuckled and mimicked the tone that she once used with me, “Oh, Michael? He’s in the shower at the moment, so he can’t take your call.”

I remembered the time when I fainted from severe abdominal pain and heavy bleeding. and was rushed to the hospital.

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At the time, I needed the money for my treatment. So, I called Michael, hoping that he would come and help me.

But where was he at that moment?

He was throwing an extravagant party at a luxury hotel with Yasmin.

However, I kept persistently calling him. And in the end, Yasmin was the one who picked up the call. Then, she simply told me in a mocking tone that Michael was in the shower and couldn’t answer my call.

Hmph... Now the tables have turned.

Yasmin was on the verge of losing her mind as she hysterically screamed at me,

Stephany Larson, do you really think he loves you? The person he loved was Stephanie Carlson! You’re just a substitute, a fake who can never replace her!

“He’s only interested in you because you look like her. But he’ll dump you sooner or later!

I rubbed my ears,
feeling rather amused.

I hadn’t expected Yasmin to claim that Michael was in love with Stephanie.

How ironic.

“Are you done? I’m hanging up now. All your bullshit is soiling my ears.” I’d heard enough of her nonsense, so I wanted to hang up the phone.

Then, Yasmin said, “You really think that I can’t prove your connection to the murderer? Just you wait and see, Stephany. Even if I had to die, I’ll drag you down to hell with me.”

She gritted her teeth, continuing to delude herself, saying “Keep laughing while you can. I saved Michael’s life, so even if it were just out of gratitude, he’ll continue to financially support me. He won’t abandon me just like that. You’re nothing but his new toy.”

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“Okay, good for you. All the best.” I said before immediately hanging up the phone.

I wanted to make sure that Yasmin would continue to suffer and spend the rest of her days in horror and doubt.

But there was no rush.

After all, I had to slowly exact my revenge and relish every moment of it.

Yasmin had to taste a hundredfold of the suffering I endured before justice was served.

“Mr. Lincoln sure cares about Mrs. Lincoln... He hasn’t eaten all day, and all he’s done is wait for her to return. He even insisted that if Mrs. Lincoln doesn’t come home, then he wouldn’t eat anything either.”

When I went downstairs, I overheard the nannies discussing how Steven hadn’t eaten all day.

Apparently, he had been waiting for me since he woke up from his nap after breakfast. He’d even skipped lunch and simply kept waiting for me.

I sighed and walked out of the house.

Why was Steven so obsessed with waiting for me? What was his relationship to me in the past?

“Sorry for the sudden call, Howard. But I have some questions regarding our time at school that I’d like to discuss with you. Yes, it’s work-related.”

After leaving the house, I called Howard. I wanted to start my investigation at the orphanage and find out what actually happened there.

“Sure, let’s meet at the cafe at the corner then,” Howard said.

So, I walked out of the Lincoln residence and hailed a cab. Then, as I got into the cab, I deliberately glanced at the rearview mirror.

It seemed like I was being followed by a black car.

“Please take a left turn at the junction in front,” I instructed the cab driver.

Then, the black car took a left turn too.

“Turn right,” I instructed the driver again.

The black car followed suit.

Then, I asked the driver to drop me at a random place.

Once more, the car stopped somewhere nearby too.

Obviously, the people in the car were tailing me. So, for fear of dragging Howard into any trouble, I decided not to head straight to the cafe yet.

After all, Howard was also a member of the orphanage, though his number was quite far down the list, and it would still take some time before the murderer could find him.

As I got out of the cab, I pulled out my makeup mirror under the guise of freshening up. Then, as I discreetly glanced behind me, a few men emerged from the black car.

They blended into the crowd while keeping their eyes on me.

After that, I went into a washroom, tied my hair up, and then seamlessly blended in with a group of women to make my exit. And before the men could realize, I quickly left the place.

I had no idea who they were, but they definitely weren't friendly people. I also doubted that they were sent by the Lincolns to protect me.

After I'd beaten up the person who was supposed to protect me the last time, Ewan started giving me a heads-up whenever he sent anyone to follow me. So, if he had sent these men, he would have told me about them.

In other words, these were not Ewan's men.

After making sure that I wasn't being followed, I entered the mall and left through the backdoor.

Only then did I head to the cafe.

When I entered the cafe, Howard was already there.

He greeted me and said in a low voice, "Stephany, how have you been doing lately? Sir told me to beware of you. He said you might betray us." Howard seemed rather anxious.

I felt my chest tightened.

What did he mean? I might betray them?

Chapter 169

"I might betray you?" I tried to be as calm as possible. "No way...."

Howard sighed in relief. "I doubted it too. No way you would betray us,"

My palms started to sweat as I clenched my fingers and said, "So, Howard, any instructions from... Sir lately?"

Who was this "Sir" anyway?

"Our recent operations haven't been going smoothly. Sir had requested for some funds. several times, but all have been denied. Some kids even got beaten up too. And without the funds, we can't locate the children's biological parents."

Howard sighed and continued, "Sir mentioned that now that you've married into a wealthy family, you're preoccupied with your upper class lifestyle. He thinks that you've lost interest in the children and might even betray us.

"Children?" I found myself asking. I didn't get what he was saying.

“When we rescued those trafficked children, we made some enemies. Those people came yesterday and smashed Sir’s windows,” Howard said with a frightened expression. Those guys are crazy!”

I stared at Howard for a long while.

So... Stephany, Howard, and this “Sir” saved a group of trafficked children? Were they some sort of charity organization?

Stephany’s secrets never failed to surprise me.

“Howard, um... sorry. Actually, I fell sick a few days ago and somehow lost my memories after I woke up. That’s why it took me a while to come find you. If I’ve caused any delays... “I said guiltily.

“Oh, so you were sick. That explains it.” Howard waved his hand and said, “No worries. I’ll talk to Sir and clear things up.”

“Sir is...”

“Sir is a good person. He never complained when he supported the both of us in the past. And now, he’s fully devoted to these children too, so we should help out however we can,

Howard comforted me.

Chantes Tax

“Oh, by the way, Stephany... How did you suddenly end up marrying that... lunatic from the Lincoln family?” Howard looked at me warily. There was a clear sense of fear in his eyes when he mentioned Steven.

“You know... He’s probably a murderer,” Howard whispered to me.

But I pretended that I didn’t understand what he was saying, “Why?” I asked.

What made him think that Steven was a murderer?

“Well... It’s a long story.” Howard scratched his head. “You know, I was an orphan. I was adopted by my foster parents when I was in my teens. Later on, my foster parents went bankrupt, and life was tough up until I met Sir.”

“I used to stay in the same orphanage with that lunatic. Steve used to be a genius, but then he went mad.” Howard gave a vague explanation.

“Actually, that’s what I wanted to talk to you about today. Can you tell me more about. Steve?” I said, gazing at Howard with a serious expression.

That day at the class reunion, I could tell that Howard was a person with some leadership skills and was actively involved in charity work. Hence, I assumed he wasn’t a bad person.

But what on earth actually happened at that orphanage?

“You’ve heard about that serial killer case too, haven’t you? All those victims were from our orphanage.” Howard stared at me.

I nodded. “Aren’t you scared, Howard? I heard that the murderer specifically targeted the people from the orphanage.”

“Oh, come on. I’ve done nothing wrong, and I’ve never hurt those people either. They have no reason to kill me,” Howard confidently replied. “But those victims deserved it.”

I looked at Howard curiously.

“The first victim’s name was Mandy Fry. She was the leader of the bullies in our class. She enjoyed picking on people, especially those who joined the orphanage later than her. Whoever disobeyed her would be in big trouble.”

Then, Howard glanced around and said, “She was the first victim. And I saw from the news that her death was the most gruesome one too. Her stomach was full of bugs! It seemed like she died in pain.”

I swallowed hard.

I’d also heard that the first victim’s death was the most brutal one. And when the police found the body, it had already been devoured by insects and was beyond recognition.

“When I was at the orphanage, I saw with my own eyes that... she ordered her underlings to hold Simmy down and force him to eat bugs,” Howard said in a low voice.

Then, he said, “Simmy was a genius. He joined the orphanage later than Mandy and was weak and skinny. So, Mandy enjoyed picking on him. She even ordered some guys to strip him naked so the bugs would bite him.”

So, Howard was a witness,

But why didn’t he tell the police about this? Surely Zion must have talked to him.

“Did you tell the police about... all this?” I asked nervously.

Howard’s expression shifted slightly. Then, he nodded. “I told the police when they questioned me. They suspected Simmy, but Simmy had died long ago in that fire!”

So, this clue was a dead end.

Chapter 170

I took a deep breath and glanced at Howard. “Then Steve...”

“Steve arrived at the orphanage before Mandy. He was abandoned there when he was little. Steve was a loner and didn’t have any friends, but whenever he was bullied, he made sure to retaliate. And as a result, Mandy didn’t dare to mess with him even though she really wanted to.”

Then, Howard paused for a moment, deep in thought, before saying, “If my memory serves me right, Mandy had once targeted Steve because he had helped Simmy out of the blue. And from that moment on, Simmy began following Steve everywhere while Steve made sure to keep him safe from Mandy.

“So, since Mandy couldn’t get her hands on Simmy, she deliberately put bugs into Steve’s pasta as revenge toward him.”

I clenched my fists.

That Mandy girl was such a bitch!

“Guess what happened next,” Howard said with a mysterious tone. “Steve didn’t say a word to Mandy and simply grabbed her head and pressed it into his pasta. Then, he forced her to finish the whole plate in front of everyone.

“And ever since that incident, Mandy would flee whenever she caught sight of Steve.”

I nodded in understanding.

So, Simeon was very attached to Steven and saw him as his savior. And Steven was very protective of Simeon too.

Not to mention, the both of them were the geniuses of the orphanage and were selected to join the junior class.

Then, Howard continued, “The second victim was Hailey Lynch. She was Mandy’s underling and the most disgusting person in our class.

“She was the one who caught those bugs for Mandy. But aside from that, she’d also done a bunch of other shady stuff for her. That’s why she was found dead with her hands cut off and tongue pulled out.”

According to the police, the second victim’s hands and tongue were detached when she was alive, so she must have died in great pain too.

I clasped my hands tightly and took a sip from the cup.

I couldn’t help but feel disgusted and frightened—but regardless, this was simply a natural physiological reaction..

But as I listened to Howard’s description of the victims, I noticed a pattern—they were all bad people.

“The murderer has been killing people from the orphanage, but he has never laid a finger on Steve...” I murmured.

Based on my memories before my death, I was certain that the murderer must have had some kind of connection with Steve.

And for now, Simeon was still on the top of my list of suspects.

Besides, was he truly dead? Was that burned body really Simeon's?

"That's why I said that Steve might be the killer. You should stay away from him. There's just something eerie about that guy. Ever since I first laid eyes on him, I've felt that he was creepy." Howard shivered.

"Howard, do you know Stephanie Carlson?" I glanced at him and asked.

Howard momentarily froze with his coffee in hand when he heard Stephanie's name.

Then, there was a sudden silence.

"Stephanie? Nice person." That was his comment about me.

All of them knew me, yet I had no memory of any of them.

"Back then, no one was willing to fund the orphanage, and only Stephanie's father kept funding us. Stephanie was a nice person too. Her father used to bring her to visit us at the orphanage and play with us." Howard took a sip of the coffee, his gaze somewhat unfocused.

I stared at Howard.

Something told me that I couldn't believe everything he was saying.

When he spoke, his gaze would wander, and this suggested to me that he was hiding something.

On top of that, when he talked about the orphanage, he seemed overly enthusiastic, as if he intentionally wanted me to know about it.

"Wow, look at the time! Anyway, I'm glad you're alright. I'll clear things up for you with Sit. If you have time, let's do some charity work again sometime," Howard said after glancing at the time.

Inodded.

Then, Howard quickly stood up and left in a hurry,

After he left, I followed him and saw him glance around cautiously before walking into an alley,

"I told her everything... Just like what you told me to do," Howard spoke nervously, his voice trembling with fear.

"You know what to say, and what not to, don't you?" the man he was talking to replied in a low, hoarse voice.

Meanwhile, I hid in a corner to get a good look at the man.

But suddenly, my body tensed up.

The man who was talking to Howard... was Ewan!