

After Death 181

Chapter 181

I understood that Aunty Lois was planning to ruin Steven in the same manner as we did Michael.

I took a deep breath and got up from the couch. I wanted to ask Steven about the animal abuse.

However, when I turned around, Steven was already sitting on the stairs. He gazed at me with reddened eyes, as if he were deeply aggrieved.

“Stephie...” Steven said softly, “Don’t settle it in private.”

“Michael won’t go down so easily. He’ll definitely fight back. In the worst-case scenario, he’ll only be detained for 15 days,” I told Steven.

Despite its significant impact on the Ford Group, this incident wouldn’t result in severe punishment for Michael.

“Detained for 15 days...” Steven seemed rather excited about it.

As long as Michael faced the music, he would be happy as a lark.

“Do you think the Ford family would just sit back and watch?” I sighed and sat next to Steven. “You don’t want to mess with The Ford family, especially Aun-

“Especially Mrs. Ford. It’s not the 15-day detainment that concerns them, it’s the impact of this incident on the company.”

Steven wrapped his arms around his legs and hunched over them with a pitiful expression. He looked like a huge abandoned dog.

I stared at him with a complicated gaze before saying, “When you... have an episode, do you abuse animals?”

Steven was startled as he looked back at me in silence. I noticed that his eyes were somewhat emotional too.

Was he aggrieved? Depressed? Or perhaps, upset?

Was he accusing me of not trusting him?

“Then how do you explain this photo?” I showed him the photo that Aunty Lois had sent

to me.

Steven glanced at the photo and looked up at me. “If I say no, will Stephie believe me?”

Honestly, it was difficult for me to blindly believe him when the proof was right there in front of me. And I was also aware that he was incapable of controlling himself during his episodes.

“Steve... The Ford family will exploit this to the fullest in their publicity. They will attack you for your mental illness and blow it out of proportion...” I lowered my head, dreading how cruel the ensuing public opinion could be toward Steven.

But lucky for him, he seldom checked his phone. Otherwise, he would be in another level of hell.

Shortly after, Aunty Lois sent me an article. It was a post published the year before, and the title was about paying attention to stray animals.

The article discussed the common occurrence of animal abuse among the homeless population and had a picture of Steven holding a kitten covered in blood attached next to

1. it.

The article was highly critical, likely written by a journalist, and nearly reduced the homeless population to being utterly worthless.

The post had received millions of views when it went viral that year.

I didn’t know how Steven went through it.

Public opinion sure could be a double-edged sword.

“Stephie... You don’t trust me, do you?” Steven’s voice was hoarse, as if he was on the verge of losing it again.

He grabbed my arm, searching my eyes for a sense of trust. However, upon finding nothing, disappointment washed over him.

Steven lowered his head as his eyes gradually reddened. Then, with tears streaming down his face, he stood up and left.

“Steve...” Instinctively, I reached out and held his hand, hoping for an explanation.

But Steven seemed to be very sensitive about the cat abuse incident.

“Steve?” I called again, but he ignored me and ran off to the room.

This was the first time I had seen him react so emotionally in front of me.

I rubbed my temples.

Honestly, anyone would feel suspicious after seeing that article and photo. So, Steven. couldn’t blame me for doubting him, especially since he refused to explain himself.

But I was just worried.

I was worried that he might get hurt by the public opinion the Ford family was about to instigate.

So, I searched for the incident about a homeless teenager abusing a cat that occurred in the previous year.

As expected, there were numerous photos and videos in the search results.

In one of the videos, the videographer bumped into Steven in the alley and struck Steven with a stone and a stick.

After that, Steven huddled in a corner and was tightly clutching onto something. His forehead and body were grimy, and there were traces of blood on him.

I was aware that Steven had suffered a lot during his days as a homeless person, but I had no idea that he had been through this much.

He could have fought back...

“Why didn’t you fight back?” I murmured in a hoarse voice.

Chapter 182

I quickly sifted through the online news and stumbled upon a dissenting voice.

It was a video with very few views that had spoken up for Steven.

In the video, the blogger followed Steven and recorded him, asserting that Steven was trying to rescue the stray cat rather than harm it.

However, the media misinterpreted Steven’s actions with their own distorted interpretation, and Steven couldn’t even defend himself because he struggled with communication.

Obviously, someone had deliberately suppressed the visibility of this post, resulting in its low traffic. And low traffic meant fewer people would learn the truth.

The blogger who posted the video had also only published this one post.

I frowned and went to look for Ewan.

If the Ford family planned to suppress the negative publicity surrounding the Ford Group by instigating public opinion about Steven’s mental illness and cat abuse incident, then we had to be ready for it.

“Ewan, find this blogger for me as soon as possible. I want the complete video he’s holding.” I pinned my hopes on this blogger, hoping he possessed a complete version of the video that could prove Steven’s innocence.

In retrospect, if I had thought this through, I would have realized that the news was fake and that I had misunderstood Steven.

The fact that those stray dogs obeyed Steven’s commands to bite people indicated that Steven treated them well. So, he couldn’t have been abusing animals..

Nevertheless, I needed actual proof now.

While Ewan sent someone to look for the blogger, I sat on the couch and scrolled through the posts, hoping to find more evidence.

However, the Ford family was quick to act.

As the news of Michael's intentional assault gained increasing attention, reports about Steven, the president of the Lincoln Group, being accused of past animal abuse also went viral.

The comments from ignorant netizens immediately flooded in.

"The homeless teenage boy who abused the cat is now the president of the Lincoln Group?"

"Is the Lincoln Group out of its mind? They actually chose a homeless guy to be their president?"

"The Lincoln Group might as well pick me as their president. These suckers are going bankrupt soon!"

Not surprisingly, the netizens couldn't wait to see how the mighty had fallen.

Their attacks and insults impacted the Lincoln Group in no time.

The Lincoln Group's PR swiftly issued a statement, saying, "We, at The Lincoln Group, will thoroughly investigate this matter and provide everyone with an explanation."

Then, calls from the executives of the Lincoln Group started pouring into the Lincoln family.

Ewan calmly answered the calls one after another despite each call being accompanied by scolding and cursing.

I bit my finger. I knew that I wouldn't have a moment of peace that night.

Should the controversy continue to escalate, Martin's people would undoubtedly show up the next morning to pressure Steven to resign in response to the accusations. They would also force him to relinquish his shares and leave the Lincoln Group.

Suddenly, my phone buzzed.

It was a call from Aunty Lois.

"Ms. Larson, have you thought it over yet? Are you ready to settle it in private now?" Aunty Lois asked, assuming that I would compromise.

I glanced at the room upstairs and firmly refused her, saying, "Never." I'd rather go down swinging than compromise.

Aunty Lois hung up the phone without saying a word.

Perhaps she thought it was childish of me. But I had my pride to maintain, so I couldn't care less.

"Mrs. Lincoln, we've gotten in touch with the blogger. He has the complete video, but

since he's an independent content creator, he requested exposure and support in exchange for releasing the video."

I nodded. "He can be the first to release the video. We'll help him increase visibility."

Ewan nodded in agreement.

Soon, the whole raw truth went viral.

The video revealed that someone was abusing the kitten, but Steven drove the abuser away. Then, he carefully took the injured kitten and rushed it to the nearby vet.

However, several vets had turned him away. And this resulted in him having to helplessly watch as the kitten took its last breath in his hands.

Then, the video showed Steven kneeling on the ground, overwhelmed by the feelings of loss, despair, and fear...

My heart tightened as I watched the video.

Then, I left this matter to Ewan and went to see Steven.

I knocked on the door, but he didn't answer.

"Steve? I'm sorry..." I said softly outside the door, "I was wrong about you, Steve."

The door opened.

Steven stood in the dimly lit room and said to me with eyes glittering with expectation, "Then sleep with me, Stephie."

I was startled by his words.

Then, Steve reached his hand out to me and said with reddened eyes, "Stephie, hug me, pamper

Suddenly, my phone buzzed.

It was Zion.

"Stephanie! Michael's mother was hit by a car on her way to the police station! She's still in the ER, and the person who hit her... claims it was Steven who ordered it."

Stunned by the sudden news, I instinctively glanced at Steven.

Chapter 183

"Our men are on their way to bring Steve in for questioning," Zion said.

I hung up the phone and stared at Steven.

If he was the one who ordered the hit, would the driver have given out his name that easily?

Besides, Steven usually let Ewan handle things on his behalf, and Ewan would never mention Steven's name.

It was evident that the driver had framed Steven by alleging that he'd ordered him to hit Auntie Lois with a car.

Zion must have also been aware that Steven was framed, so he called me in advance to give me a heads-up.

Since Michael would only face a maximum of 15 days of detention, Auntie Lois had no reason to stage this accident and jeopardize her own life.

Could it be that someone was attempting to provoke tension between the Lincolns and the Fords?

"Michael's mother was hit by a car, so I'm heading to go to the hospital now. Stay home and wait for me, okay?" I was worried about what those ignorant netizens and the people behind this accident might do if they found Steven leaving the house.

If the feud between the Fords and the Lincolns escalated because of Steven, his position within the Lincoln family would inevitably be affected.

Not to mention, Martin would have the last laugh, and he'd be able to openly confront Steven without facing any condemnation.

"Stephie..." Steven wanted to follow me.

"Be a dear and stay home, okay?" I reminded him again. "Wait for me at home."

Steven's gaze turned dark, as if he were panicking. "You won't lie to me this time... right?"

But I knew that what he was trying to express was-

-"You'll come back to me, won't you?"

I was startled for a moment. Then, I shook my head and replied, "No, I won't. I'll be back

before you know it.

"Okay." Steven nodded obediently. "Then, I'll wait. I'll wait for you until you're home."

At this, I felt a sudden tightness in my chest.

Nevertheless, I turned away from Steven and requested Austin to arrange for someone to drive me to the hospital.

Michael was still in police custody. But if he found out that his mother was badly injured in a car accident when he got released, he would undoubtedly go berserk again.

When I got downstairs, I saw Ewan going upstairs with a solemn expression. Then, I glanced back and saw Steven standing in the shadows on the dimly lit second floor.

I couldn't see his expression clearly, but there was an intimidating and ominous air about him.

Just then, I noticed my shoelaces had come loose, so I squatted under the stairs to tie

them.

“Michael seems to be bored out of his mind lately,” came Steven’s low voice.

Ewan nodded in agreement. “It appears so.”

Apparently, someone had staged this incident.

“Keep an eye on her. If anything ever happens...”

I caught fragments of Steven and Ewan’s conversation from downstairs.

Steven’s voice sounded cold. It was completely different from the tone he used when speaking with me.

But I thought that perhaps I was just hearing things, so I stood up on my tiptoes to get a better look. However, when I did, they were already gone.

Was Steven truly a real dimwit?

“Mrs. Lincoln, your driver is here,” the nanny informed me.

Before I got into the car, I instinctively glanced at a corner. I could tell that someone had been watching me lately.

I suspected that Martin and his people might be up to something to get rid of the baby in my belly, so I’d been waiting for them to make their move.

However, although I could sense that I was being watched, never once had anyone come to hurt me.

Something told me that while someone was trying to kill me and my baby, there were also people secretly protecting me.

Otherwise, Martin and Dax should have targeted me a long time ago.

Aunt Lois was taken to the Huma Hospital.

Although she was still unconscious, her condition had stabilized.

I sighed in relief when I visited her in the ward. Then, I anxiously asked the doctor, “When will she regain consciousness, doctor?”

“Maybe tomorrow. She suffered a concussion, but she should be fine,” the doctor briefly explained before leaving.

Zion waited outside, his face filled with concern. “This is clearly a setup. Despite the lack of evidence, they still think it was Steven who orchestrated the accident. And Michael might believe that it was Steven too.”

When Michael got out of jail, he would surely hate Steven even more.

“If he had any common sense, he’d realize that this was a setup,” I remarked, feeling a

bit ticked off.

“If he had any sense, he wouldn’t have let Stephanic die.” Zion furrowed his brow.

Taken aback, I remained silent.

Zion was right.

“Thank goodness, Lois is fine.” Zion glanced toward the ward.

“I looked into that guy, Simon Foley. He’s been up to a lot of petty theft, but when it comes to murder, it’s unlikely. Without solid evidence, we gotta cut him loose,” Zion said, looking apologetic.

“There’s just something off about him,” I murmured. “He’s barely a teenager, but he seems way more mature than that, and...”

I couldn’t explain the frightening aura that surrounded him, nor could I tell Zion that I was certain I’d seen him before my death.

But at this moment, I couldn’t even trust my own memories, especially given the semi-conscious state I was in before my death.

“There’s definitely something off about Simon. I’ll keep my eye on him,” Zion said, giving me a quick glance. “The doctor from the asylum where Steven got knocked out confirmed that he’s got some serious mental illness, the dangerous kind.

“Steven might go to extremes to hold onto what he wants, whether it’s things or people. And right now, it seems like we’re dealing with more than one murderer, and it’s organized. In fact, Steven could be the ringleader, so we can’t completely rule him out.”

I fell silent.

“If the evidence eventually points to Steven being the mastermind, what would you do?” Zion asked me.

Chapter 184

“I’m not sure...” I dodged the question. I didn’t know what I’d do if Steven turned out to be the mastermind behind everything.

Before, it was due to insufficient evidence. But what if they managed to gather all the evidence?

“If Simon is truly one of the murderers, and Steven has been secretly sheltering him, he wouldn’t be able to shake off our suspicion.” Zion looked at me, seemingly wanting to tell me more, yet hesitating at the same time.

I knew there were things that, as a cop, he couldn’t tell me, especially things regarding their investigation.

Even though there were numerous truths and evidence unknown to me, he still couldn't disclose them.

But now that Zion had specifically brought up these matters, I started to feel uneasy.

Could there be actual evidence pointing to Steven?

I nervously looked at Zion. "Have you found something?"

Zion remained silent for a while before speaking, "This case is a major concern for the higher-ups, it's a serial murder case, and with so many deaths... Our heads are all on the line."

I tightly clenched my hands, not knowing what Zion meant by this.

Would they just blame everything on Steven if there was evidence that he was at the crime scene?

"Many people's fate is hinging on this, so we can't tolerate further loss of life." Zion leaned against the door of the emergency exit. He wanted to light a cigarette, but he gave

after glancing at me.

up

He said, "Steven was a victim back then, so he has sufficient motive to commit the crime.

"If he possessed a motive for the crime, he wouldn't surrender himself. He's not that foolish!" I didn't know why I was defending Steven. After all, he was the one I suspected the most too in the beginning.

I could tell that there were things that Zion was hesitating to tell me. Yet, I wasn't someone he could trust.

"Stephany, you should understand that you're also one of the primary suspects we're investigating."

Indeed, Zion must have thoroughly investigated me as well.

"Stephany, I hope... you're not involved in this," Zion sighed and looked at me meaningfully.

I instinctively looked at him.

They must have found something.

"Stephany? Come with us for questioning," the cops said when they arrived.

I was caught off guard, but I had seen this day coming.

After all, Stephany had been quietly funding those homeless orphans like Jean Chester. And since Jean's brother, Cyrus Chester, failed to assassinate Yasmin, it would eventually drag me into the mess.

"Zion..." I whispered. "Can I contact Steven? He's waiting for me at home."

Act Fast: Free Bonus Time is Running Out!

Chapter 185

Zion glanced at his colleagues with a complex expression and said, "Sorry... It's not our team's investigation now, so... I can't say much."

Deep down, I sensed that there must have been some internal reorganization among them since Zion hadn't found the real culprit yet.

Hence, the case remained unresolved.

"Zion... Please reach out to Steven for me. He'll be worried if I don't come home. Just let

me speak with him, I'm begging you," I said, looking at Zion anxiously.

Zion was about to speak when Phil interrupted.

"Officer Landon is under investigation too, so don't further drag him into the mess," Phil whispered to me.

I glanced at Zion in shock.

Why was he being investigated too?

"Officer Landon... got reported," Phil muttered.

I drew in a deep breath.

The convergence of all these events at this particular moment was definitely not a coincidence.

It appeared as if nothing was connected, but somehow, it all fit together perfectly.

So, I was taken away for questioning.

I knew that Steven would surely lose his composure and go off the rails. After all, he was and once he lost control of himself, Martin would take advantage of the

situation by spreading rumors.

all alone now,

And in the end, people would only believe what they wanted to believe.

What's more, if Michael got out of jail and learned that his mother had been hit by a car, he'd surely unleash his fury out on Steven.

"I have the right to call my lawyer. You can't just take me away like this." I said, still wanting to contact Steven. At least then, I could give him some assurance and keep him calm.

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calm. 1

Chaplet Ins

273

But the cops didn't offer me that opportunity, "We didn't come to nab you without evidence, so you better play along,"

So, I decided to go along with the investigation for now. After all, I had no idea what the cops had dug up. And I was pretty clueless about Stephany's secrets too,

I rubbed my temples, feeling helpless and frustrated,

What on earth had Stephany done?

I wasn't sure when the car arrived at the police station, but time flew by as the cops grilled me all night, asking me why I had Cyrus kill Yasmin.

"I really don't know what you're talking about." I was genuinely puzzled.

"Cyrus spilled the beans. He claimed that you were backing them up and had told him to kill Yasmin. He said that if he did so, you promised to cover Jean's medical bills," the cops said in a chilling tone, trying to pressure me.

I was startled.

Did Cyrus really say that?

Did Stephany really do that?

"No way..." I shook my head. "I couldn't have told Cyrus to go to the hospital to hurt Yasmin."

This, I was certain about.

Since I got reincarnated, I hadn't reached out to Cyrus at all. So, it couldn't have been me.

"You better spill the beans!" The cops slammed several photos on the table in front of me. "These are the photos of you helping them out, buying them food, and taking Jean to the hospital. Let's see you try to talk your way out of this."

"I was just helping them out. What's wrong with that? What evidence do you have to prove that I instructed them? I won't confess just because of someone else's words." I tried to remain calm.

"Stephany, I suggest you not to mess around. Come clean, work with our investigation, and try to get a fair deal."

"I didn't tell Cyrus to kill Yasmin. It's a misunderstanding."

Just then, before the cops could say more, another officer entered and whispered

something to the officer questioning me.

The interrogating officer then gave me a deep look before walking out.

Now, I was alone in the interrogation room, and my head was pounding.

What if Steven couldn't wait until I got back? Would he lose it?

He did seem really set on waiting for me.

I wasn't sure if Zion had told Steven about me. But if he didn't, then Steven was probably still waiting for me.

And just like that, I spent the night at the police station.

The interrogators couldn't get any evidence out of me, so they stopped asking questions as well.

Then, I slouched in the chair and dozed off.

When I woke up, a female officer said that I could leave.

"You're done questioning me?" I asked, puzzled.

But the female officer simply ignored me.

As I left the police station, I saw Zion leaning against the car, as if he were waiting for me.

"Cyrus spilled the beans. He said Carol Kent told him to kill Yasmin," Zion said grimly.

I felt a sudden panic. "Who's Carol Kent?"

"Simeon's sister," Zion replied in a low voice.

I stared at Zion in shock.

Simeon's sister?

"Don't you think... it's all too much of a coincidence?" I asked.

I get picked up by the cops, and then Cyrus confesses?

"I looked into it. Simeon was abandoned as a kid and wound up in the orphanage with Carol. Carol's got mental disabilities. How in the world could she tell Cyrus to kill Yasmin?"

Chapter 186

"There's definitely someone backing Carol up." Zion nodded. "But you're not totally in the clear yet either, so better not wander around too much for now."

I stayed silent, watching as Ewan parked the car by the roadside.

"Mrs. Lincoln, let's go home." Ewan opened the car door for me.

I got into the car and looked at Zion with mixed feelings.

In response, Zion simply waved at me.

“Mr. Bart... Lately, I’ve been feeling like someone’s been keeping tabs on me behind my back, even during the police investigation. There’s got to be someone pulling the strings, don’t you think?” I inquired.

“I’m not really sure, Mrs. Lincoln.” Ewan chose to not be truthful.

He refused to admit anything, and I felt powerless.

There was surely someone watching out for me behind my back. Otherwise, how else could I have managed to get released so quickly despite being under investigation?

I couldn’t believe it was just luck.

“Did anything happen when Steve realized that I wouldn’t come home last night?” I expressed my concern.

“Mr. Lincoln... has been waiting for you,” Ewan replied as he drove the car.

As we entered the neighborhood, I spotted Steven from a distance. He stood by the door, appearing lonely.

“He... waited for me all night?” I asked softly.

Ewan nodded. “We couldn’t convince him otherwise.”

I stepped out of the car.

I saw that Steven’s eyes were red, so he probably hadn’t slept all night. In fact, he’d probably just stood here waiting for me.

“Stephie...” He rushed forward and enveloped me in his arms as soon as I stepped out of

the car.

Although his voice remained hoarse and choked, his grasp was firm and powerful as he held onto me.

He held me close, as if he feared that I wouldn’t return. Then, he tightly cradled my head.

“I’m okay...” I raised my hand and gave Steven a comforting pat on his back,

“No one... can snatch you away from me again,” he said in a low voice, sending shivers down my spine.

“Steve... Cyrus claimed that Carol told him to kill Yasmin, but isn’t Carol mentally disabled?” I whispered, feeling increasingly uneasy,

“Yeah, she has intellectual disabilities.” Steven nodded,

“If Simeon was really behind all this, would he drag Carol into it too?” I asked.

I couldn't figure it out anymore.

The two individuals with the most compelling motives were Steven and Simeon. But Simeon was supposedly deceased. And even if it was a staged death, he wouldn't have done anything that would implicate Carol.

Could it really have been as Zion suggested? Was Steven potentially the mastermind behind it all?

Steven looked at me with a serious expression before finally speaking, "Stephie, are you hungry? Let's head home for some food." He took my hand and guided me back.

As I stared at Steven's back, my mind was in disarray.

"Steven Lincoln!"

Suddenly, a car screeched to a halt behind us.

Then, Dax stepped out and angrily glared at Steven. "You got my dad arrested by the cops, didn't you?" he asked.

Steven was bewildered and taking cover behind me. "Stephie... I have no idea what he's talking about."

"From what I know, Mr. Lincoln Senior is suspected of multiple illegal activities, and the evidence is solid.

"And given Mr. Lincoln Senior's age, I suggest you go home and figure out a solution instead of pointing fingers here," Ewan said sternly.

Dax angrily glared at Ewan and Steven. "It was you!"

"Stephie... He's being really aggressive," Steven said from behind me, his gaze still fixed

on Dax.

"Why do you think that it was Steven, Mr. Dax?" I furrowed my brows and asked.

"Hmph, you stepped into the police station, and my dad's already in trouble. Isn't it obvious?" Dax pointed angrily at Steven. "I can see through him now. He's a wolf in sheep's clothing!"

"I ended up at the police station because of you?" I cautiously looked at Dax.

However, Dax snorted and remained silent.

Clearly, he was related to these series of events too.

Meanwhile, Steven stood tall as he protectively wrapped me in his arms.

He gave Dax a cold stare. "Touch my people, and you're finished."

Dax glared at Steven with his fingers tightly clenched. "Just you wait and see."

I stared at Dax in surprise.

Did I just detect fear in the eyes of someone so fierce? Was he afraid of Steven?

I turned back to look at Steven, surprised.

He was still giving Dax a hostile glare, and it wasn't until everyone had left that he slowly regained his composure.

"The sudden events in the Lincoln family... It all happened too quickly," I whispered. "Steve, are you sure you had nothing to do with this?"

Steven didn't respond and simply continued to hold me tight.

"Stephie... I'm starving," he said hoarsely.

I couldn't discern if he was just pretending or genuinely unaware of what I'd said.

But regardless, he had stayed up all night without eating or sleeping, so he must have been hungry. So, I took him out for a meal and tucked him into bed afterward.

As I sat by the bedside, I gazed at Steven's face for quite some time.

What sort of person lay beneath this mask of his?

Then, I snuggled up beside him and drifted off into a heavy sleep.

Being pregnant made me feel sleepy, and after staying up all night in the interrogation room, I felt extremely tense.

However, nightmares still haunted my slumber.

Yet, in the haze, a comforting hand pulled me close and held me tight.

As my body gradually warmed, I found solace in a peaceful sleep.

"Mr. Lincoln, moving against Mr. Lincoln Senior now might be too rash. It could alert the enemy too soon. You shouldn't act now just because of her."

I heard Ewan's voice as I drifted in and out of sleep.

"I won't let anyone lay a finger on her," Steven said sternly.

"It's just a routine investigation, nothing too serious." Ewan sighed. "But you've revealed yourself too early. It might provoke Mr. Lincoln Senior to retaliate.

"Besides, you've been patient for so many years. You shouldn't take such risks now for her."

“What do you think I’ve been holding back all these years for? For all the dirt of the Lincoln family?” Steven sneered. “Mr. Bart, you know better than anyone what I’m after.

“Is it worth it?” Ewan asked.

“Even the gods seem to be on my side.”

“Are you absolutely sure she’s the one?” Ewan sounded anxious.

“She is,” Steven said firmly.

In my daze, I tried to open my eyes to catch what they were saying, but I was too sleepy, and my eyelids felt heavy.

The room was spacious, and Steven and Ewan were talking outside the room.

I stretched on the bed, feeling the urge to get out and see what was going on.

Just then, the door swung open, and Steven entered while holding a cupcake.

His eyes met mine, clear and bright. “Stephie... You’re awake.”

He stood where the sunlight spilled in, and the golden hue created a feeling of warmth and serenity.

Steven always had a pure and angelic quality about him.

I started to wonder if everything I had heard was just in my head, if it was all just a trick of my mind.

“Steve...” I took a moment to calm myself as I sat on the edge of the bed.

Then, Steven fetched me some warm water.

His loyal demeanor made it difficult for me to stay upset.

“How long have I been asleep?” I whispered.

“For a whole day and night,” Steven murmured beside me.

I was stunned,

I had slept for so long?

“Stephie, are you hungry?” Steven earnestly asked.

I could see that his hands were stained with fruit coloring.

I closely inspected the unattractive cupcake.

Did Steven make it himself?

He seemed to know that Stephanie enjoyed cupcakes with dragon fruit.

“I don’t really like dragon fruit,” I deliberately stated.

Steven was stunned for a moment.

Then, he spoke softly, "Have your tastes changed?"

Do preferences change too?

I remained silent, feeling inexplicably annoyed. "Just eat it yourself."

Then, I got up and headed to the bathroom.

I stared at my reflection in the mirror, feeling irritated for quite some time.

Why did I have to be reincarnated? Why was I trapped in someone else's body?

Initially, I believed that being reincarnated into Stephany's body was a second chance from above. But at some point, it turned into torment.

My soul was forcibly trapped in a body that wasn't mine, one that felt unfamiliar and perilous.

I spent quite a while in the bathroom.

When I came out, Steven was no longer in the room, but he had left the cupcake there for

1. me.

So, I walked over and took a bite.

It was sweet, yet not overly so. The flavor was quite familiar too.

Chapter 188

For a moment, I spaced out.

"Steve, are you hurt? Who messed with you?"

"They ruined the cupcake I made for you."

Some strange memories flashed through my mind.

In those memories, a little girl squatted next to a little boy. She asked the little boy why he was hurt, and the little boy simply held a broken cupcake as tears welled up in his eyes.

The little girl, dressed in a red dress, reached for the broken cupcake and took a bite. "It's so sweet."

My head throbbed as if it might burst.

I raised my hand and pounded my head, but the strange memories still stubbornly lingered.

Who were they?

"Mrs. Lincoln, are you hungry?" The nanny knocked on the door and spoke softly.

My attention was drawn back, and I stepped outside. "Where's Steven?"

The nanny glanced around and whispered, "Mr. Lincoln... has gone somewhere."

Frowning, I wondered where he had disappeared to.

“Mrs. Lincoln, I’m new here, but you could check with Ms. Ewing. She’s been with the Lincoln family for ages.”

I nodded, not wanting to trouble the
nanny
further.

Then, I headed downstairs.

Ever since James had his accident and Mr. Lincoln Senior suffered a stroke, there was quite a shake-up in the Lincoln family.

Most of the old staff were gone, except for Angel, who still ran the kitchen. However, the rest were dismissed.

“Ms. Ewing, where’s Steven?” I inquired.

I was a little irritated earlier, and I might have upset him.

“Mrs. Lincoln, it’s typical for Mr. Lincoln to leave around this time every year for a brief period of time. But he did ask me to remind you to get enough rest and to eat your meals
on time.”

So, Steven had left and wasn’t at the Lincoln residence now.

I was a bit worried since his emotions were unstable,

“Did he say where he’s gone off to?” I inquired.

Angel shook her head. “We don’t dare pry into where Mr. Lincoln goes.”

I absentmindedly took a few bites of food before heading out.

As I made my way to my destination, my mind was filled with that sudden fragment of a memory—the little girl in a red dress, and the little boy holding a broken cupcake.

“Stephie...”

The little boy’s face was blurry, but I faintly remembered a cut at the corner of his mouth as I struggled to recall the rest of his features.

Then, I sat up fast, catching my breath.

Steven. Why was Steven’s face popping into my head?

That mixed-race teenager. That pair of clear eyes.

“Mrs. Lincoln, we’re here,” the driver said, interrupting my thoughts as he parked the car.

I snapped out of my daze and stepped out of the car.

I looked around and saw that the alley was a mess. Trash was everywhere, and a nasty smell filled the air.

This was the last slum in Huma, untouched and awaiting demolition.

This was the spot where many homeless folks hung out, attracting all sorts of shady characters.

I'd come to see Carol, Simeon's sister.

As I ascended the dirty stairs, I soon reached the third floor.

Trash was everywhere in the hallway.

"Damn, you're only worth 200 for me."

In the rundown hallway, shouts and cries continuously echoed.

Anyone could tell what was going on here.

Then, the door of Room 306 was kicked open, and a man came out.

He was pulling up his pants and cursing nastily.

The man sized me up. "Hmm, never knew there was such a hot chick here."

I shot him a warning gaze. "If you don't want me to call the cops, then get lost."

The man then muttered a curse. But fortunately, he didn't stick around and left in a huff.

Room 306 was dimly lit, and only a fair-skinned woman was sitting on the bed.

She appeared somewhat off, and her face was marked with bruises.

I carefully looked around the room until my eyes landed on a photo hanging prominently on the wall.

It sent shivers down my spine.

In the photo, there were three teenagers.

I stood in the center, dressed in a red dress, and looked around 17 or 18 years old.

To my right stood Steven, tall and aloof, purposely avoiding the camera.

On my left was Simeon, looking rather unhappy as well.

I had never laid eyes on this photo before, not even during my search for information about the orphanage.

Chapter 189

If I'd once questioned whether or not Steven and I had met before, now, it was practically confirmed.

What's more, not only did I know Steven, but I also knew Simeon.

The fact that Carol had hung this photo in such a noticeable spot suggested that the bond between Steven, Simeon, and me had been pretty special.

“What’s the deal with the three of them?” I turned to Carol and asked.

She cowered in fear, murmuring, “Simmy’s... buddies.”

I stared at Steven’s photo for a long time.

Back when he was a teenager, he seemed even colder and more aloof than he was now. It was also a trait typically seen in geniuses.

But his eyes often avoided direct contact, hinting at a shyness beneath his aloof exterior.

“The cops must’ve already hit you up, huh?” I turned around and whispered.

The cops would’ve definitely talked to Carol. But the reason they hadn’t cuffed her was probably because they didn’t have enough evidence, or maybe they had something to clear her name.

Carol muttered as she hugged her knees tight. “She should die. She’s just the worst.”

“Did you have Cyrus kill Yasmin?” I walked up to the bed and questioned her.

“Yeah... It was me,” Carol replied, looking confused.

It was obvious she had some intellectual disability.

But she still confessed.

No matter what had been asked, she’d fessed up.

Maybe the cops were stuck with her too.

“Where did you get the chemical that Cyrus used to kill Yasmin?” I asked again.

Carol looked up at me. “Paraquat... kills insects, pests.”

Carol admitted to all the blame, but with her intellectual disability, lack of evidence, and a

lack of a guardian, the cops’ lead to her was just another dead end.

“Who got you the paraquat?” I asked Carol.

“Paraquat is lethal. Once it’s in the bloodstream... No way out. The body slowly breaks down, and she’ll stay wide awake till the end,” Carol muttered, holding her head, as if she was recounting someone else’s words.

Clearly, this was someone putting the idea of murder into action.

Someone had put Carol up to it and greased Cyrus’ palm to kill Yasmin.

“Who told you that?” I asked,

Carol was intellectually disabled. How could she know that once paraquat gets into the bloodstream, it's game over?

Moreover, paraquat didn't allow for any second thoughts. It just brought pain and remorse, with no chance of survival.

Hardly anyone made it out alive after downing paraquat.

Once that paraquat dripped into Yasmin's body, her blood would get tainted in no time. Her insides would also slowly turn into a fibrous mess until she couldn't breathe

anymore. She would just suffer till death.

Carol kept shaking her head. "I did it, I did it.

She wouldn't spill who it was that put her up to it, and I didn't keep pushing her either. Besides, if the cops couldn't get it out of her, there's no way I could.

All I could do now was to keep a close eye on her and figure things out on my own.

I turned around and pointed at the photo. "Hey Carol, can you tell me about the three people in this photo?"

Carol appeared eager to open up to me and showed no signs of fear.

She swiftly hopped off the bed and dashed over to the photo. "Simmy, Steve, and this one is..."

"

Carol introduced me with excitement, pointing to "Stephanie" in the red dress in the middle. Then, she looked at me with a puzzled expression and said, "It's you."

My heart skipped a beat as I stared at Carol in shock. "No, you've got it wrong. We just happen to look alike."

Chain 187

Carol shook her head, puzzled. "I remember you. W's adiowaty you blamy didn't like you at all. You were always competing with key for Geys

"... competed with him for Steve?" My nerves Hypered,

"Steve is Simmy's closest buddy, wy've been tig for forew Yowy w utw the advanced classes together,

"But Steve's always ditching Simmy to beng, one with you, may wash

but Steve shut him down," Carol said sadly "bimy was crushed cried for ages. He said you and Steve didn't want

anymore

way we m

Ma

Suddenly, Carol angrily glared at me, “Why’d you have to snatch Says away at hen set even bother to cherish him? Why’d you have to hurt them! You’re the one the loses to die!”

Carol’s words caught me off guard, and i swiftly stepped back

Then, she suddenly charged at me and gave me a shove,

I wasn’t able to keep my balance and tumbled backward. Then, my head smuded against Carol’s small stool, and the world went dark, in front of me,

I never imagined Carol could be so strong

“You’re the one who caused their deaths. You snatched Steve away from Simmy and then you dumped him. You’re so mean.”

In my daze, I kept hearing Carol’s cries,

“My name’s Stephie. What’s yours?”

“Are you hurt?”

Old memories buried deep inside my mind started coming back to me,

Behind the orphanage on the lawn, a skinny mixed–race boy was covered in wounds and hiding in the corner.

Chapter 190

The little girl in the red dress spotted him and took out a band–aid from her bag. “Does it hurt?”

The little boy shook his head, looking bewildered.

“Hey, blue–eyed little bastard! Never seen you shed a tear or crack a smile, and you act like nothing hurts!” A group of kids from the orphanage laughed and taunted as they

threw stones at Steven.

They called the little boy a bastard because he had a pair of stunning eyes, like the stars in the sky.

“Who are you calling a bastard?” The little girl in the red dress got angry. She protectively stood in front of the little boy and picked up some stones from the ground.” If you mess with him again, I’ll knock you out!”

“Hey, who’re you? Just got here? Don’t you know the orphanage rules?”

“Check out that dress she’s got on, real nice.”

“It’s brand new!”

“Once we strip her of that dress, it’s ours.”

The girls wanted the red dress the little girl was wearing. They bossed around the few boys there and told them to tear it off her.

Meanwhile, the little girl stood in place as tears streamed down her face.

The little boy observed that the girl was crying. Then, he swiftly seized a stone from the ground and aggressively tackled one of the boys, repeatedly striking him hard on the head.

The little girl in the red dress was terrified, screaming out, “Daddy! Daddy!”

Then, a figure slowly drew closer from afar, and the faces of everyone from the memory started to become distinct.

The little girl in the red dress was me when I was young, while the little boy who was fighting was Steven.

And from afar, my dad, along with Ivan Hanks, the orphanage director, were rushing toward us. “What’s going on!”

Later on, Steven was locked in the punishment room because Mr. Hanks wanted him to reflect on his behavior.

The girls who were bullying me mentioned that they liked my dress, so Dad promised to get each of them one next time.

After that, Dad lifted me up and took me away.

As we left, I noticed a teenage boy peeking at me from behind a window.

That was Steven. His eyes were unmistakable.

So, it turned out I had known Steven for a long time. But I’d just forgotten that memory.

“Steve, I have feelings for you... But I need to prepare for the college entrance exam. Once we graduate, can we be together?”

“Steve... Can you wait for me?”

Suddenly, there was a sudden intrusion from outside. I recognized the voices immediately—it was Rachel, Zion, and... Michael.

The intrusion immediately brought me back to my senses.

Wasn’t Michael supposed to be in detention? How did he get out?

“What did you do to her?” Rachel yelled at Carol and instructed Zion to call for an ambulance.

“She’s Stephanie,” Carol said from the corner. Her head tilted as she pointed at me. “I can’t be mistaken, she’s Stephanie.”

“Do you believe in ghosts, like, in this world?” Carol asked Zion and Michael, sounding a bit crazy. “She’s like a lingering spirit... She’s back to be with Simmy, to take Steve away again.”

Michael’s face turned pale as he held me tightly. “I’ll take her to the hospital!”

“Stephie, you’ll be okay. I won’t let anything happen to you.” In my daze, I heard Michael’s voice. He sounded like he was in tears.

“I won’t let anything happen to you again, I swear. I’m sorry, Stephie... I’m sorry.” “I like you...” My mind was wandering. I didn’t even realize what I was saying.

Michael’s body briefly tensed up as he struggled to make out what I was saying, as if he

was eager to hear the response he desired.

“Steve...” Yet, I found myself calling out Steven’s name.