

## After Death 221

### Chapter 221

“He ran away?” I asked with furrowed brows. I had no idea what Michael was up to now.

“Did he come looking for you?” Rachel asked.

“No, I’m currently...” I was staying in a villa Steven had rented. There was no way Michael could find his way here. I began to wonder if he had gone to the Lincoln residence instead.

“Could he have gone to the Lincoln residence?” I asked. I sat up suddenly and got out of bed to put my shoes on.

“He’d better not drop dead at the Lincoln residence’s doorstep. He’ll bring nothing but bad- luck.”

After hanging up the call, Rachel and I rushed to the Lincoln residence.

Sure enough, we saw Michael at the Lincoln residence’s entrance. He could barely stand at this point.

What was wrong with him? Why couldn’t he just stay in the hospital and recover from his injuries properly? Why did he want to see me so desperately?

Michael’s face was pale and devoid of all color. By the time he saw me, he could no longer stand on his own and had to lean against the wall for support. “Stephie....

Did he just call me Stephie again?

This psycho was looking for my past self again.

I furrowed my brows and said, “Michael Ford, don’t you dare die on my doorstep.”

Michael struggled to walk toward me. Suddenly, he hugged me tightly and said, “Oh, Stephie. I’m so sorry.”

I pushed him away, acting as if he had just electrocuted me. I glared at him angrily and asked, “What the hell is wrong with you?”

Michael couldn’t remain steady on his feet, so he fell to the ground. The wound on his abdomen started bleeding again. The blood soaked through his shirt.

“I... shouldn’t have doubted you,” he said. He seemed convinced that I was Stephanie Carlson. I figured he was probably the same as Steven. These men were turning to me to console themselves.

“You’ve got the wrong person,” I said in a deep voice.

“I know you’re Stephie. When I was dying, I saw Stephanie,” Michael said softly. He sounded as if he had gone mad.

I was taken aback to hear that. I suddenly panicked and asked, “What are you saying?”

Who did he say he saw?

“Stephany...” Michael murmured in disbelief. Everything that happened felt like a dream to

him.

However, Michael firmly believed that the dream he had was real.

He believed that Stephanie hadn’t died and that her soul had reincarnated into Stephany’s body.

I took a deep breath and glanced around subconsciously.

“It might’ve just been a dream, but at least let me do something to make it up to you...

Michael’s voice was hoarse when he spoke.

Regardless of whether I was Stephanie or not, it was clear that Michael wanted to make up for his guilt toward her through me.

I had to admit that his behavior irked me.

“Stephie, please believe me. I can offer you whatever Steven can as well,” Michael said.

His gaze b

urned into me. He then reached out to me anxiously. “Stephie, will you please come back to me? If you still insist on using Steven... you can use me the same way too.”

It sounded as if he was begging for me to use him.

I sneered and took a step back from him.

I had been completely devoted to Michael once upon a time. I was willing to give him all of me, but he had avoided me like the plague. Yet at this moment, he was begging a woman who resembled my deceased self to use him.

He was doing all this just so he could make up for his guilt toward me. He was truly despicable.

“Michael Ford, you’re such a bastard,” I said in a deep voice. Then, I looked over at Rachel, who had rushed over with Zion. I said to them, “I think he should be admitted to an asylum

for mistaking me for Stephanie Carlson.”

Rachel looked at me with an odd look in her eyes for a moment and asked me softly, “If Stephie were still alive now, do you think she would truly let the matter go?”

I scoffed and retorted sarcastically, “What is she, brain damaged? It’s only logical for her to let the matter go if that were the case. Otherwise, does she want to die a couple more times before seeing through things?”

Rachel chuckled at that and suddenly hugged me tightly.

I was a bit caught off guard. “Why are you doing this? We’re not even that close,” I said.

“I think you’re pretty cool. I want to be friends with you,” Rachel replied and reached out to

1. me.

She continued, “Nice to meet you, Stephany. Let me reintroduce myself to you. My name is Rachel Qualls. Stephanie and I were the best of friends. We were super, super, super close!”

Rachel said that we were the best of friends. She also used to tell me that when speaking about important things, they should be repeated thrice.

I lowered my head and smiled. Then, I shook her hand.

I had received a second chance at life, after all. Not only did I have to protect myself this time but also my most cherished friends.

In fact, just as I was about to die, I had sworn something to myself. I swore that if I were ever given another chance in life, I would truly care and love those who truly felt the same about me.

I was foolish in my past life. I needed some sense to be knocked into me to grow and change my ways. I learned my lesson in the end, but the price I paid for it was far too high.

“Mr. Ford, if you keep acting crazy like this, I’m going to call the asylum and have you admitted,” Zion said with a frown. He genuinely thought that Michael had gone insane.

Zion did not believe in higher powers, after all. It was impossible for him to believe in stuff like reincarnations and souls.

Before Michael could say anything else, Lois and Yasmin arrived.

“Michael!” Lois called out. She and Yasmin rushed over to hug Michael. “Why did you sneak out of the hospital like that? Are you trying to get yourself killed?”

Yasmin’s eyes were red-rimmed too. She glared fiercely at me and barked out, “Stephany Larson, I can’t believe you’re still trying to seduce Michael by pretending to be Stephanie. Are you trying to kill him?”

Yasmin was pinning all the blame on me.

“She has nothing to do with this. I was the one who came looking for her,” Michael explained in a low voice.

“Shut up!” Lois yelled angrily and slapped Michael. “You didn’t cherish Stephie properly when she was still around. Didn’t I tell you to appreciate her more? Yet you never did! What’s the use of acting

like this in front of such an obvious impostor?”

Lois was a strong and independent woman. She glared at me for a moment and said in a threatening tone, “Stephany, I don’t care why you’re imitating and learning from Stephanie. You might be doing it to get to the Lincolns or us Fords, but if you do anything to harm my

son, I won’t let you off easy!”

I glanced at Yasmin in that instant. It appeared that she was still very talented at inciting arguments. This was a talent she possessed since she was a kid.

“Mrs. Ford, I’m married to Steven Lincoln. I’m even pregnant with his baby. I have not intention of plotting against your son. He’s far inferior to Steven, after all,” I said coldly.

I continued, “Instead of suspecting what my supposed motives might be, you should really be wary about the people closest to you. The woman standing next to you is as malicious. as they come. Not only did she cause Stephanie’s death, but she also has plans to suck your family dry.

“Do you want to know what’s the most terrifying thing about her? Michael had just gotten into an accident yet she was already thinking of ways to use him to get to the elusive. president of Crowdstar Group.”

Yasmin paled at that. “You’re spouting nonsense!

“Mrs. Ford, Michael, you can’t trust her words. This woman is clearly an accomplice to murder. She’s a bad person,” Yasmin said anxiously. It was clear that she felt guilty.

I sneered and took out my phone. I paused for a moment and cursed at Steven inwardly. Damn it, I had forgotten that he had dropped my phone into the bathtub earlier. Luckily, all my recordings were uploaded to the cloud.

After logging into my account, I pulled up the recording of the conversation Yasmin and had in the hospital the other day.

Gather around, you two. Mrs. Ford, this is the evidence of Yasmin begging me to help her seduce the president of Crowdstar Group while your son was unconscious,” I said,

I raised an eyebrow and tilted my chin proudly in Rachel’s direction. I had learned my lesson, after all.

I had been killed by Yasmin once already. I knew to always start recording whenever I met her alone.

Yasmin looked surprised as she listened along to the recording I had on my phone. She glanced at Michael with panic in her eyes and quickly stepped forward.

“Don’t be fooled by her, Mrs. Ford. I was just asking her about the elusive president of Crowdstar Group to help Michael. I was worried that you wouldn’t be able to handle everything at the company if Michael didn’t wake up,” Yasmin said.

Yasmin turned back to look at Lois nervously. She tried to play into Lois’ good graces.

“What a clown. It’s clear that she was trying to get with Crowdstar Group’s president, yet

she’s still trying to make it seem that she was making sacrifices for Michael’s sake. Her acting skills are truly top-notch,” Rachel said, adding fuel to the fire.

Michael’s face along with Lois’ had darkened significantly.

I smirked at Rachel. She and Zion then gave me a thumbs-up.

I

“I have other matters to attend to, so I won’t keep you all any longer. Mr. Ford, go consult a

doctor if you’re ill. You’re at the Lincoln residence, not a crematorium. There’s no need for you to cry your eyes out here either,” I said in a low voice while glancing at the time.

I still had to meet Eason. I didn’t have time to indulge Michael in his regrets and his menial attempts to make amends.

## Chapter 223

“Stephle...” Michael tried to continue, but I had already instructed the butler to shut the door.

Rachel and Zion stopped Michael from advancing. “Mr. Ford, if you really do end up dying out here, it’ll make things difficult for your doctors.”

Lois’ face had turned ashen. She looked at Michael with a mixture of frustration and disbelief in her expression. “Michael, I think you’ve truly lost your mind.”

Lois was an independent woman in the modern world, after all. I could see the weariness and disbelief in her eyes. She probably never imagined that her son would end up in such a state.

I shook my head helplessly and walked into the living room.

After I left, Rachel sent me a text. She told me that Lois was on the verge of going mad from anger because of Michael. It turned out that Lois was wondering if her son had been possessed by spirits or replaced by someone else.

Lois had even asked her assistant to inquire about the best exorcist in Huma. She said that she wanted the exorcist to perform an exorcism and also protect her family against any potential harm.

I was taken aback to hear that. I could only let out a resigned smile.

Everyone knew that there was no way the dead could come back to life. Lois was

Michael's mother, after all. It wasn't surprising that she was looking for other reasons to pin all of Michael's unhinged behavior on at this time.

I figured that Lois must hate me a lot at this moment. She probably regretted adopting me into the Ford family and ruining her son.

It was because of me that Michael turned out this way, after all.

Sure enough, I received another text from Rachel before reaching the place where I was supposed to meet Eason. She told me that Lois had brought an exorcist to my gravesite.

Rituals were being performed to ward off evil spirits at this moment. It turned out that the evil spirit Lois was trying to banish was me.

Rachel said that they were going to perform some special rites—for me to prevent my spirit from lingering around Michael.

Mrs. Lincoln, we're here."

At some point, the Lincoln family's driver had started speaking to me with a lot more respect in his tone. I didn't think it was a big deal. However, I realized that the household staff had started addressing Steven the same way too.

It felt as if they regarded Steven as the head of the Lincoln household now.

I didn't think much of it. James had become a vegetable with little to no chance of waking up, after all. Furthermore, was now a paralyzed invalid after his stroke. He could

Ignatius

not even take care of himself, let alone make any decisions for the household.

It was clear that Steven was the head of the Lincolns now.

I glanced around after getting out of the car.

Stamford was a prestigious university located between Huma and Jacaster. It was the best university in the country and the only one that offered advanced classes to geniuses.

I didn't know why Eason invited me here. However, I was rather angry. I was already three minutes late due to traffic, after all. I had expected Eason to be upset with me. But to my surprise, it turned out that he still hadn't arrived.

I had never liked people who weren't punctual. Michael was a very punctual person. He measured time to the second. If I ran late to meet up with him at our appointed time or somehow displeased him, he would always find a way to punish me.

As a result, I became a very punctual person. I would become very anxious if the person I agreed to meet with at a certain time didn't show up.

I started to wonder if I was being played for a fool again.

I took out my phone and called Eason.

"Didn't you tell me to meet you at the designated location around this time?" I asked.

On the other end of the call, Eason sounded as if he was gritting his teeth as he spoke,

And didn't I tell you not to tell that psycho, Steven, about this meeting?"

I was taken aback to hear that. "I didn't tell him anything. After reading the note, I threw it into the trash can at the hospital. I'm sure nobody saw it. Steven doesn't know," I replied, feeling bewildered.

Eason chuckled at that. Then, I heard a sharp intake of breath on the other end. It sounded as if he was in pain. I knew I couldn't hide it from that lunatic. He must have seen the note somehow and had someone beat me up in advance. I'm too embarrassed to show my face anywhere now!"

Eason continued to grumble over the phone, "I'm certain that it was him. I can't be wrong. He knows I care most about my looks, so he deliberately had someone hit me in the face!"

I was starting to get upset by the accusations Eason made. "Stop slandering my husband's name. He needs assistance for basic living needs, you know. If he had the ability to get someone to beat you up, he wouldn't have gotten bullied by Mr. Lincoln Senior and Mr.

James back then."

If Steven was really capable of getting someone to beat Eason up, he wouldn't have let himself get bullied by Ignatius and James in the past.

Sometimes, I wondered if Steven really was the murderer. Would a murderer really allow themselves to be abused that way, despite being capable of all that?

"So are you saying that the people who used to wrong him are tucked away safe and sound

now?" Eason asked in a meaningful tone on the other end.

## Chapter 224

My heart skipped a beat upon hearing that. I widened my eyes and asked, "What do you mean by that?"

"Steven's dad, Mr. Andy, died. His death is closely related to his uncle, Mr. James. Even Mr.

Martin and the rest of the Lincoln family were involved with it. As you've seen, James' fate has already been sealed.

“And now, even Mr. Ignatius, who condoned the murderer, is also bedridden. Do you honestly think Steven had nothing to do with all of it?” Eason said in a low voice and sneered.

I fell silent. I knew deep down that I did not trust Steven completely. But I had known him since we were kids. I knew that he was fundamentally a good person.

“I guess that lunatic thought that by swelling up my face, I wouldn’t be able to take you to see that place. He has definitely underestimated me,” Eason said. He seemed eager to challenge Steven.

Eason’s speech over the phone was a bit stuttered. I figured his face must be bruised up quite badly.

Eason was often cold and aloof, after all. It was difficult for me to imagine what he looked like all beaten up.

“Have you arrived at Stamford?” he asked again.

“Yeah, I’m already here,” I replied while glancing around.

“Pass your phone to the guards when you walk into the campus. I’ll let them know to let you in. Just follow my instructions,” he said.

I didn’t know what Eason was up to. Even so, I followed his instructions and traversed through the Stamford campus according to his directions.

He told me to walk across a field to get through a small gate. Then, I was asked to head toward a row of apartments located behind the school.

“You’re not playing games with me, are you?” I asked through gritted teeth. I was losing my patience.

“Why would I do that? I’m right behind you. What are you so afraid of?” Eason teased.

I glanced back. No wonder It felt like someone was following me the whole time.

Eason had pulled his cap low. He had a face mask and a pair of sunglasses on. He even had his hoodie pulled over his baseball cap. If I hadn’t known any better, I’d think he was a celebrity trying to avoid the public gaze.

“Is all that necessary?” I asked, my lips twitching with amusement.

“I’d rather be beheaded than have my face looking ugly out in public. If this ends up ruining

my handsome features, he doesn’t need to work hard to get me killed. I’ll jump off a building myself,” Eason said through gritted teeth.



My lips curled into an amused smile. When I saw Eason at the hospital the other day, he sounded so aloof and arrogant. I thought he would be a difficult person to approach, but who would have thought that he would be such an amusing idiot?

“Let’s go to the apartment building on the third row,” Eason said, then hung up the phone

and walked alongside me.

I glanced at him through his sunglasses. He was sporting dark bruises on both eyes, making him look a bit like a panda.

I was rendered speechless. I couldn’t help but wonder if Steven was really capable of getting someone to beat Eason up. It felt impossible.

Steven couldn’t even stand the pain of his wound making contact with water. He would always tear up when that happened. How could someone like that possibly instruct someone to beat another person up?

Eason led me into the apartment building and down to the basement.

I felt a little scared for some reason. I didn’t know why, but the place felt eerie and cold.

“Are you scared? You have the guts to marry a lunatic. I thought you’d be braver,” Eason

scoffed and said with a sharp edge in his tone. However, he didn’t seem like a bad guy.

proper

“This apartment is private property. It belongs exclusively to that lunatic. The only reason

I’m even allowed in here is solely based on my good looks,” Eason said proudly. It turned out that he had charmed the administrator at the apartment’s entrance with his appearance.

I followed Eason from behind. Every step forward felt heavier than the one I took before. The apartment was old, so the basement was very chilly. However, it wasn’t very damp because it wasn’t completely underground.

The walls were covered in graffiti.

There were many scribbles of formulas and numbers.

It was clear: that Steven had lived here when he was taking advanced classes at Stamford.

“But I thought the Lincolns took him in when he was studying in Stamford? Why would he live in a basement like this if that were the case?” I asked, feeling puzzled. I

touched the wall lightly with my fingers and felt a sharp electric shock shoot through me.

“He’s like a vampire who can’t stand the light. He loves dark places,” Eason said grumpily. Then, he pushed open a door in the basement that made a loud creaking sound.

I followed Eason inside the room. The place was spacious, and there were shelves lining the walls. They were all covered by black cloth.

Eason reached out and pulled away the black cloth. Once the black cloth was off, I instantly froze in my place.

Fear began to spread through my entire body.

## Chapter 225

There used to be a rumor that circulated around about Steven. People said that he was a lunatic who liked collecting animal corpses and putting them in glass cases.

Back then, I hadn’t believed it. But what lay before me shocked me to the core.

There were countless glass cases on the shelves in the basement. Each of the glass cases contained many different types of dead butterflies. They were essentially taxidermied.

I could see butterflies of many colors. There were blue ones, black ones, and colorful ones.

And the glass case at the very bottom of the shelf contained a taxidermied cat. The cat- lying inside the case seemed peaceful.

There were also puppies, snakes, hamsters...

“Scared, are you?” Eason asked. He saw that I had stiffened up and sweat was starting to

form on my forehead.

Then, he sneered and continued, “He’s a pervert. He loves turning things he likes into taxidermy and specimens like these and putting them in glass cases. You understand now how Stephanie died, don’t you?”

Eason firmly suspected that Steven was the person who killed me.

I knew Eason had taken on this case to beat Steven at his own game. He was here to find clues.

“There’s no such thing as a perfect murder. As long as what happened to Stephanie was a homicide, there will definitely be clues and evidence to prove it. If that lunatic really did kill someone, I won’t show him any mercy,” Eason said in a solemn tone.

He wanted to lock Steven behind bars himself.

“No way. Steven wouldn’t have killed Stephanie. He said that he loved her...” I muttered softly. I started to feel panic well up inside of me. I couldn’t stop shaking my head.

Eason let out a cold chuckle and replied, “You’re still so naive. Stephany, why do you think I brought you here to see all this? I’ve investigated you before. You’re not beyond saving just yet. But if you keep staying with Steven Lincoln, you’ll die.

“Don’t delude yourself into thinking that imitating Stephanie will make him develop feelings for you. If he does end up liking you, you’ll be doomed to die at his hand!” around to leave.

However, Eason managed to grab the back of my collar and forced me to take a closer look at the butterflies in glass cases.

He said, “Do you know how these taxidermy animals and insects are made? They were trapped in these glass cases before they eventually died. I followed that lunatic here out of curiosity when I was 15. Do you know what he was doing?

“He trapped a butterfly in one of these glass cases and watched it flap its wings desperately to escape. The excitement and thrill in that lunatic’s eyes terrified me!”

Eason had been truly frightened by Steven at the time.

“He kept going on about how he had succeeded. He had just trapped an insect he liked in a glass case to death. Was that really something worth celebrating?” Eason continued. He couldn’t understand Steven, nor could he forgive and forget.

“He’s nothing but a lunatic...” Eason said with a low voice.

“I’m not going to believe you,” I replied.

Then, I forcefully pushed Eason away from me and turned to run.

But just as I ran out of the basement, a person wielding a knife suddenly charged at me.

I let out a scream and shut my eyes. I figured I was going to die again. However, I ended in an embrace that felt secure and familiar.

up

Soon after that, I could smell the metallic scent of blood.”

“Stop right there!” Eason rushed out to tackle the assailant to the ground when he saw that someone was attacking me.

I opened my eyes while trembling and met Steven’s worried gaze.

“Stephie...” Steven looked at me with a panicked gaze. He cupped my face with his hands and looked into my eyes as he asked, “Are you hurt?”

At that moment, I suddenly felt overwhelmed by the immense shock. I burst into aggrieved

tears.

Steven hugged me tightly in a hurry. His arms wrapped around me protectively.

“Fucking hell...” Eason, who was restraining the assailant, cursed with irritation and guilt in

his tone, “Stop being all lovey–dovey with each other. You’re injured, you lunatic..

Only then did Steven realize that he was hurt. He lowered his head to look down at the side of his stomach, which was soaked in crimson blood.

In order to protect me, he ended up getting stabbed. Even so, Steven seemed to feel no pain at all.

My eyes

redirected toward his wound. I panicked and tried to press down on it with my hands. “Steve, does it hurt? Come on, we have to get you to the hospital right now.”

Instead of worrying about his own injury, Steven seemed more concerned about my wellbeing.

He covered his wound with one hand and held me close with the other.

“It’s alright. You don’t have to be scared. The knife didn’t hit anything vital, and the stab

wound isn’t very deep. The bleeding is not severe either, so the police and ambulance will arrive before I faint.”

## Chapter 226

Steven always seemed to be able to accurately predict everything. It felt as if he was confidently weaving his own narrative most of the time.

I cried out of concern. I felt at a loss as I continued to press down on his wound.

Soon, the police rushed in and took the assailant away. The ambulance arrived promptly as well.

Steven seemed to have anticipated that someone would get injured.

“Did you know beforehand that someone was going to hurt Stephany? Is that why you called the ambulance in advance?” Eason asked in an arrogant tone. He felt the situation was definitely more complex than it seemed.

Eason had acted very cautiously the entire time, so there was no way the assailant could have followed him. The only other plausible explanation was that Stephany had been targeted as soon as she left her house. The assailant had followed her all the way here.

“I called the ambulance for you, actually,” Steven replied in a low voice as he glared coldly

at Eason.

I watched as a hint of fear flashed in Eason's prideful gaze. It was obvious that he was still fearful of Steven.

"You called my wife over without my consent. If this happens again, I can guarantee that the one lying in the ambulance next will be you next," Steven said.

Steven let me press down on his wound. He covered my ears with his hands and began to curse at Eason coldly. "You dumb..."

Even though he had covered my ears, I could still hear him cursing Eason out. His words were rather vulgar.

I could tell that Eason was having a hard time in the ambulance. If it weren't for the police officers holding him back, he would have rushed forward and attacked Steven already.

However, it was clear that Eason had intentionally let the police hold him back. I could tell that he was still afraid of Steven, yet he kept shouting, "Stop holding me back! I have to kill this lunatic today!"

Hearing that, the police officer holding him back obediently let him go as he asked.

Eventually, Eason ended up quieting down. He gritted his teeth and sunk further into his chair. Then, he said to the officer next to him coldly, "Well, I suppose there's no use fighting violence with violence."

"Hey, my wound feels alright. It's not that deep. Look, I've practically stopped bleeding," Steven comforted me in a low voice when he saw how pale I still looked.

I looked up at him for a moment. Even though he was the injured one, he ended up being the one to console me instead.

"That idiot doesn't quite understand the current situation we're in. Mr. Lincoln Senior is getting desperate. He'll definitely make his move soon," Steven whispered. He looked different from usual.

I wondered if it was just because he didn't want me to worry about him.

At this moment, Steven looked mature and stable. He felt a little strange, but not unpleasant to be around.

It almost seemed like Steven should have always been this way. He should have been a strategist from the very beginning.

"How would I know what you Lincolns get up to these days? So many people want to hurt you guys, after all," Eason muttered quietly. But it was clear that he had been in the wrong this time.

“Hudson, don’t let there be a next time,” Steven warned Eason in a low voice as they were getting out of the ambulance.

Hudson was Eason’s old name. Steven didn’t seem to like calling him Eason.

Eason frowned and felt distinctly threatened.

I turned to look at Steven subconsciously. The way he had just threatened Eason made him look really frightening.

However, he ended up reverting back to his usual self in the next second. He looked at me with pitiful eyes and hugged me. “Stephie, I’m feeling a bit dizzy now. Can you please hold me?”

Sure enough, Steven’s charm only lasted for three seconds.

“Stephie, it hurts,” Steven complained.

The medical staff wanted to treat his wound. However, Steven kept holding onto me tightly. He looked pitiful and scared. “Stephie, I’m scared,” he said.

I was rendered speechless for a moment. He had only just realized that he was scared. now. Perhaps his brain needed some time to catch up with what had just happened for him to react.

I hugged Steven guiltily and patted him. “Don’t worry, I’ll be here with you.

“Don’t be fooled by his act! There’s no way he’s feeling scared right now. Maybe the assailant I pinned down just now was his accomplice! He might be the culprit behind everything!” Eason pointed at Steven angrily as he exclaimed. His finger trembled for a long while before he quieted down.

“Mr. Grant, please don’t unjustly accuse my husband of such crimes again. I trust him. unconditionally,” I frowned as I said.

Steven’s lips curled into a small smirk. His eyes seemed to darken as he looked at Eason.

It felt as if he was provoking him.

Eason clenched his fists in anger. “You will regret this.

## Chapter 227

I remained silent. But up until this moment, I still chose to believe in Steven.

After all, it didn’t make sense for someone to risk their life to protect someone they didn’t care about.

“Stephie... it hurts so much. This is all his fault. If he hadn’t invited you out, I wouldn’t have gotten injured. He’s a bad guy.” Steven said while hugging me.

Then, he looked at Eason and warned me, "Don't go out alone with him again, alright?"

"Alright." I nodded. I had to agree with him at this moment.

"Steven Lincoln, it's such a shame that you're not working as an actor..." Eason said through gritted teeth. He cursed, "Fucking lunatic!"

Eason then kicked the trash can at the door out of frustration.

"Stephie, he's being mean to me. Doctor, I think he's suffering from mania," Steven said plaintively.

The doctor frowned and looked at Eason. "Sir, you'll have to pay for damaging hospital property. If you have no other business here, please leave."

I was also starting to get annoyed with Eason. "Yeah. If there's nothing else, you may leave."

Eason opened his mouth, as if he had meant to say something. In the end, he could only point angrily at Steven and said, "Fine! Act your heart out seeing as you're so good at it. You might as well win an award at this point."

With that, Eason spun on his heel and left.

It was obvious that they weren't leveled on the same playing field.

"Stephie... it hurts a lot," Steven suddenly let out a fearful shriek and hugged me.

I looked at the doctor nervously and said, "Hey, Doc. Can you be a little gentler? He's really scared of pain."

The doctor pushed his glasses up and paused for a moment with the cotton ball still in his hand.

"Look, I haven't even touched him yet. Furthermore, didn't the nurse already administer the anesthesia? He shouldn't be feeling any pain now," he said.

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Eason then kicked the trash can at the door out of frustration.

“Stephie, he’s being mean to me. Doctor, I think he’s suffering from mania, Steven said

plaintively.

The doctor frowned and looked at Eason. “Sir, you’ll have to pay for damaging hospital property. If you have no other business here, please leave.”

I was also starting to get annoyed with Eason. “Yeah. If there’s nothing else, you may leave.”

Eason opened his mouth, as if he had meant to say something. In the end, he could only point angrily at Steven and said, “Fine! Act your heart out seeing as you’re so good at it. You might as well win an award at this point.”

With that, Eason spun on his heel and left.

It was obvious that they weren’t leveled on the same playing field.

“Stephie... it hurts a lot,” Steven suddenly let out a fearful shriek and hugged me.

I looked at the doctor nervously and said, “Hey, Doc. Can you be a little gentler? He’s really scared of pain.”

The doctor pushed his glasses up and paused for a moment with the cotton ball still in his hand.

“Look, I haven’t even touched him yet. Furthermore, didn’t the nurse already administer the anesthesia? He shouldn’t be feeling any pain now,” he said.

The doctor hadn’t even touched him yet and Steven was already screaming bloody murder

I smiled awkwardly and apologized to the doctor.

“Fortunately, the wound isn’t very deep. After he gets stitched up, he’ll need to get hooked

up on some IV drips for a few days,” the doctor said while stitching Steven’s wound.

“Make sure his wound doesn’t make any contact with water for a while. Just wipe away the

blood stains on his body,” he continued.

I nodded earnestly in reply.

Steven pressed himself against me and sobbed softly.

“It hurts a lot, huh?” I asked in a soft tone, feeling my heart ache for him.

Steven’s eyes were red-rimmed. “Stephie, I’m really thirsty.”

“You’ve lost a lot of blood. You can’t drink too much water at once. I’ll give him some glucose solution to drink. Can you go get it from the pharmacy? He can have a bit of that first, the doctor instructed me.



I nodded and quickly got up. "Alright, wait for me here. I'm going to go buy it for you."

Steven nodded.

I ran out of the doctor's room and had almost reached the pharmacy on the first floor when I realized I had left my phone behind in my haste.

I hurried back to grab it, but there were too many people waiting to use the elevator. As such, I had to take the stairs through the emergency exit.

Steven was on the third floor. Just as I reached the second floor, I heard a loud thud followed by a terrified scream.

I paused for a moment, wondering if someone had fallen down the stairs.

Just as I was about to head upstairs to check, I saw Steven.

He was holding a bat and was walking down the steps with an indifferent expression on his face.

He was approaching the man who was lying bruised and battered on the ground. Then, Steven mercilessly struck the man with the bat.

Steven's expression was chillingly cold.

Due to the blood loss, his face was pale. His eyes looked as if they had darkened significantly too.

Please spare me! Mr. Lincoln Senior was the one who asked me to keep a close eye on you and Ms. Larson. He wanted me to get rid of the baby growing in her womb. I haven't done anything yet, okay? I haven't even touched her! Please, let me go!" the man begged for mercy as he knelt on the floor.

I stood frozen in shock. I couldn't believe that it was Steven. I thought my eyes must have deceived me.

Steven had just been crying from the pain of getting stitches just moments ago.

"But you thought about laying a finger on her. That means you deserve to die," Steven said.

Then, he raised the bat in his hand. His eyes were filled with cold, murderous intent.

I had a feeling that he was really going to kill that man.

## Chapter 228

"Steven?" I called out Steven's name softly. I was worried that I was mistaken.

Steven's body visibly stiffened at that moment. His back was facing me. I couldn't see the expression on his face, but his silhouette from the back looked dark and intimidating.

He dropped the bat in his hand and turned around to face me. His eyes were wet with tears

as he said, “Stephie... I’m so scared. This man was following me, and he even tried to hit me...

After saying that, Steven suddenly dropped into a crouch on the ground in a panic. His face was stained with the stranger’s blood. His expression looked innocent and pitiful.

My heart skipped a beat at the sight. I told myself that everything I saw just now must have been my imagination.

The bloody man lying on the floor must have provoked Steven. That was probably what caused Steven to lose control of himself and retaliate violently.

“Don’t be scared. It’s alright...” I said as I hurriedly ran over to hug him.

The man who had just fallen down the stairs looked shocked. He had an incredulous look on his face as he stared at Steven. It looked as if he had just seen a monster. The man got up and tried to run away.

When the nurse couldn’t find Steven, she pushed open the emergency door and saw the man covered in blood. “What’s going on?”

Steven glanced back and shot the bloody man a look. The man began to panic and said, “I fell down the stairs just now. I injured myself.”

After saying that, the man pushed the nurse aside and ran away.

The nurse did not pay the man much attention. Instead, she looked at Steven and said, “You need to get some IV fluids in you. Why’d you run off?”

Steven hugged me and looked at me with aggrieved eyes. “Stephie, I’m not thirsty anymore. I’m really scared. Please don’t leave me.”

Steven trembled in my arms. I hugged him tighter, feeling guilty. “I’m not going to leave you. Mr. Bart will be here very soon. I’ll get him to go to the pharmacy instead. I’ll stay with you.

Steven nodded obediently. “Good. Stephie, you have to stay with me forever. Don’t leave me ever again.”

I nodded. “I won’t.”

After I managed to coax Steven back to the ward, I went to wash a towel in the bathroom for him. Just as I was coming out of the bathroom, I heard Steven whispering to the nurse. He seemed to be in a rather good mood. He was on his best behavior and even smiled at the nurse. “Miss, you’re so gentle,” he said.

The nurse almost lost herself in his praise. “Who knew a handsome young lad like you would be this good at flattering women?”

“Could you please tell my wife that I can’t get out of bed because of my wound? Tell her

that she has to take good care of me,” Steven asked in a polite tone.

The nurse was delighted by how sweet of a talker Steven was and nodded earnestly. “No problem.”

Then, the nurse turned to me and said, “The patient’s wound has just been stitched up. He shouldn’t get out of bed or move around too much these couple of days.”

I still hadn’t figured out what Steven was up to at this moment.

When Ewan finally dropped by with the glucose solution from the pharmacy, he brought along some chicken soup and a honeycomb cake. Steven began to urge him to leave quickly.

“Mr. Bart, I think you can head home now,” Steven said.

“Sir, your health is my top priority now,” Ewan said with concern.

Steven replied, “Well, I think family reunions are more important than I am. I don’t want to take up your personal time with family, Mr. Bart.”

Ewan glanced at Steven for a moment and was reminded that his boss didn’t have his real family with him.

The only reason Steven had become Ignatius’ confidant was because he was an orphan. Steven had no family background, no ambition, and no family.

Ewan glanced over at me awkwardly and said, “Well, then I suppose I’ll take my leave now. Mrs. Lincoln, thank you for looking after him.”

Steven nodded obediently. “Good. Stephle, you have to stay with me forever. Don’t leave. me ever again,”

I nodded. “I won’t.”

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Ewan glanced over at me awkwardly and said, “Well, then I suppose I’ll take my leave now. Mrs. Lincoln, thank you for looking after him.”

I nodded. “Of course,”

Just as Ewan reached the door, he seemed to have recalled something.

“Oh, I just remembered. The police sent us a message. They’re saying that Mrs. Lincoln’s killer has confessed. It was found that Brad Steele, a confidant of Mr. Dax, gave the instructions to the killer. The killer has been arrested, but he hasn’t mentioned anything about Mr. Lincoln Senior or Mr. Dax.

Steven fell silent for a short while. Then, he said in an innocent tone, “Mr. Bart, can you have someone help me deal with the weeds in the backyard? I’m worried they’ll stump the flowers from growing if we don’t have them dealt with soon.”

Ewan sucked in a deep breath at that. “Of course, sir.”

Shortly after Ewan left, Steven looked at me pitifully and said, “Stephie the doctor won’t let me get out of bed.”

“It’s alright. Just bear with it for now. Stay in bed in the meantime and I’ll get you whatever you need,” I said.

I still hadn’t sensed what dastardly plans he had up his sleeves.

“Stephie, I need to pee.

I didn’t know how to react. I wondered if it’d be a better idea to let him suffer a full bladder.

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## Chapter 229

Steven looked at me innocently as he said, “Stephie... my hand hurts.”

He had cleverly had the nurse stick the IV drip needle into his less-injured hand, then told me that his hand hurt.

This meant that I would have to wait on him. I even had to help him undo his pants when he went to the bathroom.

Suddenly, I understood what Michael meant when he commented on Steven’s exceptional acting skills.

Steven’s eyes turned red-rimmed as he said, “Stephie... you’re my wife.”

“Stop it!” I exclaimed, trying to harden my resolve. He had only gotten injured because he saved me, after all. The doctor wouldn’t let him get out of bed, so I had no choice but to

take care of him.

I grabbed the overnight toiletries the nurse had brought for me. With a blush on my face, I pulled the privacy curtain closed and reached out. “Do it yourself,” I said.

“But my hand hurts...”

I gritted my teeth at that. “Steven Lincoln, don’t push things too far.”

Steven merely looked up at me innocently.

I was fuming with anger as I helped him with his pants..

Soon, I heard him say, “Stephie, I don’t need to pee anymore.”

I really wanted to kill him now.

“Stephie, you’re so intimidating. Look what you’ve done! I’m swelling up from fear now.”

I was rendered speechless for a moment.

“Steven Lincoln!” I exclaimed.

I ended up lecturing Steven and pinching his ear as punishment for ten minutes straight. Eventually, he reluctantly admitted that he was in the wrong.

scoffed and started to feed him soup while sitting on the edge of the bed. “Here, have more. It’ll help you recover faster.”

“Stephie... Steven started. I had no idea what he was thinking at that moment. Suddenly, he spotted an unexpected visitor in his ward.

It was Michael. He was hanging around us like a vengeful spirit.

Steven’s face instantly darkened at the sight of him. He had forgotten that Michael was staying in the ward right next door. They both had physical injuries, after all.

“Stephie... it hurts.” Steven choked up and pulled up his shirt to show me his wound. “Look, Stephie. It took seven stitches to close up my wound.”

I wanted to stop him from whining, so I reluctantly got up from my seat and approached him slowly.

For some reason, his hand no longer seemed to hurt anymore at this moment. He went ahead and pressed my head against his and kissed me.

I knew he had ulterior motives right from the start.

Michael stiffened at the door. His gaze darkened as he glared at Steven.

Steven’s gaze turned weightier and darker. It was obvious that he was challenging Michael with his eyes.

Sensing that someone was behind me, I quickly straightened up and turned to see Michael. He was sporting bruises all over his face.

“Stephie...” Michael called out my name.

I regarded him with a frown. “Mr. Ford, you’ve recovered rather quickly. How are you already able to walk around?”

Michael had pretty severe injuries, yet he was still already out of bed. So why couldn’t Steven, who only had external wounds, do the same?

Michael seemed a bit nervous as he asked, “Can we talk?”

“No,” I refused straight away.

However, Michael was persistent. He knew me quite well after all these years. He knew that threats worked best on me.

“Sorry, Stephany. But your grandmother’s condition has turned critical. She has been  
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transferred to the emergency room. I couldn’t reach you by phone, but I heard that you were here,” he said.

I was taken aback to hear that.

Michael was talking about Grandma Rosie.

I had been worried that she would find out that I wasn’t really Stephany, so I didn’t have the guts to visit her at the hospital in the past.

“Grandma Rosie...” I trailed off, feeling remorseful. Grandma Rosie wasn’t getting any younger, after all. Even though I was still occupying Stephany’s body, I still needed to go. see her.

They're trying to resuscitate her in the emergency room now. Let me take you there," Michael said courteously.

"No need for that," I said, then glanced back at Steven. "Stay put with your IV. I'll be back

soon."

Steven glowered at Michael at that moment. He wanted to get out of bed to keep me company.

"The doctor said you can't get out of bed, so behave yourself," I stopped him from following me.

He had quite literally shot himself in the foot with his earlier demands.

Steven clenched his fingers and glared at Michael.

This time, Michael was the one who shot Steven a challenging look.

"Whether she's Stephanie or Stephany, I'll take her away from you regardless," Michael said

warningly to Steven.

Then, he walked to the door and continued, "Steven, I could snatch her away from you once, and I can do it again."

Not long after I left Steven's ward, I heard a loud crash. I was worried and wanted to turn back to check on Steven. However, Michael merely urged me along and said, "Grandma

Rosie's condition isn't looking too good. The doctors have already labeled her as being in critical condition.

"You're her only living relative, so you'll need to sign some papers."

Grandma Rosie was still being resuscitated in the emergency room. Halfway through, the doctor came out of the room to mentally prepare us for the bad news. Then, I was asked to sign some papers.

I felt very anxious. I folded my hands together in prayer. I prayed to the higher powers above that Grandma Rosie would be safe.

Even though she wasn't actually my grandmother, she had raised Stephany. Besides, I had assumed her granddaughter's identity.

no immediate danger to her life for now. She'll be transferred to the observation ward, though. Your grandmother is pretty elderly and 90 percent of her cerebral blood vessels are blocked. At her age, we wouldn't recommend surgery or any stenting procedures.

Take good care of her in recent days. This time, she suffered a sudden heart attack. It was luck that kept her alive this time round,” the doctor said.

I nodded hastily and thanked the doctor. Then, I sat by Grandma Rosie’s bedside.

“Stephie, I’m sure she’ll be fine,” Michael said softly to console me.

I found his presence very annoying. “Michael Ford, this has nothing to do with you. She’s my grandmother. You can leave now.”

“Stephie...” he persisted in calling me that.

“Please, Stephie, can we talk?” he continued in a hoarse voice. It sounded as if he wanted to explain himself.

“I do love you...” Michael said.

I frowned and felt nauseous upon hearing that. My stomach churned as I barked out, “Fuck off.”

“I read your diary. You wrote that I didn’t love you and that I’ve always despised you and never trusted you...” Michael murmured with his head lowered. It looked as if he was speaking to himself, seemingly unaware of who he was even talking to.

He seemed to have convinced himself that I was Stephanie Carlson and felt compelled to make amends with her through me. His behavior was downright despicable.

“I love you, Stephie. I love you more than anyone else. I just couldn’t believe that you could love me back,” Michael said. His voice was hoarse as he grasped my wrist.

He continued, “You were resistant to the marriage alliance. It was clear that you didn’t want to marry me. You were the one who used to love someone else. I knew that you never really paid any attention to me.

“I just couldn’t believe that you had really fallen in love with me. In fact, I didn’t even want to believe it at first. I thought...”

interrupted him with a sneer, “You thought that Stephanie had ulterior motives, didn’t you?”

Then, I shook Michael’s hand off and continued, “Michael Ford, you’re so full of yourself.

Just thinking about how Stephanie might’ve really loved someone like you makes me pity her.

Michael bowed his head low. He had a guilty look on his face, yet he was powerless to do anything about it. “I Just...”

He wanted to explain himself and justify everything. But he couldn’t.

‘Stephy... Annie...” Grandma Rosie kept calling out for Stephany and Ann in her unconscious state.



Stephany and Ann were switched at birth, after all. Perhaps Ann's parents had intentionally switched them years ago.

However, Ann's parents both passed away when Stephany was in her teens. The Larsons never investigated the matter further. They had even favored Ann over Stephany because

Ann had been the one they raised.

The Larsons regarded Stephany as nothing but an uncultured country bumpkin. They even feared that she would disgrace the family.

Ann was Grandma Rosie's biological granddaughter, after all. It was only natural for her to miss and think about her all the time.

However, it didn't matter how much she cared about Ann. Ann was never going to visit her at the hospital.

"Stephie, you were seriously injured and in a coma for seven whole days when you arrived at my house at the age of 18. When you woke up, you seemed to have lost a lot of your memories.

"You asked if I was the one who saved you at the time. At the time, I was very selfish. I lied

and said that I was. I'll admit that I'm at fault for that," Michael whispered.

He continued to speak about the past, "My mom said that your condition was unstable, after all. But because of the amnesia, the psychological illness you used to have suddenly disappeared. It was a blessing in disguise.

"Even so, I always got the feeling that you were faking it, I thought you were doing it because of your parents' deaths. I honestly thought you were faking it on purpose to benefit from the Carlsons."

Michael kept talking. He didn't care if I wanted to hear what he had to say or not.

I found him annoying at first, but after hearing him talk about me having had a mental disorder in the past, I tensed up subconsciously.

turned to look at him and asked, "What do you mean by that? Are you saying that Stephanie used to be psychologically ill?"

"So you've really forgotten..." Michael murmured and looked up at me.

"When you were a lot younger, you were locked in a dark basement in the orphanage for

quite a long time. When Mr. and Mrs. Carlson found you, you were fading in and out of consciousness. After that, you received many years of psychological therapy."

