

After Death 341

Chapter 341

Stevie continued to bark in the backyard. This clearly indicated that someone had climbed over the wall and entered the compound.

Stevie was a very perceptive dog. It could detect movements that many people may not have noticed.

Steven had sold his shares in the Lincoln Group to Crowdstar Group. This meant that Crowdstar Group had the right to suddenly intervene in matters involving the Lincoln Group.

The senior management of Crowdstar Group had begun to take over the Lincoln Group. This would have undoubtedly angered the Lincolns, especially Martin.

I pushed open the bedroom door in a panic and my pounding heart finally settled.

I breathed heavily while leaning against the door frame. Since I had been panicking, my breathing was rapid and my heart was beating wildly in my chest.

At that moment, regardless of the memories of my past, I had to admit that I was worried about Steven.

I was truly worried about him.

"Stephie..." Steven seemed to have drunk a lot. He was curled up at the foot of the bed and holding his legs. He looked bewildered when he saw me.

I breathed a sigh of relief. Then, I looked down at the intruder lying on the ground and walked over to Steven cautiously.

"Did you get hurt?" I asked softly as I bent down to face Steven.

There were some bloodstains on his pale face. It made him look enchanting and ethereal.

I instinctively reached out to wipe the blood from his face, but he grabbed my hand with a burning gaze.

His gaze was hot and intense. It looked as if he wanted to burn me with his eyes. "Stephie, it's not my blood."

My back tensed up at that. I felt like I was getting devoured by Steven's eyes.

Just when I thought he was going to kiss me in such an inappropriate situation, he suddenly raised his head and hugged me tightly. Then, he said drunkenly, "Stephie, what happened? I'm so scared. My head is spinning..."

I smelled alcohol on him and sighed in exasperation. "Mr. Bart, help sort this out. Get this person to the police."

Ewan smiled, as if he was relieved.

I guessed that he was probably going to say something about how I had rushed to check on Steven first this time. I didn't ignore him and check on the person Steven had attacked to make sure they weren't dead like last time.

Perhaps Steven was looking at me so intensely earlier because he realized that I finally cared about his well-being first this time.

What an idiot.

"Take him to the police station."

Ewan felt the intruder's neck for a pulse. It turned out that the man had only been knocked unconscious by Steven. He wasn't dead.

Ewan and I both breathed out a sigh of relief.

Steven was lying on top of me in a drunken stupor. I wasn't sure if he was really drunk or pretending to be.

He was covered in the intruder's blood. He was filthy, and his hair was all messy. However, his features still looked as good as ever.

"Stephie..." Steven kept calling out my name repeatedly. Perhaps he really was drunk.

"Wifey... Stephie..." he whined, as if he was trying to get my attention. He held onto me and refused to let go.

I sighed. Steven was no longer pretending to be clueless. He was pretending to be drunk instead.

It didn't matter if he was faking it or not, but I had to run him a bath.

"Get up. You have to take a bath now. You're filthy," I said disdainfully as I tugged him toward the bathroom.

Steven followed me obediently. He raised his hands above his head once we entered the bathroom.

He wanted me to take off his shirt for him.

I tiptoed and barely managed to pull his shirt over his head. At that moment, our eyes locked and my heart skipped a beat.

My breath was caught, and following that, Steven used the shirt that was wrapped around his arms to trap me in his embrace. He then kissed me with lust filling his eyes.

There was no way I could refuse his advances.

He was too ethereal to refuse.

If people could transform into magical beings, I was certain that Steven would turn into a siren.

"My pants..." Steven said.

He had kissed me until I had run out of air, yet he still had the audacity to ask me to take off his pants for him.

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I wanted to escape. My heart was beating fast, and my cheeks felt a bit flushed. However, I couldn't get away from Steven's embrace. He had me trapped with his shirt.

"Stephie, you're blushing," Steven said softly, as if he had just discovered something wonderful.

"Stephie, you should feel your pulse now."

I stared at him blankly and asked, "Why should I?"

"You once told me that if you liked someone, your sympathetic nervous system would get excited. This means that there'll be an increase in hormone secretion, followed by the transmission of dopamine and the acceleration of the heartbeat.

"If your heart rate now is higher than your resting heart rate while we're kissing, it means you like me," Steven explained earnestly.

I paused upon hearing that. I couldn't believe how childish I was in the past. I had apparently come up with formulas to determine whether I liked someone or not.

I coughed and said, "You talk too much," Then, I lowered my head to untie the drawstring on his sweatpants.

Suddenly, I recalled something and narrowed my eyes. "Take off your pants and get into the bathtub yourself. You're drunk, not handicapped!"

Steven started to act aggrieved and pretended to feel dizzy. "But Stephie... I feel so horrible. The alcohol is making my body burn up. It feels like I'm... in a rut."

I gritted my teeth. "I have scissors right here. Should I neuter you to help you out?"

Steven immediately straightened up and took off his clothes obediently. He did not treat me like a stranger at all. After stripping, he got into the bathtub by himself.

I rubbed my temples and complained inwardly about how shameless Steven was.

But to be fair, we were technically legally married.

"Stephie, my hand hurts," Steven said while showing me his palm. Only then did I notice the wounds there.

"Why didn't you say so earlier?" I hurried to get the first aid kit as I cursed and worried over him.

Steven lay dejectedly at the edge of the bathtub. He watched me treat his wounds with a dazed and unfocused gaze. I figured it was because he was a little drunk from all the drinking.

The steam from the bathtub began to fill the bathroom. With Steven lying in it like that, he looked like he had just stepped out of a fairy tale. He was just so beautiful.

"Stephie..." Steven whispered my name and fluttered his eyelashes.

He was just too irresistible.

"Stephie..." he called out again. He seemed genuinely uncomfortable at the moment as he lay in the bathtub.

I was doomed. The bathroom was too big, and the same could be said about the bathtub. I felt like Steven was slowly transforming into a seductive sea siren.

"What?" I asked, watching him warily.

"Stephie, it feels uncomfortable," Steven said, still resting his hands on the edge of the bathtub. "My hands can't get wet, so can you help me..."

I felt like he was taking advantage of the situation, so I got up to leave.

"Stephie," he called out pitifully again.

But I didn't indulge him this time.

"Stephie, you definitely fancy me. You shouldn't believe Michael. He's nothing but a shameless bastard," Steven said softly, not forgetting to curse Michael out a little bit at the end.

I chuckled and looked at him. "You're not exactly an innocent lamb either."

"Stephie, we're legally married. Everything I have is yours. From my face to my body, everything is yours. I don't even need to have any ownership of myself. You can have all of me if you want," Steven said seriously.

I suddenly had the strong impulse to destroy the whole world.

I quickly slammed the door shut. After taking a few deep breaths of fresh air outside, only then did my heart rate slow down.

I was probably flustered because of the heat in the bathroom. Yes, that was probably it.

Steven continued to take his bath in the bathroom. However, I was worried that he really was drunk and would drown himself accidentally, so I opened the bathroom door and lay on the bed. I found an angle where I could see Steven with just a glance. I could prevent him from drowning himself this way.

It was clear that Steven felt aggrieved. He splashed around in the bathtub for a bit and seemed to consider soaking his hands in the water for a moment.

"If you get your hands wet, I'll break them," I said in a low voice.

Steven excitedly lifted his head out of the water and obediently placed his hands that were still raised back on the edge of the bathtub.

After he had confirmed that I was still watching him, he started to play up his own antics. He looked like a peacock with its feathers spread. He grabbed one thing after another and couldn't seem to stay still.

I was exasperated. Seeing that Steven didn't seem too drunk, I decided to ignore him and took out my phone to read my parents' diary.

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Andy seemed to pity Steven.

But it definitely did not look like all Andy felt for Steven was fatherly love. There were other complex emotions mixed in as well in his gaze.

Below the photo, my mother had written a note that read: "Number 0's emotions seem more turbulent than Stephie's. It appears as if he had a tendency toward violence and abuse, but this cannot be confirmed at the moment. Further observation is required."

My head suddenly ached horrible and I heard a voice in my head, "Stephie, you can't have your own children.

"I'm really sorry, Stephie. But your genes and Steve's aren't..."

"Sherry, what are you saying to the child?"

I could hear my mom's guilty voice and my dad's rebuke in my mind. Then, it was followed by the sound of things being packed into suitcases.

"Don't affect her negatively with your emotions. Just act normal and don't make it obvious that something is amiss. I'm going to put our things in the car first. After attending the ceremony at the orphanage today, we'll leave Huma."

My mom sobbed and hugged me rather tightly, "Stephie, I'm so sorry. I wasn't good enough for you."

"We don't have much time. He has spies everywhere, we need to go as soon as we can," my dad urged.

"Have you given the police the documents and evidence you've compiled?" my mom asked, sounding fearful.

"It'd be too obvious if I handed those in myself. I asked Charlie to do it."

"Can we trust him?" my mom asked, sounding doubtful.

"We go a long way back, don't we? His wife couldn't conceive, remember? You ended up helping her with IVF. He's grateful to us, so he's bound to help us."

In my memory, it was clear that my dad seemed to trust this Charlie fellow.

I couldn't remember who Charlie was.

I began tugging my hair from the headache.

I could vaguely make out a memory. On the day of the car accident, my parents had been unusually nervous. It felt as if they were planning to hide from some people and were trying to take me away.

They had entrusted some evidence and information to Charlie to give to the police.

But judging from the current situation I was in, it was obvious that Charlie had betrayed my dad's trust. Not only did he not give the information he was supposed to to the police, but he might have even exposed my dad to the very person my dad was running from.

As such, my parents, along with Andy, ended up getting involved in that fatal and premeditated car accident on Hymn Bridge.

"Wifey..." Steven's whining snapped me back to reality. I instinctively switched my phone off and was immediately enveloped in Steven's embrace when I turned around.

My breathing started to become shallow.

I started to wonder if what Michael had told me was true. Perhaps Steven had really imprisoned and abused me.

That was what my mother's logs seemed to indicate, after all.

But until my memory got fully restored, I couldn't speculate on everything just by relying on the information in the logs.

Because at this moment, I didn't even trust my own parents.

Before the truth came out, I couldn't even trust myself.

"Wifey, I feel dizzy." Steven rolled onto the bed with me in his arms. Then, he started going into seduction mode.

He wrapped his long and muscular legs around me, preventing me from escaping.

"Stephie..." he said. He held me from behind and slowly tightened his grip on me.

My ears burned. There was something hot pressing against my waist from behind. Steven was such a bastard.

"Stephie, I'll just rub against you. I won't do more than that, okay?"

"Fuck off."

"I'll only touch you a little bit. I won't put it inside..."

I really wanted to neuter him at this moment.

Fortunately, he still had some sense left in him. He knew that my body couldn't handle his passion, so all he did was touch me a little without doing anything more.

But just his touch was too much for me to handle. His hands went everywhere.

"Steven Lincoln!"

Just when Steven was at his peak, his phone rang.

His gaze turned icy. It looked as if he wanted to kill someone.

I smirked at him and said, "Answer the phone."

He didn't.

I reached for his phone, but he tried to stop me.

"What if it's something urgent?" I asked.

Steven gritted his teeth and glanced at the screen. When he saw it was a call from Eason, he muttered, "it better be an emergency."

"Steven Lincoln! I got a hold of Stephanie's autopsy report and the genetic testing report done on the fetus in her womb. There's a huge problem. Come to the forensic lab right now!"

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When Steven and I arrived at the forensic lab, Eason was sitting on the couch in the lounge. He had a grave expression on his face.

Eason wasn't the only one there. There were several people wearing white lab coats around him with solemn expressions on their faces as well. They appeared to be researchers.

"Take a look for yourself," Eason said, placing the text report on the table.

Steven picked it up and glanced at the report. He did not seem very surprised.

I looked at Steven for a moment, then reached out to grab the report from him to take a look at it myself.

Unfortunately, I couldn't understand a thing.

Seeing that I looked clueless, Eason rubbed his forehead and started to explain, "This is a huge problem. It appears that Stephanie had genetically modified the fetus in her womb during its embryonic stage. Then, the embryo was implanted into the host for gestation after that."

The other researchers looked equally somber.

Eason continued, "Furthermore, Stephanie herself had undergone the most advanced genome editing possible.

"She should have been born with great intelligence, a superior physique, and great strength that made her stronger than any other human being. This means that she was essentially made to become... a superhuman."

This was a terrifying discovery. This meant that humans have somehow created a deity amongst men that was somehow also human.

"Genome editing?" I asked, looking at the researchers in astonishment. "Is this technology widespread?"

"It's strictly prohibited, actually." Eason frowned and continued, "You probably don't understand what genome editing will do to our society. Once it..."

Eason trailed off and didn't continue. He knew that even if he did, I wouldn't be able to understand him.

Steven remained silent. He said nothing.

"Is it possible that some wealthy people have already started doing this? It sounds harmless enough to me. It's just so that they can make their children more outstanding, right?" I asked tentatively.

Eason replied, "Research on genome editing is strictly prohibited. Experimenting it on humans is forbidden because there are too many uncontrollable factors to account for.

"For instance, if we cut off a segment of your genetic chain to make you naturally immune to a certain disease, it is highly likely that this splice will open up another door to another disease. The consequences of human genome editing are too uncontrollable and unpredictable."

The rich weren't fools, after all. They wouldn't dare to attempt such under-researched experiments on themselves lightly.

As such, in order to make sure the experiment would be successful, countless test subjects would need to be sacrificed until the best results were obtained.

Once genome editing was legalized, human society would be in total chaos. The wealthy would ensure their children were outstanding in all aspects from birth, while the poor got oppressed their entire lives.

I stared at the genetic test results and remained silent for a long while.

"So you're saying that Stephanie wasn't the product of her parent's love, but an experimental subject?"

"That's highly likely," one of the researchers said with a nod.

Eason looked at Steven and said, "You know why I called you here, don't you? News of this cannot be leaked, or it will cause mass panic. We need to investigate this further. I suspect Stephanie might not be an isolated case."

Stephanie's parents had logs that resembled experimental data, after all. As such, Eason suspected that Stephanie was actually an experimental subject.

"And her death was most likely planned ahead by the ones behind this scheme. They wanted to destroy any living evidence of the experiment."

Moreover, it was very likely that the ones behind it considered Stephanie a failed experimental subject. As such, they decided to abandon her by killing her.

"If their intention was to destroy the evidence, the person who killed me- I mean Stephanie- wouldn't have a reason to trap her body in a glass display case, right? Her body should have been obliterated," I argued.

I continued in a whisper, "Placing her body in a glass display case seems more intentional. Perhaps it's so that she could be shown to the public. Maybe the person behind her death wanted to display her as a commodity and wanted to expose the conspiracy behind her existence to the public."

Maybe the murderer was against genome editing.

Furthermore, it was clear that the murderer was privy to a lot of secret information about the genome editing experiments.

"The most terrifying part of all of this hasn't even been presented yet," Eason said, then took out another genetic testing report.

"This is the report done on the fetus in Stephanie's womb. It was shaped abnormally, had congenital malformations, severe genetic defects and chromosomal abnormalities..."

To put that in plain terms, the fetus was essentially a real-life monstrosity.

It was a malformed child that could not have been born.

"But why?" I asked in shock. I covered my mouth with a hand and trembled all over.

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The baby was never born.

"This is the consequence of tampering with human genomes. Stephanie was born a superhuman. She was naturally immune to various diseases, but it also means that her body isn't suited for reproduction since her birth.

"Much like a mule bred from a donkey and a horse. A mule is incapable of reproduction."

Stephanie was the metaphorical mule in question. It would be impossible for her to conceive a child, let alone a healthy one.

Genome editing was a bit like Pandora's box. Once it was opened, the consequences that followed were unpredictable.

"This isn't a trivial matter. It's honestly terrifying. The scope of implications is very broad. Stephanie was probably not their sole experimental subject. There must be an evil and terrifying organization that had everything planned."

Eason tapped on the table and continued, "We first learned about the genius selection, then learned about the missing teenagers. Serial killings along with dismemberment cases were thrown into the mix as well."

Looking back at this case concerning genome editing, everything seemed unrelated. Who knew that they'd end up inter-relating to one another?"

Eason suddenly showed a remarkable shred of his intelligence.

Perhaps he had always been this smart.

It was just a pity that he figured it out a bit later than someone else.

Steven had already found all of this out many years ago. He had everything plastered on the wall already.

I turned to look at Steven. My gaze burned into him.

I wasn't trying to reprimand him, but I just couldn't understand why he refused to say anything at this moment.

"That's right. The rich have long been conducting genome editing in secret to leave outstanding heirs in their place," Steven's voice was hoarse when he finally spoke up, "I'm actually a genetically modified person as well, but my situation is different from Stephanie's."

"She underwent the complete genome editing process, while I only underwent modifications in resisting hereditary diseases and some enhancements. My intelligence and physical fitness was enhanced, along with some genes related to bettering my facial features."

As soon as Steven finished speaking, everyone stared at him.

Some of the researchers' eyes seemed to have lit up.

Human desire was truly a terrifying thing to behold.

Since ancient times, kings have tried to pursue immortality. It turned out that people were still doing it in the present day. Research on longevity, anti-aging, and ways to achieve eternal youth never ceased.

But such studies were against the principles of humanity. It was against the laws of nature. Even so, human desire to pursue immortality would undoubtedly persist till the end of times.

"Andy never loved my mother. My mom was just a beautiful woman with perfect genes. She was chosen by my grandpa to bear a child for the Lincolns. All she was to them was an egg donor, while Andy was the sperm provider," Steven said.

Andy was Steven's so-called biological father, as it seemed.

Steven chuckled coldly after saying that.

In plain terms, he was nothing but a product of surrogacy. He was much like an object, a commodity.

"My grandpa wanted to have a perfect heir, so as a genetically modified person, I was born in a laboratory in Melovia," he continued.

Suddenly, I understood why Steven stopped talking about the secrets he kept.

It was because each secret he kept hurt him. He was essentially stabbing himself by revealing his secrets.

"I was observed closely by researchers until I was eight years old. It was at that age when the Lincolns had to take me back. They signed a contract and everything.

"But they ended up backtracking because I was always silent and liked to be alone. Due to the genome editing, my brain development was abnormally delayed before the age of eight. I was a lot less intelligent than other eight year olds out there as well.

"Because of that, they considered me as a failed experimental product. After they brought me back to the country, they dumped me at an orphanage." Steven took a deep breath and looked at Eason with indifference.

He continued, "But they didn't know that after the age of eight, my brain started to develop to a point where no normal person could even comprehend."

Then, Steven pointed at his own temple. His voice was tinged with resentment as he spoke.

He seemed to believe that he himself was also a genetically modified monstrosity.

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I probably knew everything about what happened next. Steven's exceptional talents suddenly flourished. He entered an advanced class as a teenager and rose to fame overnight. The Lincoln family was thrilled to welcome Steven back during this time.

Oh, how ironic! How terrible could human nature be?

"How about Simmy?" Eason asked anxiously.

Was Simeon also a baby who underwent genome editing?

Steven gazed at Eason and asked with a solemn tone, "Do you know why wealthy individuals invest in genome editing? They do so because they aspire for their children to become the next Einstein or Rockefeller. But God's creation of human beings is truly miraculous. Every so often, a natural genius emerges to propel the world's development...

"Only God possesses the power to manipulate human genes. However, there are always individuals who dare to challenge this notion, foolishly believing that they can replace or even fabricate God Himself."

Steven's words were crystal clear. Simeon was a natural genius, a one-in-a-billion prodigy from birth. Yet, he was changed due to human interference.

He was genetically superior and had been altered and improved based on his superior genetics. He was destined for success.

Steven stared at the scientific researchers. "The woman who bore me carries a quarter of Yowhayton ancestry. Genes can be passed down and inherited. This is the wonder of humanity and the horror of

genetics. If it is not against the law, wouldn't you desire your children to be born at the peak of their potential?"

Despite seeming absurd, this idea uncovered an important truth about human nature.

"Do you not desire for your child to be born a genius, possessing natural resistance against various diseases?"

The researchers remained silent.

"But this is uncontrollable. Despite the advantages, the risks of genetic mutation are too high. I can't allow my children to take this risk," one of the researchers replied, shaking his head.

Steven agreed. "So we must thoroughly investigate this matter."

Despite the challenges faced, it was crucial to uncover the truth. The entire organization should be completely dismantled and destroyed.

"I've been investigating these issues for six years, yet I've never truly reached their core. I underestimated the complexity of human nature and the horrors of power."

And also underestimated the intelligence of the mastermind.

Steven had concluded long ago that the person who planned all of this was definitely not simple. Without a doubt, this individual was a brilliant genius, far surpassing Steven's intelligence.

"Who do you suspect?" Eason looked at Steven nervously.

"Peter." Steven grasped my hand and gazed at me with determination.

He appeared to be assuring me that he would help me find out everything. He would always be there for me, always protecting me.

"But Peter might not be the true mastermind. I went to the asylum this time not only to uncover Peter's weaknesses but also to assess his true intentions. He is very ambitious and clever, but not exceptionally intelligent." Peter was intelligent but could not meticulously strategize and craft intricate plans.

Eason agreed. "Then let's start with him."

Steven glanced over at Eason. "Regarding the serial murder case, all victims are far from innocent. The reason why this killer has attracted so much attention from society is that his underlying goal... must be to unveil the truth about genome editing."

"He wants us to wait and see. He's provoking the mastermind behind this plan," said Steven, his voice hoarse and low.

I was breathing heavily. From a certain perspective, the individual responsible for the serial murders could be seen as more of an adversary, a foe of the mastermind behind this scheme.

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The enemy of an enemy was a friend. Did Steven intentionally avoid putting in his best effort to find the murderer and instead just watch them fight?

"What about Stephanie?" Eason repeated the question I asked earlier.

If no one were innocent, what about Stephanie?

Steven's hand was shaking as he held my hand. "She...is the key. She is the subject of genome editing experiments and should be showcased in the cabinet as evidence."

So, the person behind it killed me. I smiled bitterly. My genes were edited before I was conceived and born.

What did I do wrong? Why should I be ruthlessly killed and used by everyone?

I struggled to free myself from Steven's grip, but he held me tightly. His voice sounded hoarse as if he was begging me. "Stephie..."

He did this every time I got angry. But I was killed! Would he still condone the mastermind?

I firmly stated, my eyes were red. "I must find the serial murderer! I don't care why you're protecting him. I can't allow him to kill everyone in order to target the so-called mastermind!"

Those lives were innocent! Regardless of their guilt, it was the law that should administer punishment, not a serial killer!

Steven lowered his head, his breath trembling with emotion. He still refused to explain. He was so persistent.

I turned my gaze away, no longer relying on him to assist me in the search for the serial murderer. I would find the culprit myself.

Eason shook his head. "We've been unable to uncover any clues or make any progress in the serial murder case. Despite Yasmin's ongoing dramatic search for trouble, the elusive murderer remains inactive, making it extremely challenging for us. However, the mutilation case is connected to human trafficking. It is suspected that those 'natural' geniuses have been trafficked as gene vectors. They may be subjected to even more horrifying circumstances. Our top priority is to locate them as quickly as possible."

I nodded with a lingering sense of fear.

He was right. We must prioritize locating those innocent geniuses. They were most likely exploited, being utilized as a means for reproduction, acting as carriers of genes, as well as repositories for sperm and eggs, with their complete potential being exploited for personal benefit.

"The police's frequent visits to the Bridgeway Route demolition zone will raise suspicions among the escort girls. The area is densely populated with sex workers, rendering police checks futile. These individuals are akin to skilled fugitives, adept at hiding themselves. However, within such a complex environment, valuable clues are more likely to surface." Eason carefully analyzed the existing clue points.

In order to locate the abducted teenagers, they needed to head to No. 38 Bridgeway Route.

"There is someone I know. Her name is Carol, and she is Simmy's sister." I just recalled that Carol lived there. She had a mild intellectual disability. If I could get her to open up, I might be able to learn something.

But when I mentioned Carol, Steven's expression suddenly changed. "No!"

He appeared reluctant to let me meet Carol. "She's mentally disabled. You won't be able to get information from her. Moreover, the environment is chaotic and dangerous. You can't go there."

I furrowed my brow and gazed intently at Steven. It was clear that he had been concealing more than just one secret from me.

In addition, in my mother's diary, there were disturbing accounts of him imprisoning me, kidnapping me, and abusing me. I was still unable to discern whether these accounts were true or false.

Steven, what kind of person were you exactly?

"I'm going. Those children have been missing for so many years. Imagine the despair they must feel if they are still alive... I must rescue them!" I insisted on going there.

After all, the disappearance of those genius teenagers was closely related to "Stephanie". I felt the need to investigate, either out of guilt or a genuine desire for truth.

Steven slowly let go of my hand, his voice hoarse. "I'll go with you..."

No matter what, the priority was to find the missing geniuses at all costs.

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I parked my car a distance away and walked to the demolition zone of Bridgeway Route. Steven remained silent throughout the journey. He was unsure how to stop me, yet also dissatisfied with my decision to meet Carol.

I felt furious with him because he consistently prevented me without providing any explanation. He should have clearly explained the reasons behind his actions. For instance, he could have mentioned that Carol tended to be aggressive and might cause harm to me.

Any valid explanation would have been acceptable to me. However, he chose to remain silent and stubbornly prevented me from proceeding. How could I be happy about it?

"Stephie..." Upon noticing my anger, he promptly bowed his head and meekly trailed behind me at a distance of three meters. Just as I was about to step into the demolition zone, he softly uttered my name.

I glanced back at him. He was tall and attractive, but appeared fragile when wearing an oversized sweater, as if he had been a target of bullying.

I scoffed and ignored him. I couldn't constantly compromise and cater to his every desire.

Seeing that I had ignored him, his eyes were a little red. He sniffed and continued to follow me, not too far away but not too close either.

I intentionally quickened my pace, as if I were flaunting my impatience.

I was an ordinary person. But then I discovered that my husband was keeping something from me and was protecting the person who killed me. It was only natural for me to feel angry about that.

Why should I be rational with my partner? I had every right to express my anger. Shouldn't he be able to handle my emotions and be honest with me?

Fuming with anger, I let out a deep growl before turning into an alley. The alley was in a state of disarray, with gangsters and homeless people smoking.

I had always harbored a deep fear of these individuals, likely because of the terrifying encounter I had with Michael at the Nocturnal Club.

"Hello there, gorgeous! How much is it?"

"Shall we?"

Those individuals used offensive language as if all women who visited this place were sex workers.

I attempted to disregard those individuals and leave swiftly. However, they persisted, using their hands to prevent me from moving. They also said offensive words to me.

I felt a twinge of fear and instinctively glanced around to locate Steven. As soon as I turned around, I found myself in his embrace. His strong arm surrounded me, and his soothing voice whispered, "I'm here."

The men sneered, startled by Steven's chilling gaze. All of them instinctively backed away.

Steven grasped my hand and guided me down the lengthy alley.

"Steve, do you think I'm pretentious?" I asked him in a hushed tone.

He took my hand and glanced back at me. "Stephie, you asked me before. What does it feel like to be afraid? What does dependence feel like? What does fear feel like?"

He spoke softly as if talking to me but also to himself. "You mentioned feeling like a monster, lacking emotions, and longing for a normal life. You expressed envy towards those who seem carefree and

those women who depend on men. You even shared a willingness to trade your intelligence and reason for a simpler existence."

He whispered, guiding me forward with careful steps. The alley stretched ahead, deep, long, and shrouded in darkness. It emanated a sense of dampness and endlessness.

At that moment, it seemed as though I had caught a glimpse of Steven in the past. As he walked into the alley in ill-fitting clothes, he solved one obstacle after another for me.

"So, Stephie, I won't think you're being pretentious. I'll be genuinely happy and overjoyed that you've finally achieved success and started a new life. This is what you've desired, and I only want to safeguard everything for you," Steven said, his voice tinged with emotion.

I couldn't quite understand what he said.

Did he imply that I used to be excessively intellectual, almost robotic, and devoid of emotions? Was he suggesting that I yearned to break free from the constraints of my high IQ and be less intellectual, all while embracing my humanity? Did he insinuate that I desired to be pretentious?

I furrowed my brow and seized his arm firmly. "So, what you're trying to say is that you still believe I am pretentious, huh?"

Steven smiled and shook his head innocently. "I don't."

I snorted, shook off Steven's hand, and went upstairs. He was constantly following me, not too close, not too far. His presence provided me with a sense of safety.

"Bitch! Why are you pretending?"

"Ah!"

I heard a scream followed by a man's cursing.

Suddenly, the door swung open. An infuriated man emerged from Carol's room, cursing, "200 dollars is more than enough for you."

Chapter 350

Carol's cheeks were red and swollen as she clumsily followed him out. She cried and spoke with hesitation as if struggling to express herself clearly. "Please, it's 500. Please."

She begged desperately, her body trembling uncontrollably. It was obvious that she was in desperate need of money.

The man snapped and forcefully shoved Carol aside, angrily exclaiming, "Move out of my way! What an unlucky day! Fool!"

But weren't they all bullying a fool? They would give others 500, but would only give Carol 200 each time.

"I need money. I really need money, please." Carol knelt on the ground and kept desperately begging.

I stood at the end of the corridor, watching her innocently begging, and felt incredibly unsettled.

"Hand over the money. You agreed on 500, so that's what you need to give her. If you don't, we'll have to involve the police. If you're not afraid of the shame of going to jail, then go ahead and try it!" I approached the man and grabbed him angrily.

The man became angry and wanted to push me, but Steven quickly pushed him directly against the wall. In the end, the man cursed and tossed a stack of 300 dollars onto the ground before swiftly fleeing the scene.

Carol cautiously picked up the money from the ground, peeking fearfully at Steven. She seemed to be very afraid of Steven. Suddenly, she stood up and rushed back to the room, determined to lock the door.

Steven instantly stepped forward and pushed the door open, demanding, "Open the door!"

Only then did Carol open the door in fear as she nervously backed away. "Steve..."

Steven stared at her in silence.

Carol secretly placed the cash under the pillow and cast an uneasy glance in my direction. "I didn't... I didn't push her on purpose."

She was scared that she had pushed me that day. Did Steven come to see her? Steven didn't speak. He simply stood at the door and gazed at me.

I attempted to soothe her. "Carol, could we please have a conversation?"

However, she lowered her head and ignored me.

"I can pay you." Knowing she needed money, I reached into Steven's pocket for the cash and gave it to Carol. Steven snorted reluctantly.

I was actually quite curious. Carol was Simeon's sister, and Steven and Simeon were close to each other. It was puzzling that he was reluctant when I asked him to get some cash out just now, considering he couldn't ignore her when he had money.

Carol shook her head vigorously and took a step back. "I don't want that. Simmy said that I can't get something for nothing."

I was stunned. "But what you're doing is illegal. And..."

I was somewhat embarrassed to say it, but this was simply not right.

Carol tilted her head and shook it. "Simmy always said that I can't get something for nothing."

She had a mental disability and only seemed to remember this sentence.

"You get something for nothing by doing this too." I corrected her way of thinking.

She looked at me with fear, then turned to Steven. "You too! Do you work for money? You... you sleep with him, and he gives you money."

Carol pointed at me and then at Steven.

I felt somewhat powerless and was left speechless. "We are a married couple, and he enjoys spoiling me with his earnings."

Carol pursed her lips and muttered, "Shameless."

I was confused and looked at Steven. What did I do to be called shameless?

Steven's gaze lingered on Carol, his expression filled with caution. He didn't see her as just someone with intellectual disabilities, but rather as a dangerous person.

"I have something I'd like to ask you about. Could you please tell me?" I inquired tentatively.

Carol muttered, "You have to pay me."

Without hesitation, I handed over some cash to her.

She still repeated, "I can't get something for nothing."

"Then what do you want?" I was about to lose my patience.

Carol pointed at Steven. "Let him sleep with me and pay me."