

After Death 381

Chapter 382

I anxiously searched but found nothing.

Just as I sat on the ground, consumed by despair and helplessness, I heard a distinct "click". It was followed by the sound of an iron door opening and footsteps echoing down the corridor. My nerves instantly tensed up. Did someone find the key and leave so quickly? Who could it be?

"Who is out there? Who has left? Please, help us! Where did you find the key? Help us!" The commotion outside grew louder as everyone began shouting.

The footsteps grew increasingly slower, as though he were attentively listening to something.

"Thud, thud, thud." Suddenly, the person outside started banging on the iron door with sticks. Everyone fell silent, curious to know what he was up to.

After everyone had stayed quiet, he called out, "Stephie..."

The voice was hoarse and filled with panic. It was Steven! He was searching for me.

I forcefully slammed the door. "Steve! Steve! I'm here!"

I heard the sound of his footsteps approaching, and soon he was sprinting towards me in a state of panic.

"Click." Another sound echoed as someone else had opened the iron door.

"Damn it! Enough with the hocus-pocus! You're going to make me late for my college entrance exam." The cursing voice belonged to Joel.

I felt an overwhelming mix of surprise and panic. With tears streaming down my face, I desperately banged on the door in fear. "Steve, I'm terrified."

Steven's anxious voice could be heard outside the door. "Stephie, don't be afraid. Take a deep breath and listen to me. Don't be scared. Calm yourself down."

I listened to him, took a deep breath, and remained silent.

"Hasn't she come out yet? How foolish!" Joel approached as well. His voice trembled slightly with concern, though he masked it with feigned disgust and indifference. "Click." Someone managed to open the iron door again.

"Steven," the person called out with a sneer.

"What are you doing? Are you still searching for that impostor? Do you honestly believe that if she were me, she wouldn't be clever enough to figure out such a simple trick and find a way out?" That voice belonged to Yasmin!

I felt uneasy. Even Yasmin found the key. She could find it, but I was clueless.

Steven completely ignored Yasmin and asked softly, "Stephie, don't be scared. What did you see on your room's wall?"

I took one look and quickly replied,

my voice trembling. "If I have been dwelling in darkness, please don't expose me to the light... If you choose to bring me into the light, don't then thrust me back into the darkness where I can't even see my own hands."

After a brief pause, Steven advised softly outside the door, "Check beneath the lamp, in the brightest spot."

I quickly understood his meaning. I ran to the lamp and tapped on the tiles. They were indeed hollow.

I successfully managed to pry up the tile and retrieve the key from it. I tried to open the door, but my hands were shaking and I failed a few times. Eventually, I managed to open the door.

As soon as the door was opened, I caught sight of Steven. Without hesitation, he reached out and enveloped me in his embrace, holding me tightly.

I couldn't breathe for a moment. It was like I could understand the words written on the wall. "If I have been dwelling in darkness, please don't expose me to the light."

What was written was absolutely
correct. If I were to find myself
crawling in fear through the
darkness, I would undoubtedly feel
immense gratitude and heavily
depend on the individual who
illuminated my path, granting me the
ability to perceive the light. Content

"Click." Another sound resonated through the long, narrow, and deep corridor, signaling the opening of the door.

Our attention was immediately captivated by it. The person who walked out was Michael. He stood there with a frown, his expression exuding displeasure, and emitting an icy air.

I was utterly astonished. If Steven and I were both players in the game, Joel was the implicated outsider, and Yasmin herself was on the Death List, then what about Michael? Why was he present as well?

Was the murderer planning to kill every single one of us? Were we all just pawns in this twisted game? How many secrets lay concealed behind this serial murder case?

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"Mikey," Yasmin took the initiative to call out Michael's name, and she called him Mikey.

I felt a sense of revulsion. Would I have referred to Michael like that in the past? I wasn't sure if the "Stephanie" portrayed by Yasmin resembled her.

"It's astonishing how someone as foolish as Michael can come out so quickly. She really thinks she's good at pretending." I whispered in a low voice, peeking out from behind Steven and gripping his arm tightly. I was feeling a bit frightened.

Where was this place?

Michael glanced over in my direction, his gaze locking onto me. A subtle furrow appeared on his brow, yet he remained silent. His gaze towards me was frigid and unfamiliar.

It was clear that Michael strongly believed that Yasmin was Stephanie. He thought I was merely pretending to be Stephanie, plotting to kill him.

Joel cursed softly, "How many people has this lunatic captured? How on earth did this psycho manage to catch all of us?"

Yasmin shot me a hostile glance, her voice dripping with intensity. "The nanny of the Ford family was helping the murderer. She has been cunningly embedded within the Ford household for years, elusive and virtually undetectable."

Michael was clearly upset, and it was obvious that he had also been drugged by the nanny, Angel.

I hid behind Steven and took a deep breath. Angel...

During my time at the Ford residence, I couldn't shake the feeling that Angel was acting strangely. Wasn't she under Peter and Yasmin? Could she possibly be working as a double agent?

If she were a double agent, what was the significance of her telling me that the cherry tree on Quemerley Street had blossomed?

"Alright. Someone close to you is plotting against you." Joel nodded.

Then, he pointed at Steven. "He is a psycho and was purposefully kidnapped to catch the murderer."

After making that statement, he pointed at me and himself. "We were the only two fools, and we were both knocked unconscious by someone."

I glanced at Joel and didn't expose him. In fact, when Joel was arrested, it was evident that he didn't resist. It was clear that he was intentionally caught. I was the only fool in the situation. "Help us! Get us out!"

"Please! Help!"

From the eerily clean corridor,

numerous people frantically banged on the door and called for help. Their voices were becoming faint. Clearly, many people were unaware that infused nutrient solutions could also be consumed to quickly recharge physical strength.

If they continued howling, crying, and panicking like this, their physical strength and sugar levels would deplete rapidly. Before long, they could become hypoglycemic, fall into a coma, or even go into shock. Ultimately, they would succumb to starvation, dehydration, and various other causes, leading to their

demise.

"Thud, thud, thud." The corridor's voice-activated sensor lights illuminate and switch off.

I stood behind Steven in fear, nervously tugging at the corner of his clothes. He reached behind his back and motioned for me to hold his hand.

I quickly reached out and intertwined my fingers with his. At that moment, the warmth of his hand slowly soothed my panicked heart.

"Where is this? How many people did the lunatic kidnap?" Michael asked in a low and determined voice, showing no interest in rescuing anyone.

"This lengthy corridor is lined with.

small cage-like rooms on both sides, clearly filled with people," Joel cursed and exchanged a glance with Steven, silently debating whether they should intervene and rescue them.

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Yasmin sneered. "Let's save ourselves for now."

After speaking, Yasmin stepped forward and gripped Michael's wrist. "The lunatic claimed that there was food and weapons at the end of the corridor. Let's go there first."

I glanced anxiously at Steven. Should we prioritize saving others or saving ourselves first?

It was clear that all three of us had limited stamina, and my legs were starting to give out. This was the moment that revealed everyone's humanity.

Joel leaned against the wall, cursing under his breath. "I've gone my whole life without experiencing hypoglycemia, and now I'm breaking out in a cold sweat..."

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On the contrary, Steven appeared quite ordinary. However, as I gripped his hand, I could distinctly sense his strength gradually waning too.

"Click." The door of another room opened, and a figure stumbled out.

I stared at the person before me, my eyes widening in astonishment. It was none other than Howard.

"He claimed to have cancer. After being granted bail, he was swiftly transferred to the hospital for emergency treatment. How did he get here under the nose of the police?" I asked in shock.

Steven didn't respond and passed me off to Joel. "Go grab a bite to eat and select a weapon for self-defense before these people come out."

Steven was aware that the people on the lists were all inherently vicious. With limited food and resources, they might not be able to wait for police rescue and could end up killing each other due to the scarcity of food and resources.

The mastermind sought to witness this phenomenon. His purpose was to make everyone kill each other. Since the very first case of the serial murder case, he had skillfully used the close connection between the killer and the victim to murder.

Howard lay on the ground, clearly unable to stand up due to low blood sugar. As he opened his eyes and caught sight of Steven, fear and survival instinct overwhelmed him, prompting him to flee towards the end of the corridor.

With a resounding "click," another iron door swung open, revealing Callum's wife.

When we went to look for Carol, we found out that she was a woman who had suffered from domestic abuse by Callum.

I stared at Steven in disbelief. "Isn't she innocent? How could she have been caught?"

"She is a victim." Steven frowned.

Taking a deep breath, I couldn't help but wonder if the captured individuals were not only the perpetrators but also the victims.

"Carol... Carol!" She panicked and shouted, displaying a noticeably greater physical strength than Howard.

I took Steven over there and examined her room. She had consumed the nutrient solution. She was also aware that the words on the wall held the key to locating the key. It became evident that she was quite smart.

"Please, I need your help! Carol has also been captured. We were caught together. Please!" She pleaded desperately, urging Steven and me to assist her.

I nervously glanced at Steven. "Carol is actually here too..."

"Joel, take her there," Steven requested of Joel, asking him to take me to eat.

Joel nodded and grabbed my wrist. wanted to stay, but I also knew it would cause trouble for Steven Therefore, I quickly followed Joel to find some food.

As we reached the end of the corridor, we were met with a tantalizing spread of food and an array of weapons mounted on the wall.

Michael ate slowly, scrutinizing the array of weapons adorning the wall before finally selecting the most handy one.

Although considered traditional, weapons like knives and axes held an undeniable lethality capable of ending a life.

Yasmin wrapped all the leftovers in a tablecloth, clearly intending to keep them for herself.

"What are you doing? You've taken everything away! What about everyone else?" I exclaimed with anger.

Clearly, Yasmin and Michael had no intention of providing a means for others to survive.

Yasmin glanced at me coldly and

ignored me. She made her way to the weapons wall, carefully choosing two extremely sharp knives. Then, she proceeded to remove all the other

apons, planning to hide

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them.

Joel saw through her intention and quickly moved forward to grasp her wrist. Michael furrowed his brow and reached out to block Joel. Tension crackled in the air between the three of them.

I walked over, squatted down, and carefully selected a dagger for myself. After that, I chose another one for Steven.

Joel reached out to grab the sword that had caught Yasmin's interest, only to be abruptly halted by her.

"Put down the food and weapons." I couldn't comprehend why I pressed the dagger against Yasmin's neck. Quietly approaching her from behind, I firmly stated, "Put it down, or I'll kill you."

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Howard eventually crawled over. He lay on the table in a panic, desperately eating the leftovers that Yasmin had left behind. He was attempting to regain his strength.

Meanwhile, the four of us were still at a stalemate. Joel glanced at me surprisingly as if to acknowledge that I had finally made a clever move.

Yasmin didn't appear afraid. "Do you dare to kill me?"

"Give it a try," I said with a feigned sense of composure. I pressed the dagger against her carotid artery, its sharp edge grazing her skin.

Michael's expression turned stormy as he scolded with evident anger. "Stephany Larson!"

Without a doubt, he referred to me as Stephany. He was convinced that Yasmin was actually Stephanie.

I smirked. "Ha... If you wish to spare her life, put down the food."

Michael had no option but to take over the package from Yasmin. He opened it and put down the food. Joel grabbed a portion enough for us to share and ushered me to a secluded spot in the corner.

I gazed warily at Yasmin and Michael, whispering, "Joel... they are dangerous."

The mastermind was no longer the real danger here, but rather everyone who got caught.

"Let's go and assist Steven." After eating some cakes, I sensed a slight return of strength. Hence, I proceeded to locate Steven with food and a bottle of milk.

He was assisting the woman who was a victim of domestic abuse in searching for Carol. I hurried over and promptly handed the cake to Steven.

Steven knocked on the door while eating and helped the people inside find the keys. He walked through each room without showing any emotion, assisting everyone to escape.

In contrast to Michael and Yasmin's indifference, this lunatic and the person previously suspected of being a murderer appeared to possess a greater sense of humanity.

I asked softly, "Steve, most of the people locked up here were from the orphanage in the past. They've all harmed you and were the main ones responsible for Simmy's death. Wouldn't it be better if they stayed here and died?"

Steven fell silent. "They are indeed guilty, and it is the law and divine justice that should be responsible for punishing them. Not us. Not him."

Steven spoke in a hushed tone as he referred to the mastermind who controlled and orchestrated everything from behind the scenes.

I turned my gaze towards Steven and passed him the bottle of milk, determined to assist him in searching for Carol.

"Click." The iron door swung open, revealing Callum, the perpetrator of domestic abuse.

The first thing he did when he rushed out was not to find food but to assault his wife. "Quinn Lloyd, you filthy bitch! Did you do it?"

Quinn cowered behind Steven and

me in fear, her entire body shaking uncontrollably. The visible wounds on her face and the corners of her mouth were clear signs of the prolonged domestic abuse she had endured.

"I advise you to conserve your energy. We may not be able to get out of here alive," I warned him.

Only then did he react, turning around and swiftly running to the end to find food and weapons.

Despite not being a genius, most of the children from the orphanage were clever enough to find a way escape. The differences and

changes between them and the ne

photos were significant. It was difficult for me to identify the names of those people.

Finally, Steven and I found Carol, who was nearly unconscious in a corner room. Despite knocking on the door, there was no response. "Carol!" Quinn frantically knocked on the door, calling out to her to respond.

Yet, there was no response. Panic set in. She was doomed. If she was unconscious inside, we had no idea where the key was or how to rescue her. Just when I was at a loss for what to do, Joel arrived with an ax and struck the door lock with force. Sparks scattered as he hacked away at it. After a relentless effort, the lock on the iron door was shattered. With a powerful kick, the door burst open.

Joel was the first to rush in, holding

a bottle of mineral water. He quickly approached Carol, who was dying and offered her the drink. She was huddled in the corner, her face pale. It was obvious that she couldn't hold on much longer.

There was a sentence written on her wall. "If you cannot transform this tainted world, then transform yourself. Natural selection dictates that the strong shall conquer the weak, and the feeble shall perish."

I didn't understand the meaning of that sentence, so I looked at Steven. He pointed to the corner, where a drop of blood stained a tile, standing out in stark contrast to the other clean surfaces.

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Clearly, the key was right there.

After taking a sip of water and munching on a piece of candy, Carol began to relax.

Quinn let out a sigh of relief and collapsed on the ground. Tears streamed down her face as she hugged Carol tightly, crying, "Carol."

Once Carol regained her composure, she burst into tears.

Terrified, she sought refuge in Quinn's embrace, trembling all over.

"It's okay," Quinn whispered, trying to comfort her.

Steven glanced outside indifferently. "Gotta hurry."

They had to leave this place immediately.

Everyone had been released. And soon enough, the lunatic orchestrating everything behind the scenes would make his next move.

"Do you fancy yourself a savior? Or perhaps a god..." That voice echoed again, filled with fury.

"They've harmed you. Yet, you're bent on saving them. You'll regret your choices sooner than you think."

The warning was clear. Saving those people would only result in them seeking revenge on Steven.

Steven stared coldly at the room's speakers and cameras, a smirk playing on his lips. But, he remained silent. For some reason, I felt a chill down my spine.

Was Steven genuinely trying to save these people, or did he want to watch them turn on each other? Just letting them starve to death? That was too simple.

Their sins deserved something more brutal. They should suffer in fear before being slowly tortured to death.

I startled myself with that thought and quickly looked down, clasping my hands tightly. "Let's get out of here."

As we reached the dining area, those folks had devoured every last bit of food.

Yasmin had set aside some extra food, and she had hidden away most of the weapons, only letting a few people have them.

After dinner, everyone remained relatively calm, and someone spoke up on their own, "What's going on? Can anyone explain?"

I knew the guy speaking from the group photo at the orphanage.

Standing beside Howard, he looked like the oldest among us orphanage kids, named Mark Cruz. He was the last one adopted by a working-class couple from a small company.

He seemed decent now. But, I couldn't shake the feeling. They were all wolves in sheep's clothing.

"It looks like everyone's done eating." The eerie voice echoed in the hallway.

"If you want out of here, you gotta head downstairs. This is the 18th floor

make i

the building. Only those who

it down to the first floor alive get to leave ya.

"Now, the countdown begins, 30 seconds... The whole floor will be filled with carbon monoxide..."

The voice from the speaker sounded like the Grim Reaper himself, sending shivers down our spines. "30, 29..." The countdown started.

Panic spread as everyone scrambled to find an exit on this floor.

"Hey, lunatic! Who the hell are you to trap us here?" someone yelled in fear.

Some started to lose it, going mad.

I nervously glanced at Steven.

He and Joel remained completely composed.

As for Yasmin and Michael, they were nowhere to be seen when I turned around.

Had they already found the exit? And didn't bother telling anyone? Damn it.

"Steve... are we gonna make it out alive?" I nervously gripped Steven's hand.

Steven glanced at me, his voice carrying a weighty undertone. "Stephie, you'll get out... you'll make it out alive."

My heart sank in that instant. If only one person could make it out alive. Did Steven want me to survive?

"Oh... I forgot to mention." Suddenly,

the countdown stopped, and the

ice came again. "I'm right benet

you all. I could be anyone.

"20, 19, 18..."

I gripped Steven's fingers in fear. The murderer was among us, maybe me, maybe Steven, maybe Joel, maybe anyone.

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"15..." The eerie voice continued its countdown, mechanical and unsettlingly eerie. Suddenly, Carol went berserk, staring at the end of the hallway in terror. "Simmy..."

She broke free from Quinn's grip, running uncontrollably toward the end of the hallway. Joel was stunned. Then, he chased after Carol without much thought.

"Steve..."

Everyone dashed down the hallway, desperate to survive, like there was a way out at the end.

Steven glanced back at me, reaching for my wrist. But, the crowd pushed between us and we got separated.

At that moment, the windowless hallway suddenly went dark, plunging into pitch-blackness.

Meanwhile, the mechanical countdown began its final numbers. "10, 9..."

I stood frozen in place.

"Steve..." I yelled Steven's name in a panic, but with all the frantic people running around, my voice just got drowned out.

Suddenly, a hand grabbed onto my wrist in the pitch-black darkness. Then, I was pulled into a quiet corner.

I leaned against the wall, scared, breathing heavily. "Steve?"

His grip on my fingers tightened slightly, and I could sense his anger.

"Are you dumb?" he spoke in a hushed tone, wrapping me in his arms.

My body stiffened instantly. It was Michael.

I was about to call out his name. But, he covered my mouth.

Michael wrapped his arms around me from behind, whispering, "Don't scream... Listen, Yasmin and Steven are sketchy. Everyone around you might be sketchy too... But I won't hurt you." He wanted me to get it. Everybody was just putting on an act, telling lies, playing a part.

He was the only one keeping it real. He wouldn't harm me.

I bit him, and he finally released his grip. "You might be the killer too..." I muttered angrily.

In the darkness, I had no clue where we were. But, the countdown kept ticking away.

I was scared and just wanted to find Steven. "Steve..."

As death approached, all I could think about was about finding him.

Even I was taken aback by this thought.

Michael was clearly pissed off. He held onto me tightly, his jealousy evident as he pulled me close and spoke in hushed tone, "This is the vent room. There are no windows on this floor. We need to rely on these vents for air. It's safe here. But if you go in now... you'll die."

"5, 4, 3..." As the countdown neared its end

the sounds of people

, crying, and banging

around inside grew louder.

"1... carbon monoxide released."

The air was filled with the sound of gas being released, mixed with the cries of many people.

I struggled to push Michael away. "Let go of me! Steve's still inside."

Joel, Steven, and Carol, they were all still inside.

Holding me tightly, Michael said with a hoarse voice, "There are many vents in the building. He won't die..."

"Stephanie, how do I make you believe me? It's only me... who really cares about you."

"They're all using you, just acting their parts. Steven won't die. He's the mastermind of this game."

As the gas began to seep in, Michael held me tightly in his arms, making sure I had the only vent, providing me with fresh air. He was basically giving me his life.

Even though we had a vent, I still felt dizzy and nauseous. What kind of hell awaited inside?

"Steve..." I struggled to get out. But, my legs gave out, and I fell to the ground.

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"Stephie... Steven is the mastermind. Don't trust him."

"Yasmin works for Peter. I'm sorry..." Michael held me close, murmuring apologies.

He actually knew Yasmin was with Peter.

It seemed all his foolishness lately was just an act, to gain Yasmin's and Peter's trust.

When did Michael start realizing something was wrong?

Since I died?

So, his suicides, self-harm, and even his sudden change in personality and behavior, were all just a front to deceive others, making Peter and Yasmin believe he had been brainwashed and hypnotized? But, what was Michael's purpose?

"After you passed away, I started looking into things... I know it's connected to Yasmin."

"But, as I dug deeper, I realized it's not just a serial murder case. There's a whole mess of other stuff involved, even involving our Ford family." Michael gripped my hand tighter. "Stephie... can you trust me this time?"

My head felt heavy. Despite being colorless and odorless, carbon monoxide weakened my legs and left my body feeble.

"Don't trust Steven and anyone else except me, Stephie... I'll get us out of here. I won't repeat the same mistake." Michael's voice faded into the distance.

I finally succumbed and passed out. Clearly, I wasn't strong enough.

I had no clue how much time had passed. But suddenly, the hallway lit up.

I frown, slowly opening my eyes to the dim, cramped space.

We were hiding here, it was safe for now.

But what came next might be tough.

"It's the sound of the ventilation system starting up. The gas has been replaced, everything should be fine now." Joel's voice came from outside..

Propping myself up with my arms, I glanced around. Michael was gone.

In a haze, remembered Michael

telling

me to trust him before I

passed out. It mustn't have been a hallucination.

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But in my current situation, who was trustworthy?

Anyone could be the mastermind and executor.

It might even involve more than one person.

"We're good now." Joel led everyone back to the hallway. Several bodies lay scattered on the floor, obviously dying here before they could make

their escape.

I muttered a curse at the lunatic and leaned against the wall as I exited the ventilation room.

"Steve..." I called out, my head throbbing.

Joel had a lighter in hand, probably picked up from the pile of weapons earlier.

The flame flickered normally, a sign that the air was circulating as it should.

"Let's go down this way," Joel directed, guiding everyone to follow the stairs down from the safe exit in order.

"Steve... Where's Steve?" I didn't see Steven anywhere.

Joel looked at me with surprise. "You weren't with Steve? You're by yourself?"

He glanced toward the vent where I was hiding.

I instinctively shook my head. "No... I was... alone."

Joel started to panic too, turning to look at the several lifeless bodies scattered in the hallway. "I thought

Steve was with you. I mean, he

wouldn't leave you."

My fingers felt numb as I hurriedly ran over with Joel to check the bodies on the ground.

"Steve..."

He'll be fine.

"Simmy... I saw Simmy. Hehe..." Carol's voice echoed through the hallway.

At the exit, Quinn, holding onto Carol, looked nervously at us.

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Three bodies lay scattered on the ground-one from the orphanage, the other two unfamiliar faces. It seemed the killer had brought them in for reasons unknown.

Not finding Steven among the bodies, Joel and I both breathed a sigh of relief.

"They're human traffickers," Joel stated, glancing at the two unidentified bodies.

I was surprised as I asked, "How did you figure that out?"

"Take a look at this tattoo." Joel pointed to a cross behind one of the human traffickers' ears.

"In the dismemberment case, we found fragments of the same tattoo missing behind the victims' ears too." Joel frowned, surveying the surroundings. "Steve will be okay. Let's hurry up and leave this place." I glanced around frantically.

Steven, please stay safe.

"Is this the only way to the 17th floor?" I nervously asked Joel.

"For now, it's the only route I've found. But, I'm not sure if it's the only one," Joel replied, shaking his head.

Steven might have taken a different path to the 17th floor.

All I could do was hope and pray that Steven was safe.

17th floor.

Michael and Yasmin had been waiting in the center of the open floor.

Michael had returned to his previous cold demeanor, standing beside Yasmin, as if he hadn't been the one to save me last night.

To be honest, I started to wonder if it was all just a hallucination from carbon monoxide poisoning.

"Hey, have any of you seen Steve?" I didn't see Steven on the 17th floor. I started to panic, asking around for his whereabouts. Everyone shook their heads, saying they hadn't seen him.

"I think he's the mastermind, probably lurking behind us, enjoying the show!" Howard started to rile everyone up. "Remember what that voice said? The killer is one of us! I bet it's him. He's just a lunatic. He even confessed to being the serial killer!"

"Yeah... I know him. He's a lunatic, a genius from the orphanage..." someone chimed in.

Quinn's husband, Callum, joined in

loudly, "I

murderer, no doubt about it! It's all because back then we accidentally started a fire, failed to save them,

2ar. Steven is the

and let that guy named Simmy burn alive. He's been holding a grudge and plotting against us!"
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My palms got sweaty. Where was Steven? If this kept up, they might really think he's the killer and turn against him.

"No way? He saved us," some argued in Steven's defense.

"What do you know? Everyone's dead, his little game won't be fun anymore. This lunatic just wants to play us to death," Howard clenched his teeth as he spoke.

Mark chimed in loudly, "He's a

lunatic, this supposed genius. Killing us would be just a piece of cake. We can't just sit around and wait for the worst. We need to find and kill him to defend ourselves!"

The scene erupted into chaos.

Yasmin and Michael stayed on the sidelines, observing everyone coldly.

Quinn cried out, defending Steven. But, her voice was feeble, barely heard.

"Simmy... Hehe, Steve, we're gonna be together again," Carol babbled innocently, her mind clouded by her low intelligence and the recent excitement.

"Have you seen Steve? He came to find you?" I rushed to Carol, squatting down and anxiously grabbing her shoulders.

Steven couldn't be the mastermind. With his intelligence, if he was behind this, he would definitely lurk among the crowd, not be discovered in the first round.

Clearly, either Steven was in trouble, or someone was afraid of him and intentionally separated him from us.

Leaving us, who weren't particularly bright, to deal with this mess.

"Steve... went downstairs." Carol grinned at me.

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My breath hitched. "What do you mean, go downstairs?"

"Steve's waiting for us down there," Carol said cheerfully.

My fingers tingled, and I hesitated before speaking, "We need to go downstairs fast." Perhaps Steven was really on the first floor.

That lunatic didn't want Steven involved. He wanted us to turn against each other.

"Steven's definitely the mastermind," some muttered. They were all banding together against him.

Now that someone had died, their fear was maxed out, stirring up their survival instincts and deepest malice.

"We gotta find him and deal with him, or we're done for," Howard muttered quietly. While a few others whispered among themselves, scheming away.

"That annoying voice hasn't shown up. Let's use the time we've got to find a way out, to the next floor," Howard, being clever, instructed a couple of his group to look for a way out. "Who knows what crazy stuff that lunatic might pull next."

I glanced at Joel cautiously. "We gotta head downstairs too."

"Heh..." Yasmin, just standing there watching, smirked coldly. "Thinking about going downstairs? Seems tough."

I frowned, looking at Yasmin. "What do you mean?"

"It seems you haven't figured out what that person really wants," Yasmin walked up to me. "He wants us to turn against each other. If that hasn't happened yet, he won't let us go downstairs so easily." My nerves tensed up.

"What's more thrilling than uniting us, building trust, forming bonds, and then turning us against each other?" Joel sneered. "So, this level acts as a buffer zone. All we need for everyone to work together to find an exit. No bloodshed. You're definitely not Stephanie."

Yasmin furrowed her brow, looking warily at Joel. "So, are you saying that just because she asks why, what to do, and cries whenever things go wrong, that makes her Stephanie?" She pointed at me.

Joel glanced at me, his gaze deep. "The best trickery fools everyone, even the one pulling the strings..."

I didn't understand what he meant. But suddenly, a chill ran down my spine.

"Stephie... is the murderer," Carol accused as she pointed at me.

Quinn panicked, covering Carol's mouth, afraid she might say something to cause trouble for me. Then, she looked at me apologetically. "Sorry, miss. Carol's not in her right mind." I nodded, brushing it off. But, I couldn't shake the feeling of unease.

"Hmph, do you think you're right? Let's see if that person actually starts killing on this level." Yasmin didn't seem convinced. She gave me a cold glance, as if she were betting with Joel.

Joel claimed this was just a buffer level, no one would die. We just needed to find the exit.

But Yasmin was convinced that someone would die on this level.

My mind was all over the place, just wanting to know if Steven was okay.

I have to admit, I was really worried about him.

"Steven knows the way out. He's not on the 17th floor. Which means he's already gone to a lower floor. He

doesn't care whether you live or die,"

Michael said quietly as he O
approached me from behind.

I glanced up at Michael, my voice firm. "No way. Steve's not like you. He wouldn't just leave me to deal with danger alone. I believe he must have encountered danger."

The real killer must have been too scared of Steven. So, they snatched him away during the chaos.

I didn't believe Steven would leave me behind.

"Some people don't realize the danger until it's too late," Yasmine sneered as she hugged Michael's arm. "We don't need to worry about her, She'll realize it when she's already in his grip."