

After Death 411

Chapter 411

"Help!" Quinn and Carol were hiding behind a bouncy castle in the corner. They thought they were safe, but a masked man found them.

"Carol!" In that crucial moment, Carol forcefully pushed Quinn aside. Suddenly, blood began to flow from her wound.

"Carol..." Quinn sobbed as she called out.

When Steven, Joel, and I rushed over in a panic, Carol was already dying. She was vomiting blood. Her abdomen was severely wounded by a chainsaw, and blood was pouring out. The scene was truly gruesome.

"It's her! She was with the masked people. She lured them here on purpose." With tears streaming down, Quinn pointed at Yasmin, accusing her relentlessly.

Yasmin was stunned for a moment, acting as if she didn't know how to explain. "No..."

She was eager to express herself, but Joel forcefully pushed her aside with murderous intent.

Michael furrowed his brows and reached out to grasp Yasmin's hand. He scrutinized her closely. Everyone seemed to doubt and blame her.

"On the 16th floor, you deliberately lost your way to lure Stephie, and now you're hurting Carol. You're so cruel. I believe you and the murderer are working together!" Rachel exclaimed angrily. "That's right. I saw her talking to those masked people..." Howard also pointed at Yasmin nervously.

Several other survivors also accused Yasmin. She was displeased, yet she chose not to provide any explanation.

I gazed at Yasmin with an icy glare. Then, I shifted my attention to Quinn, who was cradling Carol and weeping uncontrollably. I stepped forward to assess Carol's injury.

"Next, the battle royale... commences." The eerie voice resonated from the speakers once more.

Suddenly, the ground began to tremble with ferocity. The floor tiles rippled like a wave and moved toward us from the corner of the wall.

"Run!" Howard exclaimed, leading the charge as he sprinted ahead.

The remaining few from the orphanage followed him and started running as fast as they could. However, masked people were waiting there. It appeared that, no matter what, death was inevitable. "Quinn! Let's go!" The mechanism was approaching quickly, but Quinn was still holding Carol and crying.

Carol's face was alarmingly pale. Judging by the visible injuries, it seemed highly unlikely that she would be able to survive.

Carol's eyes were hollow as she uttered Simeon's name. "Simmy... I was wrong. I failed to protect you. Simmy..."

Joel's hands tensed as his knuckles turned pale. He swiftly grabbed Quinn's wrist. "Come on, let's go!"

Just as Joel reached out to hold Carol, the ground beneath them collapsed. Carol plummeted into the unknown depths of darkness. The wave of machinery surged past, and I instantly pulled Steven and Joel to jump over it.

Joel stood on the closed floor with mixed emotions. Quinn was crying, and Carol's body was trapped

underneath. We couldn't remove it

Carol's body until we escaped and

alerted the police to seal off the

area.

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"Help!" Howard and the others were still in a chaotic situation. The masked men continued to carry out their ruthless killings while five or six people frantically ran around in panic.

I carefully observed the wave of mechanisms, noting that only the floor under the roller coaster remained stationary.

"That's the exit!" I shouted to everyone. Everyone followed me and ran toward the roller coaster.

"Help!" Howard yelled, pushing the surrounding people toward the masked men and rushing over alone.

He was selfish and never changed. He pushed his companions away to save himself from the chainsaws, leaving them behind at ease while he tried to escape.

"Open here." Steven and Zion began to pry up the floor. The rest of us weakly leaned and slumped on the roller coaster.

"Are you in such a rush to leave?"

Stay and play a little longer," the eerie voice exclaimed as the ground suddenly cracked. Only a few of us managed to seek refuge beneath the roller coaster while the others fell into the trap, vanishing beneath the surface.

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At that moment, the only ones alive were me, Yasmin, Eason, Michael, Zion, Rachel, Quinn, Joel, and Howard. There was also another man. He had been hiding underneath the roller coaster from beginning to end. His name was Taylor Barlowe.

The unconscious masked man dragged over by Zion was the last one. The other masked men died in the trap set by the mastermind.

"Oh no! I went too far by accident," the eerie voice chimed in, perfectly complementing the whimsical music of the amusement park with its unsettling laugh.

"He can track us through surveillance and send people after us. He must have a special shortcut. We need to find him, or else we'll always be at his mercy." I frowned and glanced at the surveillance camera or the ceiling.

Manipulating the game through surveillance was truly a crazy act...

Suddenly, the masked man jolted awake, whimpering and wriggling. He was desperately attempting to speak. However, his mouth had been tightly stitched shut, causing blood to seep out whenever he made the slightest movement.

Quinn and Rachel averted their gaze in fear, and Yasmin instinctively avoided making eye contact as well. This was extremely vicious. I firmly restrained the masked man and freed his mouth by cutting the thread with a knife.

The masked man shouted in horror, pointing his finger at the place where they had been sent. "He's on this level... The lunatic... There, in the control room, he's in it..."

Steven and Zion managed to pry open the floor. There was indeed a passage that led directly to the 14th floor.

"Be careful..." Zion grasped Steven's arm and warned him against acting impulsively.

I glanced at Steven, quickly removed the tie from the masked man's clothing, and pulled my hair up into a high ponytail. "You two head downstairs first. I'll confront that lunatic." If we did not eliminate him, the path that lay ahead would become even more challenging.

"I'll go with you!" Michael stopped me nervously. It was too dangerous.

I glanced at Steven without even realizing it. He seemed anxious as he returned my gaze. It was evident that he desired to be by my side too.

"Two people are too conspicuous," I declared as I brushed off Michael's hand and retrieved the knife from the ground. I then glanced at the surveillance camera in the northwest corner. "You can't go alone." Zion also stopped me.

"I assume that the person in the control room has no physical combat skills," I remarked, glancing at Steven.

The two of us didn't seem to need much language to communicate as he understood that my intuition would always be right.

"Go downstairs and make it seem like we've gone. Let's cover for her." Steven grabbed Joel, who was still confused.

He glanced at me once more. "I've destroyed the surveillance camera in the northwest corner just now."

I couldn't help but raise the corners of my mouth, a smile forming. This was my man... He appeared to have foreseen my actions and prepared the path ahead for me. Michael looked at me with a perplexed expression and appeared to struggle to find the right words. However, ultimately, his disappointment left him speechless. Yasmin chuckled sarcastically. "Ha... No matter how much you try to be like her, you'll never be Stephanie..."

"Stop being so sarcastic! You're too vicious! Why don't you just die? If it weren't for you, Carol would still be alive!" Rachel glared at Yasmin, her anger burning fiercely. Quinn glared at Yasmin with pure hatred. "You should just die..."

Yasmin glanced at me, and it was as if she no longer wanted to pretend. She laughed at herself.

"You won. This is what you want to see, isn't it? You want me to be the target of public criticism, the object of everyone's suspicion. You want me to experience the pain that Stephanie went through before when she wasn't trusted and was standered..."

I frowned. Did she not do it?

"Let's get going! We can't afford to waste any time." Steven frowned.

Zion reassured me, "Stay safe. We'll be waiting for you downstairs."

When they went downstairs, I quickly hid in the blind spot of the surveillance camera. I was eager to discover the identity of the person lurking behind the surveillance.

I carefully felt my way along the wall,

then used a knife to disable the electric valve that closed the door.

slipped inside as soon as the wall

opened. There was a not-so-long

passage ahead.

The moment I entered, all the lights turned on. It was as if the man knew I was coming.

I kicked open the control room and cautiously glanced at the person sitting in front of the monitor. He didn't appear to be capable of fighting back. There was only one person.

He was confined to a wheelchair, having lost both of his legs. He should be Benjamin, the young boy who was tragically pushed off from the roller coaster at the orphanage.

He turned his wheelchair and flashed a smile at me. "It's been a while, Stephie."

I quickly became alert and looked cautiously at him.

"When you asked me where to place the emergency exit, I didn't have an immediate answer at that moment. Do you know the reason behind my decision to locate the emergency exit under the roller coaster? Benjamin inquired, flashing a smile.

My heart suddenly raced, and my grip on the knife tightened. What did he mean? Did I design this so-called amusement park of massacre?

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Benjamin pivoted his wheelchair to face me directly. "I remember vividly the time I confided in you about my plan for revenge. You told me that as a human being, leaving a way out for others is also leaving a way out for yourself.

"It made me think of the time I was pushed off the roller coaster and how I had hoped someone would come and save me."

But no one could save him. What awaited him was only fear, pain, and... a lifetime of disability.

"On a selfish note, why should I leave a way out for these people? Did they ever leave one for me in the first place?" Benjamin smirked, a strange smile on his face.

Suddenly, a chill ran down my spine. I wanted to leave here to warn them. That was not the way to the 14th floor! It was Benjamin's final trap!

The door to the control room suddenly closed, trapping me inside.

My heart was beating a little faster, and I glared at Benjamin. "Let them out!"

Benjamin laughed gleefully. "Haha... Stephie, you can't save them."

I gazed at the surveillance monitor in panic. Once Steven and the others descended the stairs, the exit would close automatically, leaving them all trapped in that confined space.

"What are you going to do to them?" I felt like I was suffocating, like there was a weight pressing down on my chest. I seemed to lose control at that moment.

I turned to face Benjamin and forcefully pulled him down. I swiftly plunged the dagger into his palm. "Release them..."

When I regained consciousness, I found Benjamin on the brink of death. A haunting smile lingered on his lips amid the blood stains.

"When I was three years old, I was diagnosed with congenital heart disease. My parents tirelessly worked from dawn to dusk, saving up for five years to cover my surgery expenses. I truly believed they would never give up on me as they were my biological parents.

"However, what transpired shattered my world. On my eighth birthday, they abandoned me at the market, and I've not heard from them since."

Benjamin smirked sarcastically. "Later, I was sent to the orphanage. I naively believed that my companions there were all abandoned children as well. I hoped that by sticking together and providing comfort, we could create a new family for ourselves...

"I believed that we could be like siblings even though we weren't related by blood. But why did they push me into the abyss over just an egg, a piece of bread, a glass of milk, and a spot on a roller coaster?

"I've struggled and worked hard, longing to break free. I understand that the human heart holds no pure good or evil. Our thoughts shape everything. A single thought has the power to transform into a devil or an act of kindness."

Benjamin's laughter echoed crazily through the room. Blood still trickled from the corner of his mouth. He forcefully pushed my hand aside, fought to reach the wall with his impaired legs, and finally leaned against it.

"There's someone in the dark little

room. He used to be the principal of the special needs school. I told him that in order to survive, he should kill anyone who entered." Benjamin pointed to the monitor and asked me to look at it.

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I stood up in despair and observed the small, dim room. I was also searching for a device to make a call. I wanted to remind Steven that there was someone inside. However, I couldn't see clearly what was happening. I could only hear the sounds coming from inside.

Someone was screaming.

"Let them go! Open the door!" I couldn't locate the control switch, so I couldn't kill Benjamin yet.

I grabbed his collar, my eyes blazing with fury. "Steve is still inside! There are so many innocent people. You're out of your mind!"

Benjamin glanced in my direction and suddenly smiled. The smile was no longer wild but rather filled with a sense of relief.

With trembling hands that were stained with blood, he gently wiped the tears from my face.

"Stephie... you're crying. You've learned to be afraid, haven't you?"

I felt my body stiffen. All of a sudden, I released my grip on Benjamin. His gaze pierced right through me as if he could see into my soul.

I was suddenly overwhelmed by fear and panic. What kind of connection did I have with him? And how did it relate to this dead end?

"Please, let them out." I was unable to locate the switch to open the secret room, and I realized that Benjamin's design of this supposed "escape exit" was a dead end. There was no way out and no mechanism to release them.

Benjamin stared at the monitor, his voice raspy. "Stephie, this is a dead end. Every ten minutes, the light in the secret room flickers for three seconds. Their chances of survival are based on pure luck."

I kicked him out of anger, then

quickly turned around and looked at

the monitor with fear. As he had mentioned, ten minutes later, the light in the secret room turned on. In just three seconds, I saw blood covering the floor and dead bodies.

The masked man was dead, and Howard appeared to be wounded, having been stabbed in the thigh. The darkness left them unable to even recall the killer's whereabouts.

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As the light went out and the secret room plunged back into darkness, they had to proceed with caution. They were afraid that any careless move could harm their companions unintentionally.

"Place your hand on each other's shoulders and declare your name!" Steven's voice echoed through the dark, inviting them to step forward and reveal their name through the connection of their hands on his shoulders.

"Zion."

"Rachel," said Rachel, her voice trembling with fear.

Rachel gently placed her hand on the shoulder of the person standing in front of her. The other person uttered, "Michael."

"Yasmin."

"Eason..."

"Howard..." Howard's voice was forbearing, probably because he was injured.

Amid the darkness, Howard's voice resurfaced. His hand rested on the shoulder of the person in front of him. "Reveal your name! Speak up!"

In an instant, the entire secret room was engulfed in darkness once more. "Ugh!"

Howard was unlucky as he encountered the murderer. Perhaps, in the mere three seconds when the light flickered on, the murderer had set his sights on Howard as his target victim.

I believed that Howard should be dead by now. His death would have exposed the murderer, allowing Zion and Steven to take control.

But the interior was too dark, and the hidden room felt like Schrödinger's cat. I couldn't anticipate what would happen next until the light was turned on.

I lost control, frantically throwing the

mouse from my hand. I turned to look at Benjamin. "What do you want? The people who harmed you are from the orphanage, and they're practically dead! What more do you want? Steven is innocent. The police officer and Rachel are all innocent!"

Benjamin fixed his gaze on me, his voice hoarse. "Stephie, joining the game is a dead end. You, me, him... We're all just part of the game."

He gazed at me intently, his eyes bloodshot. It was evident that he had concluded that Howard was dead. The person he sought to kill had already met his demise.

"Some people believe in an afterlife where souls are trapped on earth forever. I hope my soul will cease to exist. This world feels like purgatory with everyone playing different roles and hurting each other." According to Benjamin, the terrifying aspect of hell did not stem from its dreadful elements or punishing methods but rather from the presence of people inflicting torment upon each other.

Many of humanity's most agonizing experiences and torments were caused by individuals of the same kind. The abandonment of loved ones, the betrayal of friends, the separation of lovers, the stabbing of partners in the back...

When members of the genetic

criminal group delved into the study

of genes, they discovered that the more artificially enhanced a highly intelligent human being's genetic makeup was, the colder, heartless, and more emotionless they tended to become.

This was because the pursuit of heightened intelligence often resulted in a decrease in emotional capacity. In essence, only those who could detach themselves from emotion could elevate their wisdom to new heights.

Indifference acted as the shield of highly intelligent beings, and their ruthlessness became unparalleled.

"My life has been incredibly miserable. I feel miserable not because I've lost my legs but because I've lost faith in humanity. Turn on the mechanism of the secret room. With Steven's wits, he can find a way out..."

"What do you want to do..." I stared

at Benjamin, my eyes filled with intense determination as I yearned to take immediate action. However, it was too late. He retrieved a pistol from the nearby corner and firmly pressed it against his own temple.

A deafening noise erupted through the room, and the small control room fell silent. The final words he uttered to me before taking his own life were, "Stephie... live on." He asked me to carry on living, yet he chose death decisively and without hesitation.

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As I stood in the control room, a shiver ran down my spine. It enveloped my entire body. An excruciating headache gripped me, and a piercing ring echoed in my ears.

The overwhelming dizziness caused me to lose my balance, and I tumbled to the ground.

I noticed a switch on the control room floor, and Benjamin had placed a note on it that read "Exit". He placed the actual exit in his control room, revealing that he never intended to keep himself alive from the start.

I lay on the ground, my heart heavy with an indescribable feeling. Was it sadness or simply discomfort? It was as if something was on the verge of bursting out of my heart...

The secret room also fell into silence. After ten minutes had passed and the light came on for three seconds, Steven swiftly pressed the mechanism inside. The door to the secret room reopened, allowing them to climb out through the exit under the roller coaster.

Everyone lay on the ground, feeling fortunate to have survived. They were breathing rapidly. Zion quickly counted the remaining people and forcefully pulled the killer from inside to the ground.

The man appeared disoriented, his entire being trembling. It was evident that he had endured a prolonged period of confinement, rendering him somewhat deranged. "I was wrong. I shouldn't have treated you like that, I shouldn't have done that..."

He appeared to be unhinged, repeatedly insisting that he was aware of his wrongdoing.

I exited the control room, feeling a slight weakness in my legs. I said in a hoarse voice. "Benjamin is dead. The exit is in the control room..."

Zion glanced at me, a wave of relief washing over his face. "Howard has passed away."

Nearly everyone on the orphanage's list had died, except Yasmin and the man named Taylor. Honestly, this man named Taylor was seemingly invisible. He was so fortunate to still be alive. It was sheer luck. His complexion was deathly pale, an indication that he had perhaps sensed that his death was coming. I remembered that on the murderer's Death List, Taylor was second only to Yasmin. In other words, after Yasmin died, Taylor was next in line.

"Don't kill me, please don't kill me." The man who was being dragged out pleaded, his spirit shattered. He cried and begged for mercy, showing the depth of his desperation.

Benjamin mentioned that this man was the principal of the special needs school. Following the injury that left Benjamin with broken legs, he was enrolled in a special needs school as part of his settlement. The charity committed to supporting him. until he completed college.

He believed that leaving the orphanage would mark a fresh start and that everything would improve. However, he encountered nothing but malevolence from everyone he met. This was why he lost faith in this world and humanity. Content

Zion kicked the principal with a frown. "I recognize him. A few years back, I worked with my superior on a case involving the discovery of corpses during construction at a special needs school's playground.

"Despite being identified as the culprit, he was ultimately exonerated due to a psychiatric diagnosis certificate. He was consequently confined to an asylum."

Eason frowned. "I've heard about

that case too. This bastard was a pervert and had a preference for students with physical disabilities. When a student tried to resist and call the police, he violently killed them and buried their body in the playground."

The principal, who was fat and greasy, was still shaking and covered in blood. He admitted, "I know I made a mistake. I know it's unacceptable..."

I sneered and turned around. "Let's leave. We need to get out of here as soon as possible."

Suddenly, the strange voice echoed in the corridor once more. "Click! Have you ever experienced despair? Do you know what true despair is? Welcome to... the 14th floor."

I halted and glanced back at Steven. Indeed, there was more than one murderer. Benjamin was merely one of them. There was a gamer, a manipulator, a murderer, and a victim.

Michael walked over with a look of concern, wanting to make sure that I was not injured. "Are you okay?"

But before he could finish speaking, Steven forcefully bumped him against the wall. He ran over, glaring at Michael with caution.

Michael took a deep breath, clearly restraining his anger. He couldn't allow his anger to show in front of me, so he had no choice but to suppress it and massage his temples. "Steven, stop behaving like a child!"

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Steven ignored Michael, took my hand, and proudly declared his sovereignty. "She's my wife. It's official."

Michael's expression darkened. Taking a deep breath, he gritted his teeth and uttered, "You can get divorced even after getting married."

"I won't get a divorce," Steven replied.

"Steven!" Michael appeared angry and ready to confront him.

Steven hid behind me with an innocent look. "Stephie, he's so aggressive. He wanted to kill me down there just now."

I frowned at Michael and gave him a warning look.

Michael appeared to be losing his mind. "Me? It was pitch-black down there. How could I even know where he was? Don't listen to his nonsense. Steven, have you gone mad?"

Michael was usually aloof. However, he was definitely upset facing Steven, who feigned innocence.

Steven took cover behind me and said aggrievedly, "He injured my wound further. It was extremely painful and started bleeding."

Steven deliberately exposed the wound on his arm. As expected, a distressed look crossed my face. He then lay contentedly on my shoulder.

Eason was disdainful. "Let's go. Leave him here to fend for himself. He's good at pretending."

Joel had been a bit absent-minded and appeared slightly preoccupied. Upon regaining his awareness, he cast a glance at Steven, then lowered his head and left. He no longer exuded the same vibrancy as before.

"Everything he says is false," Michael insisted, trying to persuade me to believe him.

"Stephie, he can't be trusted. Both he and Yasmin might be working under Peter. The Ford family is also one of the investors in Genome Society. He's an investor himself..." Steven complained to me in a hushed tone.

Michael clenched his fists, his eyes brimming with an intense desire to kill Steven.

"I believe you two make a great pair. Enjoy your time together," I stated calmly. I then gently pushed Steven away before turning on my heel and exiting.

He clung to me aggrievedly. "Stephie, it hurts so much."

Rachel walked in front, supporting the injured Quinn. Yasmin was clearly isolated and left alone after her identity was exposed. She was also injured, but she walked behind alone. The crazy principal was left to fend for himself as no one cared about him.

"Mike..." Yasmin called out.

Michael paused and gazed at Yasmin with a complex expression.

Yasmin grinned sarcastically. "You've always been aware that I worked for Peter... In fact, even before Stephanie's passing, you knew about Ford Group's secret funding of Genome Society, right?" Michael remained silent and did not respond.

"Michael, you've always known that Stephanie was the result of genetic experiments. That's why you're so confident, so certain that she won't die. How can a genetically modified *най* monster die? She's so good at disguise," Yasmin said in a low voice.

Michael remained silent as he walked alongside Yasmin. He was only aware that Yasmin could not die just yet. She kept many secrets about Genome Society and the Godmaker Project. "Why don't you explain to her? Aren't you convinced that she's Stephanie? Or... are you starting to waver?" Yasmin sneered.

"Understanding the truth can be unsettling. Stephanie is gone, irreplaceable. No one will ever be able to truly take her place no matter how similar they may seem or how memories intertwine." Michael frowned. "Perhaps there is truly a miracle in this world."

Yasmin smiled. "A miracle? The real miracle is that you and I have found ourselves in this hellish place. Whether we can make it out alive is still unknown."

I stopped and looked back at Yasmin. "Peter should have located you by now, shouldn't he? Why hasn't he brought anyone in?"

Yasmin gazed at me, her voice

dropping to a hush. "He can't afford

to act recklessly and tip off the

enemy. The mastermind behind this game is right here among us. He's also seeking to uncover the identity,

whether it's you, Steven, or any one of us."

I sneered and said sarcastically, "So, it seems that there are people who can cause Peter to have a headache and feel fear too."

This piqued my curiosity even further... Who was the person responsible for it? Was it someone among us?

I scanned the remaining few people still alive. None of them appeared to be the mastermind. To my dismay, however, he was among us...

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We went through the safe passage to the 14th floor.

I raised my arm and stopped the people behind me.

Standing beside me, Steven looked downward and stared at the red laser beam on the floor.

The beam of light stood out more than usual in the dark.

A snapping sound was heard.

Steven had briefly touched the ray with his foot before swiftly retracting it. The sensor mechanism made a sound before a small, metal marble dropped down from above. It gradually rolled along the track and fell on the floor.

The wooden plates rapidly fell like dominos.

Subsequently, the entire 14th floor lit up.

It was a spacious and barren room without any form of cover in sight.

The dominos were still falling. Afterward, the word "death" appeared on the ground.

"Dramatic." Eason rolled his eyes.

Zion furrowed his brows and glanced around the entire floor carefully. "Something's not right."

"Twinkle, twinkle, little star..." A young girl's voice rang out from the empty space.

A small distance ahead, a girl in a red dress was playing with marbles on the floor.

"Hey, little missy!" Eason yelled.

She didn't seem to be able to hear him and continued playing with her marbles.

"I'll go check it out." Zion wanted to cross the red beam of light in order to check on the girl.

"It's a hologram," Steven said, holding Zion back. "That girl is a hologram."

Zion halted and stared at Steven in bewilderment. "Has hologram technology become so advanced?"

"Light, setting, where we're positioned-that's why it looks so realistic," Eason explained.

Michael picked up a stone from the ground and threw it in the direction of the girl. As expected, it went right through her body. It was clear that it was indeed a hologram.

"That lunatic gathered us here to watch a movie?" Eason scoffed, frowning.

Joel remained silent at the side. Since Carol's death, he'd begun acting like a different person. He was no longer as energetic as he used to be. It was like he constantly had something on his mind.

"What's wrong with the kid? Did the chainsaws spook him?" Eason asked Steven in a hushed voice.

Steven ignored him.

"He's been like this since Carol died..." Eason mumbled. He felt a chill down his back. He lifted his head and took a closer look at Joel.

Joel remained silent with his head lowered.

"Simmy..."

All of a sudden, Carol's voice rang out from the barren hallway.

At the end of the hallway, the woman stood there drenched in blood, smiling as she called out Simeon's name.

Everyone was shocked.

"Hell... He even used AI to bring back the dead? Are these lunatics technology to show off or S?" Eason

something?" Eason grumbeve ingen

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However, Joel froze at the sight. He then instinctively dashed past the red beam toward the end of the hallway.

"Joel!" I wanted to grab him, but it was too late.

He had already rushed in.

Steven frowned.

Joel ran for a bit before he stepped on some sort of trap.

He turned around and looked at Steven. He furrowed his eyebrows, his expression turning grim.

"That... isn't a hologram," he said.

Steven's expression darkened as well.

I didn't quite understand what Joel meant. I was just about to ask when the floor beneath his feet swiftly opened. He fell in, and the floor closed up again.

"Joel!" we all screamed, but there were only echoes in the empty space.

My breathing hastened as I stared at Steven.

Joel just fell in. We did not even know if he was alive.

In the distance, Carol slowly left our field of vision.

Before she left, she turned around and flashed everyone a smile.

The smile was horrifying.

Quinn sobbed out loud, "Carol...."

She wanted to go over too, but I reached out and held her back.

She stared at me with reddened eyes and said, "Carol looks so lonely. I want to go keep her company."

Frowning, I cautiously glanced around as I kept my hold on Quinn.

Not to my surprise, some sort of

velmet

white gas was being emitted

the ceiling. It was causing

hallucinations, making people walk

forward involuntarily.

"Steven..." My voice was slightly weakened.

Zion shook his head vigorously. "Hold your breath... Rachel."

However, Rachel's gaze was fixated on what was ahead.

"Stephie... They're calling me, Stephie..."

I mustered all my strength to restrain her, but she'd fallen under the gas' influence anyway.

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Under the projector, Stephanie Carlson... AKA "me" stood, well and alive.

She flashed us a smile and opened her mouth.

"Michael... will you marry me?"

I glanced at Michael. He was influenced as well and started making his way forward.

Afraid that he'd also be affected, I held onto Steven anxiously.

Thankfully, he was immune.

He held me in his arms and whispered, "It must be a fake if the first person you call out to is Michael. If it were actually you, you'd definitely call out my name first."

I leaned against his shoulder in resignation. "How could you be jealous at a time like this?"

"Rachel..."

Zion pulled her back, but she was adamant about moving forward.

She walked toward the hologram and reached out to touch "Stephanie".

"I'm sorry, Stephe," she choked out the words. "I should've brought you away sooner."

The floor abruptly opened up again with a loud snap. Rachel fell down as well.

There was the sound of machinery.

Everyone could hear it. They could hear the screams. Afterward, they smelled the blood.

Then, blood started oozing out from the tiles where Joel and Rachel fell.

I tried to hold onto Steven's collar. My heart was beating rapidly, and my entire body was shaking.

It was that feeling again...

The same feeling where I'd go mad from despair, but I couldn't do anything at all.

My chest was numb yet aching at the same time. I wanted to cry, scream, and go insane.

"Steven..." My voice was hoarse. It felt suffocating, but I had no energy to fight back. I was desperately trying to hold Michael back.

Steven reached out and helped me restrain him.

Michael regained his senses. His breathing was rapid.

Yasmin appeared to be influenced and tried to walk forward as well.

Michael grabbed her and yelled solemnly, "Get a hold of yourself, Yasmin!"

After seeing Rachel fall down with his own eyes, Zion went mad and tried to go over as well. He only regained his senses after Eason punched him. Quinn was sobbing on the floor.

Everyone was in despair.

What did it feel like to watch the people you cared about-your friends, the ones you loved-fall into an abyss and die a horrific death in front of you? "Can you feel it? This is despair. It's suffocation, sadness, pain, struggle, and anger..."

The girl under the projector laughed eerily, as though she was provoking us. "And the lot of you, you're cowards."

I clenched my fists tightly. My entire body was shaking, but I didn't know how to express my emotions.

Was it anger? Was it pain?

What kind of feeling was this?

"She's dead... She was your best friend," the girl taunted me.

The floorboards opened up, and she held up a bloody head.

It was Rachel's head...

"I'll kill all of you!" Zion struggled against Eason's restraint like a madman.

Quinn was crying in despair.

Zion was going mad.

Eason was holding him with all his might.

Yasmin hid in Michael's arms, trembling.

Michael was looking at me with bloodshot eyes.

In that split moment, it was as though Steven's heartbeat was all I could hear.

"Monster, she's a monster! An emotionless monster!"

My head felt like it was about to split open from the pain.

I fell onto my knees, panting.

All the blame and accusations the children used to throw at me echoed in my ears.

"Wendell, Stephie is an emotionless

a

I saw her kill that bird with

wing with my own eye with

my mother cried desolately. Content

"Stephie... She has no emotion. She never gets angry or feels afraid. She has no feelings."

"Why did you kill that bird, Stephie?" Peter's voice was laced with interrogation.

"Its wings were broken. A bird with a

l.ne

broken wing only meant death. Instead of letting it die a painful death by predators and being fed on by insects, I wanted to help it..."

"Stephie?" Steven was calling me.

I snapped back into reality. I stared down at the girl who was taunting me with reddened eyes.

I recognized her. The little girl in the red dress was me when I was younger. It was Stephanie as a child.

"Stephie!" pushed Steven aside and crossed the red line. I stepped the tiles and walked toward the center step by step.

Anger?

I seemed to have felt it!

Chapter 419

"Stephie!"

Steven was yelling. He wanted to stop me, but Eason was hugging his legs, holding him back. Dragging the ax Joel left on the floor, I made my way down the hall.

I stepped on the tiles one by one as though I knew that those weren't a trap.

Upon closer inspection, the trap was right above where the dominos fell.

I walked toward the center and looked up at the projector. Furious, I smashed it.

The projector was destroyed. The girl who was projected slowly blurred and then disappeared.

However, she soon reappeared from the projector on the right.

"Congratulations, Stephie. You've learned how to be angry."

She was mocking me.

She was trying to provoke me.

I broke one projector after another before slumping listlessly on the floor.

After all the projectors were gone, the bloody head on the floor slowly dissipated as well.

It was a hologram; it wasn't actually Rachel's head.

But I had to admit, they actually managed to anger me.

I got up and started axing the floor, trying to create an opening. I desperately clawed at the tiles until my hands bled.

"Rachel..." I cried, my tears dripping onto the tiles.

"Rach!" I screamed and cried her name as I tried to pry the tiles open like a madwoman.

Come out...

Don't die.

Steven pushed Eason aside. He followed the marks on the floor and made his way over. He tried to stop me but was pushed aside.

I felt numb as my tears fell onto the ground.

Through the gap, I could see Rachel down the abyss. She was barely alive, and she looked as though she was about to drown in a pool of blood. Yet, I couldn't save her.

"Have you lost all hope, Stephie? Does it feel suffocating?" The voice rang out again. "You're human, and humans have feelings and desires." Hopeless?

Was this what hopelessness felt like?

I pounded on the floor with fists as Steven tightly embraced me from the back.

I watched through the gap between the tiles as Rachel was swallowed by the red pool of blood.

I couldn't save her.

This was what despair felt like.

"This is just the beginning, Stephanie... You've just lost friend. Soon, you'll lose a lot more," the eerie voice echoed. Cet

The people behind the incident on the 14th floor were after me all along!

"Come out! I'm going to kill you, I'm going to kill you!" I screamed

y while looking at.net

surroundings.

I wanted to kill someone.

I wanted to kill her...

SW

My entire body was shaking. I couldn't hold back my tears.

The time I spent with Rachel all these years flashed in my head.

"If we never end up getting married, let's spend the rest of our lives together, Stephie.

"Stephie... I don't want to get married. I want to spend my days with you.

"What's so great about Michael, Stephie? Can you not like him anymore? "Let's go shopping, Stephie.

"Hi, Stephanie. My name is Rachel Qualls. I just transferred here too.

"We'll be classmates from now on. Can we be friends?

"Stephanie?"

I cried out in despair, my entire body shaking.

Steven stayed silent and held me tightly. He could feel my pain.

Even if I didn't say a single thing, he was the one who was the most attuned to my feelings.

I wasn't emotionless, nor did I

sense

how desires. I just didn't k

express myself.

And Steven was the only one who understood me. "I'm here, Stephie," he comforted me with a hoarse voice.

He was the one who told me he'd always be there for me.

Chapter 420

He stayed by my side all these years.

Michael and Eason were violently knocking on the tiles, trying to get Joel out.

However, I couldn't pry them open, and neither could they.

Zion knelt on the floor, his hands covered in blood. His fingers were still in the gap in the floor tiles, adamant about getting them open. He screamed and struggled in despair. My numbed senses seemed to have gradually sharpened.

This was what despair felt like.

I knew it for a fact-this was despair.

"The first person who triggers the destructive mechanism can get out of here alive. The price being... everyone else will end up dead," the creepy voice said once again.

I instinctively looked toward the far end. Taylor, who was usually unnoticeable, had already run to the end of the hall without us knowing.

He stared at the red button on the wall. Then, he turned to look at us with a shaky gaze.

"Press it and the exit will appear," the voice said, tempting him to press it.

Everyone held their breath and stared cautiously at Taylor.

He shook his head, sobbing. "I'm sorry, I'm so sorry. I'm too afraid. I want to leave. I'm so sorry..."

This was human nature-sacrificing everyone else was a valid option if it meant one could live.

"Taylor!" Quinn screamed his name while crying.

But he pressed the button anyway.

"I know I've made mistakes in the past, but I've corrected them," Taylor cried, shaking his head.

"I've been doing endless good deeds these last few years in order to make up for my mistakes."

He continued, "I know I shouldn't have left Steve and Simmy to fend for themselves during the fire, but what choice did I have..."

"I wasn't as strong as them. I just wanted to live. Where's the fault in that? All these years, I've worked hard at my job in order to live life like a regular person. Why was I brought to a place like this? Why?" He screamed and cried in agony. Subsequently, he bolted for the exit without hesitation as soon as it appeared.

"Autonomous device, on."

Just as Steven grabbed my hand and wanted to escape, a metal barricade dropped down where the exit was. We were all trapped inside. There was no way out.

Behind us, the lights dimmed. Countless red sensor beams were aimed directly at each and every one of our foreheads and chests.

I knew for a fact that there were multiple machine guns being operated in the dark.

There was nowhere to run or hide.

"Let's play a game." The creepy girl reappeared in the dark.

She smiled at me and said, "Stephie, between him and him, only one can stay alive. It's your pick. I'll give you 20 seconds."

She was pointing at Steven and Michael. She wanted me to pick one survivor between them.

My entire body was shaking as I clenched my fists. An impulse to destroy everything was brewing from my anger.

I shot a furious look in the direction of the camera. "I'm going to kill you..."

"I'm helping you out, Stephie. I'm

helping you figure out where your heart lies," the little girl said with

smile. "Don't you want to know if you love Steven or Michael?"

"Counting down-20... 19, 18, 17..."

Neither Michael nor Steven spoke. They just stared at me in silence.

I knew that they were also waiting for my decision.

I lifted the ax and swung it down onto the projector.

"How dare you tell me what to do," I said in a low voice.

Before the countdown ended, I ran diagonally toward the wall in front. Stepping off the wall at the side, I jumped up and tore the infrared sensor down. I smashed it on the ground.

Eason pulled Zion and Quinn out of the way and promptly moved away from their original position. Steven and Michael quickly stepped aside as well.

The machine guns started shooting in the pre-aimed direction. Without the sensor, they could only fire 1.9
around blind and aimlessly,

"Stephie." Amidst the chaos, Steven found the switch for the metal barricade.

He guided me away from the line of fire as we escaped.

"Stephie!" Michael had also gotten out. He wanted to reach for my hand, but Steven quickly pulled it away.

Breathing rapidly, he hugged me and shot a provocative gaze at Michael.

"I'd like to know as well, Stephie," he said. "Who would you pick between me and Michael..."

Furious, Michael glared at him. "Are you crazy? We don't have time for this. Go!"

Dragging a dazed Zion in one hand and a shocked Quinn in another, Eason also headed for the exit.

Yasmin, on the other hand, was extremely lucky to be alive.

Michael had to guarantee her safety in order to find out about the Genome Society's secrets.

I couldn't believe she made it to the 14th floor.

"Would you pick me, Stephie?" Like an upset child, Steven asked stubbornly with his red eyes.