

After Death 421

Chapter 421

Michael leaned on the wall at the side like he was injured.

"Michael..." Yasmin called out his name nervously.

I lifted my head and looked at him. His gaze was fixated on me. It looked like he wanted to know my answer as well.

"Let's hurry. Michael is hurt." Yasmin looked at me angrily as though I was the one prompting this argument.

I looked back at Steven and asked quizzically, "Why wouldn't I pick you? You're my legal husband."

Steven froze for a moment before his eyes lit up.

He looked toward Michael as if to gloat, the triumph evident in his expression.

Michael's fists tightened, and his expression seemed to have paled slightly.

"You heard her. She only picked you because of the marriage certificate." He scoffed.

"We're not getting a divorce," he declared gleefully while hugging me.

He didn't look like someone who almost died at all.

I felt a bit numb. I stared at Steven with furrowed brows but remained silent.

Seeming to notice the shift in my mood, Michael said, "Rachel was her best friend. Joel was one of your people as well. Is this all you care about when they just died down there? How cold-hearted do you have to be? What a lunatic."

He was trying to cause a rift between us as Zion's emotions were also suppressed to their limit.

At the side, Quinn was still crying. Everyone was submerged in sadness, including myself.

Eason opened his mouth to speak but ultimately chose to remain silent as well.

This time, no one was on Steven's side.

Steven did seem like he wasn't sad about the situation at all, though.

"He's actually a lunatic. What a heartless monster," Yasmin berated him.

Steven glanced at Michael.

Michael's anger.

to stoves were filled with

e was very evidently

everyone's emotions along.

"Carol... is gone. Joel and Rachel are also gone," Quinn sobbed out the words.

Everyone's sadness peaked after her words.

They all stared at Steven who didn't appear visibly upset.

In that split moment, I felt the prejudice that was cast upon Stephanie back then.

It was as if not knowing how to express sadness made you a monster.

"Let's go..." Eason broke the awkwardness and tried to get everyone to leave.

Steven turned to look at me again. It looked

I was still the one he

most concerned with. He was

what I thought of him. Content

Did he deserve to be discriminated against or berated just because he wasn't collectively in despair?

He might not care about what the rest thought, but he cared about my opinion.

I didn't offer any words of comfort, but I tightened my grip on his hand.

"Do you really not care about Joel's life, Steven?" Eason, however, suddenly asked.

"I only care about Stephie." Steven seemed like he was upset as he pulled me into his chest.

He should've known what the others would think of him if he said things like that.

"Ha... What an actual lunatic," Yasmin mocked before reaching for Michael's arm and turning to leave.

"You

to an on't need to explain yourself

I said softly. Then, lifted

my hand to pat Steven's head.

He shouldn't even say anything out of spite.

Faced with accusations and those who disagreed with you, any form of explanation was pointless.

Chapter 422

Because they wouldn't understand.

Steven's grip on my hand slowly tightened, and his eyes welled up slightly with tears. He looked like he'd been wronged but was trying his best to suppress his emotions.

"Why should we be upset... They're not going to die," he said.

"They're only sad because they're stupid," he mumbled.

Michael furrowed his brows and turned to look at Steven.

Zion's gaze also violently snapped in our direction.

He tugged on Steven's wrist nervously and asked, "What do you mean?"

"Joel... won't die. He has his own ideas. He just wants to test out his theory." Steven pulled his hand back.

Under everyone's gaze, he looked at me nervously. "Let's go, Stephie. I want to go home."

He didn't want to explain, and he couldn't be bothered to explain either.

I understood. In the eyes of regular people, those with unusual personalities like me and Steven were considered aliens.

Our mere existence felt alien.

Deep down, Steven understood that Rachel and Joel might still be alive. However, he couldn't explain as they weren't on the same level of understanding. Even if he did explain... they might not even believe him.

They would only understand once we got out of here and saw them alive before us.

"Rachel won't die?" Zion asked nervously. "Explain yourself, Steve."

"If she's innocent, then she won't die." Steven looked at him. "Are you confident that she is?"

Zion knitted his brows together. "She's definitely innocent."

"There are only a few types of people that were taken here. The ones responsible for the incident at the orphanage are all evil-none of them will get away with it.

"The rest are police. You, Eason, and Rachel are all considered witnesses. As long as you're not running head first into the gun barrel like some idiot... the ones behind all of this won't really harm you."

I lifted my head to look at the direction of the camera. Then, I explained on Steven's behalf.

"Another type would be the ones behind all of this, or the ones controlling everything."

My gaze fell on Yasmin. "Take her, for example. The fact that she's still alive isn't sheer luck. It's because she's under Peter Jones' protection.

"The masterminds didn't orchestrate this horror game to kill anyone, they did it to taunt. They want to taunt the people behind Yasmin, the kidnappers, and the human traffickers. Genome modification could involve countless of those involved in various crimes."

I continued, "At the same time, they also want to mock. They're revealing the truth bit by bit. This way, they're mocking the capabilities of so-called criminal experts like Eason."

I frowned and looked toward Eason.

The man in question opened his mouth and wanted to retort, but he lowered his head again sheepishly.

"I didn't expect human traffickers to be involved with genetic crimes..." he said.

"Stupid," Steven added.

Eason gritted his teeth and W
him. He was afraid of
getting hit by Steven,
hit by Steven, though. Hence, he swallowed his annoyance.

"So... Steven isn't sad because he
bent. He believes that
s that both Joel and Rachet
are

the
end, they'll both still be alive. S

"They just ended this game earlier than us. They're safer than we are at the moment." I held onto Steven's hand tightly.

To be honest, before his explanation, I was also blinded by the tricks that the masterminds were using.

His words made me come to a sudden realization.

"What about Carol?" Michael asked.

"Isn't she innocent as well? We
vele

the chainsaw go through her
stomach with our own eyes before she disappeared into the trap."
I froze and didn't respond.

Carol... was indeed not within my expectations.

"Carol is innocent," Quinn choked out. "She's a good person. She's been protecting me all these years."

"In this building, all we can see is what the game makers want us to see," Steven said in a low voice.

Holding my hand, he made his way to the front.

"Move," he said coldly as we passed by Michael.

Michael took a look at the spacious pathway. His position wasn't causing a blockage in any way. Steven obviously did it on purpose. "Steven Lincoln!" he barked.

"Let's go." I tugged on Steven's arm resignedly. "Why are you always picking on him?"

"He just irks me," Steven grumbled in response.

I didn't know what to do with him.

I had just taken a few steps forward when I heard a hiss from Michael.

"I'm hurt, Stephie." He leaned on the wall.

He had also started putting on an act.

"He's been shot!" Eason gaped after checking out the wound. "Why didn't you say anything earlier!"

Chapter 423

"I didn't feel it earlier. The pain just kicked in." Michael leaned against the wall.

Her eyes reddened, and Yasmin said angrily, "Liar... You only got hit by a stray bullet because you were trying to protect her!"

She then shot me a nasty glare, as if telling me that I was nothing but trouble.

I looked at Michael as he lifted his head to return my gaze. His eyes were bloodshot. He leaned on the wall and repeatedly drew deep breaths because of the pain.

"Apply pressure to stop the blood. Then, let's just get out of here as soon as possible." I wanted to go check on his wound, but Steven was holding onto the corner of my shirt.

He looked at me with a pouty expression. He didn't want me to care for Michael.

To my surprise, I actually... didn't feel like doing so anymore.

"Ouch..." Yasmin wanted to touch Michael's wound, and he cried out in pain.

"Without Rachel here, no one else has any medical knowledge. You'll have to endure the pain." Eason patted him on the arm.

"Stephie, you minored in medicine. Help me stop the blood." He insisted that I tended to him.

I walked over and took a closer look at his wound.

"I thought you were going to die. Turns out you've just been scraped by a stray bullet." Steven rolled his eyes.

He was still holding onto my shirt, and I practically had to drag him over.

Michael was trying to suppress his anger. I felt like the pair would end up in a fight sooner or later.

"The wound is on your arm, and it's not that deep. You'll live." I walked over to tear off a piece of Yasmin's shirt to bandage his arm.

"What are you doing?" She stared at me in shock.

"Don't you love him? You should feel overjoyed that I'm using your clothes to dress his wound," I said blankly, tying the fabric around Michael's arm with more force than necessary. Michael almost toppled over from the pain. His eyes reddened, and he looked a bit hurt.

Furious, Yasmin turned and walked off on her own.

Zion and Eason followed after her out of concern for her safety.

Quinn took a quick look around before going after them.

"Stephie... I'm only keeping her around because I want to know the truth..." Michael pulled on my hand and tried to explain. "Can you forgive me this once..."

"No, she can't!" Steven swatted his hand away. "You're so shameless."

I had a feeling that if the marriage papers were in Steven's hands right now, he'd slap them on Michael's face.

"Steven Lincoln! Don't push it." Michael wanted to get physical with Steven.

I promptly put my arms around Steven. "Get out of here. Does this look like a place for brawling?"

"You're biased, Stephie. You're stopping me." His acting was top-notch. Even his eyes welled up with tears.

"I'm stopping you out of fear that you'll beat him to death..." I sighed and tried to pull him away from the scene.

I didn't know what was wrong with Michael either. He remained glued to the floor.

Based on

on the way he was acting,

probably wouldn't budge if I

over and drag him with

me.

"Are you coming or not?" I turned around and asked.

"Stephie... you still love me, right?" Michael asked softly.

"No," I replied bluntly.

"I don't believe you," he refused.

"I don't

you don't." I walked off, pulling Steven along. "Live, want to leave."

bay in heir,

That method worked wonders. Michael then swiftly caught up with us.

Steven looked at him tauntingly, as if mocking him for not knowing his place.

"Do you love him then, Stephie?" Michael asked on purpose.

I paused.

How... did love feel like again?

At the moment, I only knew of pain and despair.

The concept of love was very foreign.

I only knew that I wanted to protect Steven. I knew that... I had started to rely on him.

I gravitated toward him unconsciously and didn't want to let him out of my sight.

"She loves me!" Steven answered for me.

Michael scoffed. He raised an eyebrow confidently. "We're both fighting on equal grounds.

"Are you high? We're legally married." Steven looked at Michael like he was an idiot. Michael drew a deep breath and said in a low voice, "Divorce is always an option."

"We're not getting a divorce!"

The pair started arguing.

They were both frankly quite immature.

I retracted my wrist from Steven's hand and swiftly marched toward Zion and the rest.

Michael and Steven were still arguing at the back.

Some bickering was kind of nice as well... The atmosphere didn't seem as tense anymore.

"Is this the 13th floor?"

Zion looked at the solid wall in front of us and patted it.

"They're not going to let us in?"

Chapter 424

The words "13th floor" were written on the wall.

But there was no way to get in.

"Where's Taylor? He ran off earlier. Where could he have gone?" Quinn asked curiously.

Eason checked the wall carefully. "It's a solid wall-no gaps, no way to move it. It's stuck in place."

I patted the wall and looked back at the exit stairway leading downstairs. "Can't we just walk down?"

The 13th floor was blocked off. Were we supposed to go straight to 12?

No more games?

"She's my wife."

"Divorce is an option."

"I'm not getting a divorce."

Behind me, Steven and Michael were still debating about the possibility of a divorce...

I sighed. The air around us became tense.

"Get over here!"

Steven ran over staggeringly. "Honey..."

"Figure out what's going on." I feel like I wasn't even as smart as Steven was at the moment. My memories had not completely recovered, so my brain was still a bit of a mush. Steven was overjoyed that he could be of service to me.

"The 13th floor is blocked off. There's probably something that we're not supposed to see in there. Let's just go straight down to 12.

"I want to get out of here, not look at what each floor has to offer." Steven started making his way downstairs while holding my hand.

The safe passage led straight to the 12th floor.

Everyone seemed to be curious about what was on the 13th floor and why it was blocked off.

As the saying went, curiosity killed the cat.

"What's on the 13th? Why is it off limits?" Eason asked curiously.

"There's a secret passageway that leads straight to the first floor. How else did you think the people behind this got up?

"The 13th floor is the control hub for the entire building. It's where they controlled the holograms on the 14th floor as well. It's also where the people who fell through the floor ended up at," Steven explained.

Of course, they needed a control center for such a huge building. Especially with the amount of technology set up on the 14th. An entire floor was needed to store all the necessary equipment.

Zion caught the main point and looked at Steven with a bright expression. "So, Rachel and Joel might've just fallen down and are actually still alive? They just wanted us to feel sad and hopeless?"

"I'm not sure. I can only tell you that innocent people won't die." Steven shook his head.

Everyone fell under the influence of the gas back then. If all of us had crossed the red line and fallen, those who were guilty would've been immediately killed off by the people downstairs. On the other hand, those who weren't supposed to die would've been set free in advance.

If Joel and Rachel were indeed innocent, they wouldn't need to worry about their lives being in danger.

However, it seemed like Steven didn't trust anyone...

"So, what we need to do now is get out of here alive as soon as possible. Eason nodded. "Else, we'll get the police to surround the area and launch an investigation. I'm sure we'll be able to find some clues."

The lights on the 12th floor abruptly came on following a sinister laugh.

"How naive," the eerie voice rang out again.

"Welcome to the 12th floor. You must be hungry. The food on the table was specifically prepared for all of you."

Without the reminder, I hadn't even realized that I was parched and starving. Humans tended to get elevated adrenaline levels when they were focused on survival.

Upon the reminder, I suddenly felt like I was dying from hunger.

"Some of the food in front of you contains deadly poison. You'll die if you happen to ingest any. Who among the lot of you is planning to be the first to take a bite?" the voice asked with a laugh.

I cast a glance at Taylor, who was lying listlessly on the floor. He probably ran in and started munching, which was why he was poisoned to death.

The food he ate must have been poisoned.

If we were to calculate the possibility, the remaining ones would be...

"Here, Stephie." I hadn't even started calculating before Steven walked over and took a bite out of a loaf of bread. He handed it to me after making sure it wasn't laced with poison.

Everyone was stunned speechless.

Eason gave Steven a thumbs-up. "My friend... My brother, could you help me take a bite of this?"

Steven shot him an uninterested look. "You're not worthy."

Everyone was hesitating. They stood staring at the entire table filled with food, unable to muster up the courage to eat any.

"Don't you love Michael Ford, Ms. Bailey? Why don't you help him test for poison?" The voice chuckled.

To everyone's surprise, she named Yasmin.

Yasmin was slightly panicking as she stared nervously at Michael.

On top of his excessive blood loss, Michael was struggling to stand upright from hunger. He sat on the floor, leaning against the wall.

"It turns out that Ms. Bailey doesn't love Mr. Ford, after all." The eerie voice laughed out loud.

"Are you willing to take a bite of the food for the one you love, Mr. Ford?" She directed her attention to Michael instead.

The man in question cast me a glance before reaching out to pick up a waffle. Then, he took a bite.

After making sure it wasn't poisoned, he handed it to me.

"Just eat it yourself," I said through gritted teeth.

"Mr. Landon, what if I told you... I'll grant you a wish if you get something to eat? Would you do it?" the voice was asking Zion now.

Zion furrowed his brows and picked up an apple from the table. "Give me Rachel back."

"Sure, as long as you eat it."

We were gambling with our lives to prove our sincerity.

The amount of food that was safe to consume gradually grew less. That only meant that the probability of choosing something that was poisoned had increased.

Chapter 425

Without any hesitation, Zion took a bite of the apple.

After a while, he realized that he felt nothing. He had made the right choice.

The voice couldn't help but laugh.

Everyone looked around curiously at the surveillance cameras around. Something felt off about the operator on this floor.

"Now, Mr. Eason Grant, do you have a wish?"

The voice pointed Eason out again.

Eason pointed at himself and said, "Who, me? A wish? Send Joel back too, then."

As if the person was holding back their laughter, they said, "If I may ask, would Mr. Eason Grant dare to finish the remaining food on the table? From what I know, there's a high chance that the remaining food is poisonous."

Eason frowned, then turned around to look at Steven and I.

He grumbled, "Is this person crazy? Is he mocking me?"

Steven nodded solemnly.

"Yeah. He's looking down on you, but I don't know why you're letting him do it."

That was a very somber way to provoke somebody.

I couldn't help but laugh.

Steven stared at me in amusement for a while.

Provoked, Eason grabbed a bottle of milk from the table.

"If I die, I die. Everyone dies in the end, but I don't want to die."

And so, Eason took a sip of the milk with a straw.

To his surprise, he survived.

Steven looked at Eason as if he was an idiot.

Steven shook his head and whispered to me, "Do you see that? We're both students of the advanced class, but we're very different."

I nodded solemnly too.

Just as the voice was about to speak, Taylor, who had been "dead", gradually regained consciousness.

In a feeble voice, he said, "Water..."

Quinn hid behind Zion in fear.

"H-He's alive!"

Finally, the voice couldn't help but break out laughing. With the voice changer, it sounded eerie.

"He simply choked because he was being too greedy! None of the food is poisonous."

Zion frowned, finally realizing that something didn't add up.

He looked at the camera warily.

Suddenly, the ceiling opened up, and Rachel popped her head out.

"You guys are so funny!"

Zion looked at Rachel in shock.

"Rachel..."

Behind her, Joel poked his head out and mocked Eason, "You're still dumb, as always."

Eason almost choked on the milk.

"The fuck? What's going on?"

"Somebody took us away after we fell into that trap. I passed out, but strong man Joel held his breath, so he remained conscious. He dealt with the people down there. When I woke up, I discovered the control panel on this floor!"

Rachel continued to laugh heartily.

Meanwhile, Zion's expression was grim.

"Hurry and come down. It's not safe there."

Rachel continued shaking her legs as she sat up there.

"Mr. Zion Landon, are you worried about me?"

Then, she laughed. Zion huffed in dissatisfaction, but he remained quiet.

"Why don't you all come up and have a look? There's a tunnel that leads straight to the first floor," said

Rachel, holding back her laughter.

"How do we get up there?" asked Quinn, who was nervous about the height.

"I found a rope. I'll pull all of you up."

Joel tossed the rope down.

Taylor, who escaped prior, felt guilty. He had been hiding in the back and staying silent.

"Wait. Let us eat first."

Steven took a piece of bread and took a bite. He continued, "We need stamina."

Everyone else walked over and began eating too.

"Zion, I want an apple. Pass one over," Rachel ordered Zion with a smile.

Zion huffed again, but he picked up an apple anyway and gestured to throw it to Rachel.

"I don't want that one. It doesn't look sweet," Rachel said coyly.

"How can you tell?" Zion asked.

"I want the one that you had. Since

you

you took a bite, you must find it's sweet," Rachel said

cheekily.

Zion paused. Then, his ears became bloodshot. He was shy because of how Rachel was teasing him.

Chapter 426

"Steven, give me an apple."

Joel couldn't bear to watch further, so he decided to ask Steven to toss him food.

But Steven had no time to respond to Joel.

Steven took a bite out of every piece of food, making sure that it wasn't poisonous before giving them to me.

"He's lovestruck..."

Joel rolled his eyes, then threw something at Eason, who was drinking milk with bread.

"You, give me some food."

Eason glanced at Joel, then gave him a piece of bread.

Joel said, "Since you intended to save me earlier, I'll pull you up first."

Eason grimaced at Joel. He wondered if high schoolers nowadays were all like Joel.

"You should worry about escaping. You have the college entrance exams to sit for." Hearing that, Joel's expression darkened. He snorted.

When they were almost done eating, Joel put the rope down for Eason to climb up.

Since Eason had received professional training, he easily climbed up the rope. Zion quickly followed suit.

After the two went up, we told them to pull Quinn up first.

"Stephie, go up."

Steven wanted me to go up first.

I didn't reject that idea. I wrapped the rope around my wrist and started climbing up.

"Not bad," Eason teased.

I turned around to look at Steven, but it seemed like he was about to fight Michael.

"Are you guys coming?" I asked.

"The control panel for the 12th floor is on the 13th floor, which means we've only temporarily escaped the mastermind's control. Once they discover us, we won't be able to leave." Steven understood what I meant, so he tossed the rope to Michael.

Michael did not expect Steven to let

him go

est. But since he had a

injured arm, he hung onto

using his other arm and

up.

When Michael got pulled up, I offered a helping hand as a companion. Everyone else pulled him too. It wasn't me pulling him up on my own...

But Michael insisted on provoking Steven by grabbing my hand and refusing to let go.

I thought that both of them were childish. I shook Michael off and looked at Steven, who seemed woeful.

"Come on up."

Steven coolly climbed upward. But

|

just as his hand reached the edge of the ceiling, he stuck his head out and said woefully, "Stephie, my wound hurts..."

He was reminding me that he was injured too.

So, I smiled and stretched my hand toward him.

He obediently put his hand in mine and allowed me to pull him up.

Eason and Joel wanted to help, but Steven ignored them.

The truth was Steven had come up with his own strength, yet he still wanted to pretend to be weak by leaning against me. Then, he looked at Michael provocatively. S

I knew all his childish tricks, but I didn't expose him.

Downstairs, Yasmin panicked. She shouted, "Michael..."

She was afraid that nobody would rescue her.

But she was right... Rachel retracted the rope.

Rachel rolled her eyes and said, "She's the worst. She can rot alone."

"Michael..."

Yasmin was pale. She looked at Michael nervously. He was the only person who could decide if she got a chance at survival.

Behind Yasmin was Taylor, whose head hung low as he stood there feeling hopeless.

He escaped the 14th floor in exchange for everyone else's lives. He was certain... that they would not save him.

"Pull him up," said Zion, pointing at Taylor.

Zion wasn't a saint, but he simply couldn't stand idly by. All lives were equal before his eyes, after all.

Chapter 427

Taylor was surprised. He looked up at Zion.

Then, he looked down and softly said, "I'm sorry..."

He apologized.

But sometimes, an apology would mean nothing to the actual hurt that was caused.

If everyone had died on the 14th floor, Taylor would've been a selfish murderer.

Rachel reluctantly put the rope down.

Yasmin, who had a strong will to live, hurriedly grabbed the rope first. She looked at Michael nervously.

"Michael... You know I can't die."

"Yasmin works for Peter. He knows of the secret behind the Godmaker Project," Michael said. He glanced at me, waiting for my approval.

"Even if she dies today, I'm confident that we can still discover the truth," I said plainly.

"Yeah, we can figure it out," Steven agreed.

With her voice trembling, Yasmin said fearfully, "Stephany Larson... don't cross the line."

"I'm crossing the line?"

I laughed, looking down at Yasmin.

"Back when you baited Stephanie Carlson out, causing her to die at the hands of the killer, did you ever think that you were crossing the line?" Yasmin's expression became increasingly grim; she looked at Michael nervously, asking for help.

Rachel scoffed.

"It's karma. Did you imagine this day to come when you made Stephie die?"

Rachel grudgingly continued, "Taylor Barlowe, hurry on up. Otherwise, you can die with her."

Taylor came forward, but Yasmin was still holding the rope.

Since he was desperate to live, I expected Taylor to push Yasmin away so that he could climb up, but he didn't.

He looked at us with a conflicted expression.

Perhaps luck was not the only thing that helped Taylor get this far...

I wondered if the mastermind saw hope in him.

Suddenly, a robotic voice began to announce, "Beep! Automatic self-destruct device activated on 12th floor..."

Everyone tensed up immediately.

As the timer ended, cracks appeared across the floor, and the 12th floor began to collapse.

"Hurry and come up!" Zion and Eason shouted panickedly.

Amidst the panic, Taylor still let Yasmin go up first.

"Taylor!" Zion shouted.

Taylor fell into the wreckage. He started to bleed from his mouth as the rubble fell on him.

Teary-eyed, he looked at us and said in a choked-up voice, "I really just... wanted to live... I'm sorry, I'm really sorry... I just wanted to live..." He simply wanted to live.

"Grab this!"

After Yasmin was pulled up, Zion tossed the rope down. Taylor reached out as he cried. He caught the rope when the floor collapsed completely.

"When I was born, my biological mother abandoned me... She was a university student and had a premarital pregnancy..."

"I heard from the director that she may have given birth to me in the washroom of a shopping mall or some small polyclinic. She abandoned me in the washroom later.

"It was quite a big issue then. A

couple who couldn't conceive adopted me, and they treated me

well at first. Up until when I was ten years old, I still believed that they

were my biological parents. Content

"But when I turned ten, they conceived a pair of twins. They couldn't afford to raise three children..."

"So, they put me in the orphanage.

They said that they weren't

abandoning me. They claimed they

did it because of the financial

burden and promised to bring me home when things improved..."

Taylor was injured. After he got up, he narrated his past as his trembling body leaned against the wall.

His chest was heaving abnormally. I could tell that his ribs must've been broken.

If he did not receive treatment soon, the broken ribs may pierce through his lungs... and he might die.

"I waited for them at the orphanage. One day... Two days... Three days... I waited. I just wanted to live. I wanted to wait until my parents came to pick me up...

"But no, they even moved. They went somewhere where I couldn't find them... They didn't want me anymore.

"The orphanage was a much scarier place than expected. Children who lacked discipline from their parents were like sprouts with bad roots, growing without restraints.

"I had received ten years of

education, so knew what was right

and wrong I knew that I couldn't

be

a part of them, but I didn't dare to

defy them. They would beat me up... If I wasn't on their side, they would exclude and marginalize me..."

Taylor's chest began to heave harder.

Chapter 428

I pressed on Taylor's chest so that he would lie down.

"Stop talking..."

"I was lucky. I wasn't special, so they always targeted... the two geniuses who didn't fit in..."

As Taylor spoke, he began to cough up more blood.

I wondered if his ribs had already pierced through his lungs.

"On that day when they were going to commit arson... I was scared. I heard their plans, but I hesitated. I wasn't sure if I should tell both of them..."

"I felt guilty, so I secretly told Steven. I told him to escape with Simeon... That they should leave the orphanage since the rest were going to commit arson..."

"But Steven said that there was somebody that he was waiting for, so he refused to leave."

Taylor looked at Steven. I also turned around to look at Steven.

So did everyone else....

It turned out that someone had notified Steven of the arson beforehand.

I wondered why Steven didn't escape, causing Simeon's death in the process.

Steven stood in silence. He kept his head low, refusing to explain himself regarding the incident from years ago.

After all, Steven... had his flaws too.

"Steven... Simeon could've escaped, but you insisted on staying. That's why Simeon died, right?" Quinn asked, teary-eyed.

"Carol said it was all Stephanie's fault because she made you wait for her..."

Everyone looked at Steven.

Simeon died because he got held back.

I wonder if Steven had been feeling guilty, hence spending years being homeless. He was punishing himself by staying guard at the orphanage.

"What do you know?" Joel interjected, his breath quickening as he tried to say something.

"We have to leave soon..." Steven interrupted Joel.

In response, Joel clenched his fists and stared at Steven.

Without any explanation, Steven lowered his gaze and walked t

the elevator. He checked if it

bring us to the first floor. S

As I stared at him, I sensed he felt lonely and hurt. He looked so... alone.

It felt like he was trying to do something in his own world, but nobody supported or understood him.

I thought he would've needed a hug or a kiss.

No words were needed to explain or express my solidarity with him.

"Let him lay flat and not move. We must carry him with us. I'm afraid

bones have pierced taidet

hi said softly. Content

I touched Taylor's chest and continued, "Stop talking. I know you just wanted to live. If you want to live... hang in there."

Taylor

eyes

at till trembling, but his

to lose focus. He looked

suddenly grabbed

hand with his bloodied fingers.

"Stephanie... I'm sorry... I'm sorry..."

I frowned. I couldn't understand why he was apologizing to Stephanie.

Zion and Eason made a makeshift stretcher and placed Taylor on it.

I walked to Steven and gave him a backhug...

"Steven, I'm so tired. I want to go home."

Steven froze. He turned around to look at me, and his eyes were red.

I wondered if he felt upset when he was misunderstood.

I looked at his eyes and the tears in them.

Suddenly, I couldn't help myself but kiss him.

Let us console and heal each others' imperfect souls.

Steven, my Steven.

A voice from the depths of my soul told me... that I should trust and love Steven unconditionally.

Because he was Steven. The one and only Steven.

Chapter 429

"I hope you'll stay alive."

After Steven inspected the elevator, he looked at Taylor.

He hoped for Taylor to stay alive.

But I knew Steven wasn't hoping for the individual, Taylor Barlowe, to be alive. Instead, he was hoping for humanity and innocence to stay alive.

Humans were born kind...

As long as one was not born evil, any average person should be allowed to make up for their mistakes.

Taylor was the average person among the group of geniuses. He was going through the motions...

He didn't have the chance to make decisions for his life. He was average, yet he tried his best to stay alive...

"When we get out..." Taylor said to Steven, smiling as blood continued to flow from his mouth.

"If we survive... You should all buy insurance... from me."

I smiled at Taylor.

"Yeah. I'll buy the most expensive personal accident insurance policy."

Taylor smiled at me, but his eyes began to lose focus. In the end, he passed out.

Zion looked away, then pressed the elevator button to the first floor.

If we could make it out alive... we should live a good life.

We should appreciate the people around us and also appreciate every new day.

Suddenly, the elevator halted on the tenth floor.

I glanced at everyone else in the elevator.

After inspecting the control panel for the 13th floor, I found it was not connected to other floors. Similarly, Benjamin's control room was not interlinked with other people's control rooms either. Yet, the mastermind still found out about our intention to escape.

That only pointed to one thing-there was a spy among us.

Sparks flew along with the screeching sound that the elevator made. The light inside the elevator began to flicker.

Out of reflex, Steven held my right hand while Michael held my left hand.

I wanted to shake Michael's hand off, but he refused to let go.

The elevator stopped between the tenth and 11th floors. The door. opened
to reveal a wall, which el.net

looked exceptionally scary S

"What do we do? Are we trapped in the elevator?" Quinn cried out of fear. She trembled and hid behind Eason and Zion.

Rachel consoled her, "It's fine. Don't be scared, we'll figure a way to get out."

"We're stuck on the blank floor," said Joel, frowning. He turned around to Steven.

"What do we do now?"

Suddenly, the elevator moved and began to drop rapidly.

Steven embraced me and said, "Everyone, look at the sides of the elevator and squat down."

Soon, the elevator stopped at the next blank floor. The door wouldn't close, and sparks continued to fly.

Quinn began to bawl from fear, and even Rachel hid in Zion's arms fearfully.

Eason turned pale from the shock. He cursed, "Crazy..."

"Someone's controlling the power source, When the electricity gets cut off.

eel get stuck," I whispered.

SW

Then, I took a deep breath.

"They're trying to kill us," Eason cursed.

"They've discovered us..."

Joel warily scanned everyone in the elevator.

"There must be a spy among us."

On the 18th floor, the madman had also claimed to be among us....

Now, many had died and sustained injuries. The surviving ones were familiar people, but the more familiar we were, the higher the possibility for the culprit to be among us.

"Trust no one," Steven said in a low voice.

"It's you, isn't it?" Rachel snarled at Yasmin. "Are you the one who's trying to kill us?"

Chapter 430

Yasmin collapsed onto the ground, her face as white as a sheet. She had no energy to explain.

"I already said that the elevator wasn't safe..."

"It must be her. She's the most suspicious among us," Rachel snarled. She raised a foot as if she was going to kick Yasmin. Yasmin dived into Michael's arms in fear, to which Michael looked at me out of reflex.

I didn't bother to respond. I got up and touched the wall.

"Rachel Qualls, stop trying to stir the pot. You just think that I killed Stephanie Carlson! Why don't you reflect on yourself?"

"You and Zion are suspicious too. You were dead, but now you're alive!" Yasmin refuted angrily, clinging to Michael's arm as she spoke. "Michael, don't believe in what she said. It isn't me."

Yasmin seemed to be having an emotional breakdown. She was crying desperately.

I looked at her and said, "You can cry louder. That way, we'll die even sooner."

Yasmin glared at me as if she wished for me to die.

But right now, she simply seemed like a joke to me.

"If the culprit is among us, then it's good news," I said calmly, consoling everyone.

"At the very least, they wouldn't be seeking death. That also means... the mastermind won't let us fall to death in the elevator."

I knew Yasmin wouldn't have taken part in planning the killing game. It was because she didn't have what it took.

My words successfully pacified the group. Quinn quietened down and hugged Rachel.

The elevator went down slowly. It stopped on the seventh floor, which was in pitch-black darkness. There was no light. "Well, none of that was in vain. We skipped quite a few floors, going from the 13th floor to the seventh floor," said Eason. He was trying to lighten the mood, but he dared not be the first to step out.

Joel glanced at Eason, who was clinging to his arm.

Joel said, "You really live up to your name."

Eason paused, then glared at Steven.

"You told the kid that?"

To Eason, Joel was but a high school kid.

Steven habitually ignored Eason.

Joel scoffed, then began to drag Eason out to the seventh floor. He asked, "How scared are you... of Simeon?"

Eason and Simeon had a long history together.

When Eason heard Simeon's name, he felt a chill down his spine.

"You know quite a lot, kid. Now, shut up."

I pulled Steven out of the elevator.

Michael wanted to exit the elevator too, back as she sat on the floor and cried.

asmin held him I

"Michael, let's not go. Don't go... I'm scared."

She was finally feeling fearful.

Quinn was scared too. She trembled as she hugged Rachel. She

not exit the elevator. Con dare

t the elevator.

Rachel

elevator's not safe. We're on the

floor. It'll be quick...

out."

SW

Teary-eyed, Quinn nodded and followed behind Rachel, exiting the elevator.

Zion got Eason's help to carry Taylor out while also being wary of their surroundings.

Suddenly, the elevator moved.

I shouted at Michael, "Get out!"

Michael wanted to exit the elevator, but Yasmin couldn't stand up and held him back!

"Michael!"

The elevator began to drop. In the process, Michael pushed Yasmin outside.

He fell downward with the elevator, all alone.

I crouched by the edge of the elevator shaft and watched the elevator fall.

We were on the seventh floor.

Even if we considered the blank floors and the basement floors... Michael would die.

"You're a bad omen!" Rachel snarled. She wanted to beat Yasmin up, but Zion stopped her.

My breath quickened as I stared at the dark pit below. My body began to tremble.

Michael... didn't deserve to die.

I turned around and slapped Yasmin and glared at her.

"You deserve to die..."

Stunned, Yasmin stared blankly at the elevator that dropped downward.

She collapsed onto the floor.

"Michael..."