

After Death 441

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Steven looked at me.

"Stephie, do you wish it was me?"

"No."

I shook my head.

Regardless of the final goal, the methods were too extreme.

For somebody to use such methods to hurt others to achieve their goals... I didn't think that person would be somebody "good".

Steven held my hand and brought me to hide behind a truck. We took off the hazmat suits.

"If you don't want it to be me, then it won't be me."

I looked at him in confusion.

"And if I wished it was you?"

"Then I'll find the mastermind and replace him, becoming the person you want me to be," Steven answered seriously.

I smiled. He looked a little silly for how seriously he was taking it.

But he also intelligently answered my question.

Eason said Steven had IQ but no EQ. But in my opinion... Steven had a terrifyingly high IQ and EQ.

He just... used his IQ on others and all his EQ on me.

I sighed and walked up to him, giving him a back hug.

Exhausted, I said, "I'm so tired. Piggyback me."

Steven piggybacked me with a smile and took us out of that place.

"Sir."

I wasn't sure how long it took, but I fell asleep on Steven. When I woke up, Ewan had arrived along with many other people. He must've known that we weren't safe. Shocked, I asked Steven, "How did Ewan get here so quickly?"

"Since Mr. Lincoln has been missing for days, I came here to look for the both of you because this was where his GPS location last appeared," explained Ewan. "Are Joel and the rest... okay?"

I felt exhausted.

My adrenaline had kept me going in the killing game inside the ruined building.

I had a hard fall on the staircase too. I was hungry and sleepy. My body felt exceptionally tired.

"They're all fine. Taylor has the worst

injuries, but he survived. Genome Society took Yasmin, so she'll live.

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Rachel's injuries aren't severe either,"

Ewan said assuringly. S

"As for the rest, they just suffered some bruises."

Hearing that, I relaxed and fell into a deep sleep.

Even in my sleep, I knew Steven continued to hold my hand. He never let go.

The truth was I knew that Steven might not be the mastermind behind the killing game.

But I was afraid that it would be him.

When I woke up, I found myself at a hospital back in Huma.

On the beds next to mine were Rachel, who was sobbing, as well as Michael, who was glaring at Steven.

"Stephie!" Rachel said excitedly, noticing that I was awake.

"This is..."

I frowned. I couldn't understand how I ended up in the hospital when I had just been asleep. Why did everyone look worried? "Stephie, you're finally awake."

Rachel got off her bed and hugged me tight.

"Where's Zion and the rest?"

I patted Rachel on the back.

"Zion reported himself back to the police station. This case alerted the higher-ups, so everyone's really concerned about the case..." Rachel said softly.

She seemed hesitant.

"I can't tell you too much. But you get it, right? The major higher-ups were alerted!"

I paused.

I understood what she meant. The

mind had intended for it to

lot of public attention. But

in case it caused public panic, it hadn't been publicized yet. S

The authorities would certainly interfere with the case.

And Genome Society must be in a panic now.

"Was I... asleep for a long time?"

I asked Steven, who immediately stood up to block Michael.

"It's been half a month..." Michael answered hurriedly, looking worried about me.

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"It's been 13 days and 8 hours, hmph!" Steven retorted at Michael. Michael gritted his teeth, tempted to strangle Steven to death.

I nodded, stunned for a moment. I then asked, "I've been unconscious for so long? What did the doctor say?"

"The doctor said you probably passed out because of excessive shock or concussion," Rachel replied, squeezing my hand tighter. Her voice was trembling with fear. "You frightened me to death, Stephie." Feeling somewhat dazed and numb, I sensed a loss of control over my body. Something told me that neither excessive shock nor concussion was the cause of my prolonged unconsciousness... Noticing Steven's cautious and fearful gaze at me, I wondered what had frightened him.

Obviously, he wasn't worried that I would remain unconscious. It felt more like he was afraid that I wouldn't recognize him when I regained consciousness...

Was he concerned that I might lose my memory again?

Silly Steven. How insecure was this guy? Worrying that I might fall in love with Michael again...

"Steven, my head hurts," I said softly.

I had heard that showing your vulnerable side to your significant other could increase the couple's happiness.

"I'll massage it for you," Steven said, pulling me into his embrace and massaging my temples in front of Michael.

"Show off..." Rachel hummed in a tone tinged with jealousy. "Stephie, am I not your favorite anymore? You said you wanted to live with me, didn't you?"

I glanced at Rachel, my expression complex. After a moment, I smiled and teased her, "Don't you have your eyes on Zion for that?"

Rachel chuckled. "He's occupied at the moment..."

Despite feeling a lack of control over my body, I attempted a smile. I hoped it didn't come off as forced.

I could feel that my body was seized by an uncomfortable numbness.

"What happened... after I passed out?" I asked.

"I led the police to search for you guys, but-" Michael explained, moving closer to express his concern.

Steven snorted, cutting him off, "The police went to the ruined building and found the bodies of those people, but... no sign of Carol's and Benjamin's bodies."

I was startled, looking up at Steven

as he continued, "All the bodies were there except Carol's and

Benjamin's... Oh, and the principal of the special needs school is still alive, but he's gone crazy. The police are still interrogating him, but they can't get anything out of him."

I frowned in silence, wondering why Carol's and Benjamin's bodies were not found.

"Where's Joel?" I looked around.

I knew Eason and Zion were absent because of the case, but why wasn't Joel here either?

"The college entrance exam is near, so he went to school," Steven explained.

I wanted to comment on that but decided to change the subject instead. "How's Taylor?"

"Still there. He was seriously injured, so he'll be transferred back only when he's allowed to be moved from the intensive care unit to the regular ward," Michel quickly replied before Steven could interject.

Steven rolled his eyes.

"Good to know..." I nodded, relieved to hear that he was still alive.

"After this hunting game, the mastermind of the serial killer case will stop his killings, right?" Rachel asked fearfully.

"Do you remember Project Zero?"

The only survivors left on that list are Yasmin and Taylor. Taylor has survived, and his crime doesn't warrant a death sentence either, which means... Yasmin is the only one left. But she still holds some value." I looked at Michael.

Michael lowered his head nervously and said softly, "Stephie... Yasmin works for Peter. Peter is too cunning and cautious... Yasmin is the only person we can extract more secrets and clues from if we gain her trust."

I sneered. "That depends on whether Peter decides to let her live or not."

The killing game had attracted a lot of attention, and Peter was now at huge risk himself...

I figured it was about time for him to eliminate some liabilities.

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Michael paused, casting a nervous glance at me. Clearly, he didn't want Yasmin to die. Regardless of the reason behind it, he seemed to believe that Yasmin didn't deserve to die. I found it amusing. I had thought that after learning the fact that Yasmin intentionally lured me out on the night of the 15th, Michael's view of her would change.

I imagined he would probably no longer trust her or even turn against her. However, I never anticipated that he would remain as concerned about her life and death as ever.

"Stephie... Yasmin promised to give me evidence against Peter if she made it out alive, and I haven't received any from her yet," Michael explained anxiously, insisting that he was only concerned about the evidence and not Yasmin's life.

"Besides... she did risk her life protecting me before... " Michael continued to deceive himself with excuses.

"Come on, do you really think someone as selfish as Yasmin would risk her life for others? Either she knew there was no real danger from the start, or you're mistaken," Rachel remarked, rolling her eyes. "You saw how she reacted when I tested her at the ruined building. She didn't even dare to take the risk."

"That was different- " Michael attempted to explain.

I pulled Rachel closer and said, "Destroying a marriage is worse than destroying anything. Let sleeping dogs lie. They're engaged, after all."

"Stephie... " Michael's voice sounded hurt and anxious. "That's not it. I just feel Yasmin doesn't deserve to die. She—"

"Your thoughts are none of my concern," I cut Michael off.

Steven, sitting obediently next to my bed, couldn't help but chuckle secretly. He was probably laughing at Michael's lack of emotional control. Michael was simply digging his own grave.

Whenever Michael found himself in trouble, Steven would behave like a good boy as if to highlight how obedient and sensible he was.

At the right timing, he would even chime in to fan the flames, saying "Honey, Yasmin got Stephanie Carlson killed, yet he's still defending her."

Michael frowned at Steven, clenching his hands. "I admit that was Yasmin's fault. She said she was too scared and didn't anticipate Stephie getting into trouble as a result. She drank too much on the 15th, so she couldn't remember the date right, ultimately misleading the police."

Michael continued to defend Yasmin, eager for us to believe that Yasmin didn't deserve to die.

"Michael, it seems you haven't learned any lessons from this killing game... "I sighed, feeling he was indeed beyond help.

"Stephie, I know this whole thing

hasn't been fair to you, and I'll make sure Yasmin pays for her actions. But we're not police officers, after all. So, we need to analyze her value rationally." Michael explained, hoping I would understand his perspective on protecting Yasmin.

From his viewpoint, he might have a valid argument. He simply aimed to maximize Yasmin's usefulness before administering the appropriate punishment. However, it seemed as though Michael perceived everyone as wanting Yasmin dead. Thus, he was desperate to convince us of Yasmin's continued value.

It appeared we were not all on the same page regarding this matter.

"Stephie, he's so emotional. It's not like we're going to do something to Yasmin. He sure loves her a lot Steven interjected, adding fuel to the fire once again.

"Shut up, Steven!" Michael snapped, clearly irritated by his comments.

"She's my wife. I can say whatever I want to her! We have a marriage certificate, you know?"

Steven retorted, his tone displeased and assertive. His brows furrowed as if he was preparing to start a brawl with Michael.

"No violence when you can argue civilly," I intervened, pulling Steven's arm.

Steven grunted and sat back at my side, still visibly angry.

With a headache looming, Michael rubbed his temple and turned to Steven. "Could you leave for a while? I need to speak with her." "No," Steven replied defiantly.

I turned to Steven, bursting into laughter. It wasn't until later, due to the numbness I felt, that I realized I had laughed out.

It felt strange.

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After returning from the ruined building, I couldn't shake the strange feeling that my reactions always lagged behind my subconscious...

"Stephie..." Steven turned to me, protesting, "He must be up to no good. That's why he wants me to leave."

I nodded. "Michael, you can say it with Steven present."

Michael was so furious that it took him a while to calm down before speaking, "Stephie... Yasmin is really important. Even the police know that—"

"Why are you explaining so much to me? Are you worried that I might kill her?" I interjected curiously.

Somehow, Michael seemed to be wary of me. Was it because of the recent killing game in the ruined building?

"No..." Michael replied after a long pause. It was evident he was worried that I would kill Yasmin.

Nervously, he tried to explain once again, "I'm just—"

"Since I didn't kill her at the ruined building, you don't have to worry about me getting rid of her now that we're out," I assured him, realizing that Michael had been startled by the sight of me pressuring Yasmin for answers.

"Honey, he's scared of you," Steven whispered to me.

I didn't respond to him and fixed my eyes on Michael.

Was he afraid that I would kill Yasmin because he believed I was the mastermind behind the serial killings? Or perhaps the mastermind behind this killing game?

"She... " Michael lowered his head, taking a deep breath. "Yasmin told the police that you're the mastermind behind this killing game. She said... you stabbed her and... tore her wound. She demanded an examination of her injuries...'

I narrowed my eyes and asked Michael, "Ha, does she have any proof?"

I noticed Michael's sudden silence and finally came to a realization. "Ah... now I get it... "

All of a sudden, I understood why Michael was so worried that I would kill Yasmin.

"Yasmin told the police that I

harmed her, and you're the only

witness, I said to Michael, feeling a tightness in my chest. My body was trembling with rage. "So, you sold me out, didn't you?"

Did Michael tell the police that I was the one who harmed Yasmin? Michael's head remained lowered, and his voice was soft. "I was just—"

"Just telling the truth?" I chuckled, then pointed to the door. "Get out."

Rachel stared at Michael in disbelief. "What did you do? When did Stephie hurt Yasmin? She saved her! If it weren't for Stephie, Yasmin would have died in there long ago!" Steven frowned quietly.

Yasmin accused me of harming her to the police, claiming that I was the mastermind behind the killing game... And Michael was the witness.

"Yasmin was scared that... you would kill her. I was just... " Michael clenched his fists.

Clearly, he couldn't tell a lie when Yasmin begged him helplessly with her eyes filled with sincerity.

"Michael, I told you before, you're a kind person, but your kindness often leans toward Yasmin's perspective. You've done nothing wrong in this matter because you chose not to

lie," said solemnly, to the

AUMS

door.

"But I don't want to see you now. Please get out."

"Stephie... Yasmin still holds some value. If— " Michael abruptly paused, realizing that no one could understand his thoughts now. His disappointment was evident as he lowered his gaze.

His action implied that he believed that I had harmed Yasmin without justification. There was no solid evidence to support my actions in that chaotic situation, after all.

Perhaps he just wanted to win Yasmin's favor so that she would promptly hand over the evidence against Peter.

sorry.

Michael apologized, his

"I'm voice hoarse. "If Peter targets Yasmin, she'll be scared, and then...

I'll be the only person she can trust
and rely on. That's our only chance to get the evidence from her."

With that, Michael left the ward.

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Later, a police officer arrived to question me about Yasmin. I remained silent, leaving the explanation to Rachel.

The officer informed me that Yasmin had dropped her charges, stating that she wouldn't pursue the matter further. All I needed to do was apologize to her.

I continued to remain silent.

"What do you know about this killing game? From what we gathered, you're just an ordinary person who graduated from college a few years ago with little social experience, and you often help homeless children.

"How did you manage to walk out of the ruined building unharmed? And your husband, he's intellectually disabled with mental issues-sorry."

I had never met the officer questioning me. I understood he was just doing his job and had no intention of offending me when referring to Steven as intellectually disabled. Nevertheless, I spoke up warily.

"I wouldn't say I came out unharmed. I did fall down the stairs, resulting in a brain injury. I was in a coma for half a month. I just regained consciousness.

"As for why Yasmin was injured, I assume she was overly frightened in that pitch-black environment, leading her to mistake me for an enemy. Thus, I don't think I owe her an apology," I stated truthfully, though omitting certain details such as intentionally tearing her wound.

"I can vouch for her!" Rachel angrily chimed in.

She was also telling the truth. She certainly hadn't seen me harm Yasmin.

Rachel had never perceived me as someone who would hurt others, and Yasmin's "malicious" image had been deeply ingrained in her heart. Thus, she was inclined to side with me.

The officer glanced at Rachel, then back at me. "But Mr. Ford stated that he was present at the scene and implicitly confirmed that you harmed Ms. Bailey."

"Mr. Ford was also overly frightened in that circumstance. I don't think any eyewitness testimony would hold much significance or value given the situation," I calmly and rationally answered his question.

I then added, "Yasmin took a tumble and lost her balance on the stairs. By the time I saw her wound, she was already sobbing and screaming."

Despite the truth that Yasmin fell off the stairs because she was terrified by me, I provided a kernel of truth amidst a tapestry of deception, altering the sequence of the events.

The officer nodded. "Understood. Since Ms. Bailey has dropped the charges, this matter isn't significant anymore. Please take a good rest. The task force will come to see you later. We ask for your cooperation."

I nodded as I watched the officer leave, then turned to Steven, whose gaze remained intense and restless.

Fueled with fury, Rachel cursed Yasmin with every word she could think of.

After sitting numbly for a while, I slowly confessed, "I did harm Yasmin." It was undeniable that I had resorted to violent means while questioning her.

Rachel looked at me in surprise. "Then why didn't you finish her off?"

I stared at Rachel speechlessly before responding, "As a coroner, you should know better than to let friendship cloud your judgment, my friend."

"Oh, right." Rachel scratched her head, feeling a bit embarrassed. She then muttered under her breath, "Oh, whatever. Since Yasmin dropped the charges, who cares?"

I knew Michael had ways to make Yasmin drop the charges, so I hadn't been too worried about it.

"I just wanted to see... how many steps it takes to turn a lie into truth," I said.

Obviously, that officer-an outsider-had bought my lies earlier.

The police had already documented the testimonies of everyone who managed to escape from that game alive, including Rachel, Zion, and Eason. With their accounts and Yasmin's "wicked" image, most

people were more inclined to believe

my version of events. Content

"Do you know why Quinn could hide among us without being discovered?" I posed the question.

I explained, "It's because most

people tend to perceive the weak in

a certain way, especially when Yasmin, and other malevolent

figures are present. We're moral

likely to suspect Yasmin and others

like her than those who appear weaker.""

In essence, we could only perceive what others were willing to show us.

Since Peter had been portraying

himself as a loving husband and

devoted father, it suggested that he was concealing something beneath this facade. But how many secrets was he truly hiding?

"Steven, do you think I shouldn't have lied just now?" I asked Steven.

He seemed to have been silent for the whole time.

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"You lied because you knew that Yasmin dropped the charges. Your lies won't affect the investigation. If the charges hadn't been dropped, you wouldn't have lied. Instead, you would've confessed," Steven said

softly.

He indeed knew me too well.

"It's human nature to protect oneself. It seems only natural for humans to act selfishly," I muttered. "Honestly, before I realized it, I was already lying just now."

My breath became heavier, my gaze trembling as I turned to Steven, who was also staring at me intensely.

Steven was aware that the past Stephanie Carlson lacked emotions. She was incapable of understanding feelings such as happiness, pain, despair, or heartbreak... even devoid of self-preservation. However, I understood all these... which made me somehow emotional.

The moment I learned that Michael had informed the police about my involvement in Yasmin's injury, I couldn't help but wonder about Yasmin's true intentions. Was she trying to threaten me? And could this indirectly harm Steven? Consequently, I chose not to engage with the officer despite his inquiries.

However, when he mentioned Steven, my instinct for self-preservation kicked in almost immediately.

"Stephie... You're fine just the way you are, always have been, and always will be... Don't push yourself too hard," Steven said as he pulled me tightly into his arms, his voice trembling with emotion.

It was clear that he understood the extent of my efforts to fit in... to become a normal person.

However, while normal people experienced emotions, they were also inherently selfish and capable of lying. They had flaws, weaknesses, and vulnerabilities. Yet, it was these complexities and varied traits that made humans. They were a highly intelligent and adaptable species, surpassing all others on Earth.

So, when I found myself instinctively lying, I was taken aback in disbelief.

I looked at my hands, then shifted my gaze to Steven.

In my restored memory, the Stephanie Carlson before amnesia felt like an outsider in this world.

After amnesia, I became like a newcomer who had stumbled into a trial game by accident. I experienced pain and disappointment in what seemed like a normal life, forgetting the fact that I used to be an "abnormal person".

I had to admit, I felt somewhat grateful to Michael. Without his "episodic teaching", I wouldn't have become the current me.

I was like an old tree that had been withered for a long time, suddenly sprouting new shoots. I was now filled with vitality and growing branches.

However, this was a lengthy process as there were still many challenges awaiting me in this world...

Suddenly, my train of thought was disrupted by a knock at the door. Glancing over, I saw a tall man in a suit standing there.

The man was good-looking, with
some resemblance to Steven,

though not much. He had a

confident demeanor, reminding me of Michael. He gave off the air of a capable and seasoned senior executive in some company.

I surmised he was the heir Martin had carefully cultivated in secret, the man who had led Martin to treat his son, Dax, as expendable.

"Hey, Steven," the man greeted Steven with a smile, his expression genuinely friendly and non-threatening.

However, I could sense the danger emanating from this man's presence. Something told me that he was more than met the eye...

"You must be my brother's wife. Hi, I'm Jimmy Lincoln," the man said as he approached with a fruit basket, extending his hand to me in a friendly gesture.

I frowned at him. I had investigated Jimmy Lincoln beforehand because I was wary that Martin might harm Steven, and "genius" was just one of Jimmy's least conspicuous labels.

Jimmy grew up in Melovia, receiving only the top education along his journey. He was meticulously nurtured by Martin at great expense. Now, I suspected he might also be a genome-edited human. What worried me even more was that Jimmy had received a good education on top of his given gift. He was deeply influenced by Ulophia's aggressive capitalist ideology... Steven might not be his match.

"You're in the wrong place," Steven interjected before I could speak, his demeanor cold and commanding.

"Go out, turn right, go straight, take the stairs down, and you'll find the morgue. If you still don't know the way, Lean take you to the

crematorium," he added, his tone sharp and unwelcoming. Content

When Steven faced his "enemy" Michael, he often resorted to throwing tantrums and acting childishly because he never regarded Michael as a competitor of his level. Yet, Jimmy Lincoln was different.

He exuded an air of danger, with his

mere presence releasing pheromones that instantly set other high-level men on edge. It triggered a response akin to the rivalry observed among powerful animals.

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"Steven, it's been so many years, and you haven't changed a bit," Jimmy said with a smile.

Though he made it sound like Steven hadn't changed at all over the years, I could tell he was mocking Steven for not growing up.

"Who's this? Your younger brother? I didn't know your dad had other illegitimate children," I asked Steven, my tone clearly unfriendly toward the uninvited younger brother. Steven tightened his grip on my hand and replied, "He's nobody."

"Looks like my brother's wife holds some enmity against me," Jimmy chuckled, his hand still extending toward me for a handshake.

"The purpose of my return is not to become your enemies. Instead, I want to cooperate with you." Though he sounded sincere, I didn't buy it.

"My brother has sold the Lincoln Group to Crowdstar Group, which means the Lincolns have lost the privilege the Lincoln Group provided them until now.

"That was very brave of you, Steven. You've just declared war against all the Lincolns, you know?" Jimmy's smile remained.

While I was pondering the meaning of his words, Jimmy suddenly leaned closer to Steven and spoke in a voice that only the three of us could hear.

"Some of the recent killing sprees have impacted the core operations of the black market industries behind several conglomerates, and Peter Jones is just a small-time doctor...

"He and his entire team, the Genome Society, are merely puppets controlled by capitalists. The real root of evil... remains untouchable until you become one of the rich and powerful."

I gazed at Jimmy, understanding what he was getting at.

So, Peter was merely a lackey raised by the rich and powerful... To unearth the hidden truth and expose the mastermind lurking in the shadows, we needed to assume the role of the powerful backer first. That was probably the reason why Steven had agreed to return to the Lincoln family.

"Steven, I told you three years ago that the only way to confront all of this is for us to work together. But you refused. I've been trying to prove my loyalty to you all these years. Surely, you can feel my sincerity?" Jimmy looked at Steven

Steven remained cold, shielding me alertly as if guarding something important.

Noticing Steven's reluctance, Jimmy

backed off and added with a smile once more, Chill, Steven. The recent incident has already impacted the core interests of the upper echelons. Soon someone will step in to clear O Those and resolve everything

arrogant clowns behind the killings will soon be wiped out." Content

Jimmy was referring to the mastermind behind the serial killings, wasn't he? In other words...

"Such a perfect masterpiece..." Jimmy glanced at me meaningfully, then left.

The mention of "perfect masterpiece" sent a chill down my spine.

Before "Stephanie Carlson" was murdered, the killer also referred to her as the perfect masterpiece he had ever seen...

I knew Jimmy wasn't the murderer, but that phrase simply held too much significance for me.

"Who's that guy? He's so dashing..." Rachel was still captivated by Jimmy's demeanor and appearance. "But why do I have a feeling that he's not one of the good guys? More like a movie villain."

"Hmph," Steven grunted, clearly dissatisfied.

Seeing Steven's reaction, Rachel giggled. "Oh, you know what? He's nowhere near as handsome as Steven."

Steven glanced at me, as if seeking my agreement.

I was speechless. Was now really the time to compare who was better looking?

Jimmy mentioned that the rich and

powerful behind the scenes had

been thoroughly angered by the mastermind of the serial killings. In other words, they were going to take action.

"Everything looks good. You can be discharged today," the doctor, wearing a mask, said after examining me and reviewing my test results and medical records.

Perhaps... I was being too cautious. The sight of hospitals and doctors always put me on edge. I couldn't shake the feeling of being observed by everyone around me. "Stephie?" Steven noticed my unusual behavior and came over to touch my forehead.

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I looked up abruptly, belatedly coming to my senses. "I'm fine..."

"Your health is fine. Everything's good," the doctor reassured. "Oh, and the results from the health department's tests came back clear too."

"Phew! We really dodged a bullet..." Rachel sighed in relief.

"The health department?" I furrowed my brows.

"They discovered that the crazed headmaster from the special school has AIDS. Also, among the people who were locked up with us, one has AIDS, and three have infectious diseases," Rachel explained. "Quinn was found to be a carrier of the AID virus. Her husband, Callum, was promiscuous and abusive. Not only did he engage in high-risk sexual intercourse, but he was also abusive and alcoholic... Quinn was infected by him."

I gasped in disbelief. It seemed that we had been exposed to a high risk of infection given the circumstances, especially for those who were stabbed by Quinn.

"Rach! Have you taken the test?" I instinctively grabbed Rachel's wrist. She was one of the people Quinn had stabbed. If she had any contact with Quinn's blood...

"I have, and I'm clear. Don't worry, Stephie," Rachel quickly assured me, then laughed. "What are the odds? I should probably go buy a lottery ticket, haha!"

I was stunned for a moment, rendered speechless

Before anyone realized that Quinn and others were carriers of AIDS, no one would have thought of taking antiretroviral drugs. By the time the results came out positive for AIDS, it was likely already past the optimal time for prevention.

"Sir, Yasmin has contracted AIDS and is currently in a state of collapse. Michael is watching over her," Ewan whispered in Steven's ear as he arrived to pick us up from the hospital.

I sat numbly on the edge of the bed.

Yasmin had contracted AIDS... It was as though Quinn had done it intentionally. Since Yasmin couldn't be killed for now, Quinn had inflicted another form of suffering upon her. She infected her with a highly contagious yet incurable disease.

"Both the contraction of AIDS and

the recent killing spree were kept top secret, yet Jimmy somehow learned about it... How did the news of Yasmin being infected with AIDS spread?" I asked Ewan. Content

Ewan took out his phone. "Someone deliberately posted it online. We tracked the ID, and it was from overseas. The police suspect it's Quinn."

Since Quinn had been exposed, she had nothing to fear, so she posted online:

"Hi, I'm one of the masterminds

behind the killing game. I'm truly a pitiful woman. My family favored boys over girls, so I was left at my grandmother's place when I was young.

"My parents didn't care about me, and I was drained of all my worth. I was eventually married off to a worthless scoundrel in exchange for 1,000 dollars.

"Not only did my husband abuse me,

but he also maliciously infected me with AIDS. Thanks to him, I felt a despair I'd never experienced before in this world. My despair ended when I learned about Project Zero.

"This world is too dark. There are simply too many maggots that need to be cleaned out, so we planned this killing game. I was hiding among the players in this game.

"And at the end of the game, I used a knife—stained with my blood—to stab several survivors. Namely, Yasmin Bailey, Rachel Qualls, Steven Lincoln, and Stephany Larson."

Quinn seemed to deliberately spread the news online.

I looked at Steven worriedly. He shook his head and assured me, "I won't be infected with the HIV virus. Because of the genome editing, I'm naturally immune."

"Then why Rachel and I— " I asked, puzzled. My eyes met Rachel's.

Stephany Larson and Stephanie Carlson were experiment clones of the same embryo. Since Stephanie was a completely geically modified experimental body, was Stephany one too?

If my current body had also undergone geic enhancement and editing, then I was immune to AIDS. But Rachel...

Rachel looked a little scared and quickly declared, "It's just my luck."

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"We should go now," Ewan said after completing the discharge procedure.

"You two go on ahead. I won't be discharged until tomorrow. Zion should be able to pick me up," Rachel motioned me to come near and hugged me. "Get some rest when you get home. Don't worry too much." I nodded, following Steven numbly.

Noticing my concern, Steven whispered, "Rachel's geic test came back fine. It's really just luck."

"Good to hear." I looked at Steven and sighed in relief. Rubbing my temples, I realized I was becoming overly anxious. Even the sight of a doctor put me on edge.

"Don't worry. You still got me," Steven gently reassured me.

"About Jimmy... "I wanted to know more about Jimmy and the cooperation he mentioned.

"He came to the orphanage to see me three years ago. He knew I was just pretending to be an idiot." Steven held my hand, leading me into the elevator.

"The moment I laid eyes on him, I sensed he was incredibly dangerous. He showed me the evidence and facts about Genome Society, telling me that geic modification had become popular among capitalists 20 years ago...

"The wealthy began experimenting with genome editing, using their own sperm, high-quality eggs, and surrogates to create a superior population, ensuring the longevity of their assets and families." There was no denying that money was the root of all evil.

"The concept of genome editing raised ethical questions. While scientists and researchers proposed it and successfully validated it with animal experiments, such inhumane actions were strictly prohibited worldwide.

"As a result, a criminal organization emerged-Genome Society. Operating in secrecy, they conduct experiments on human subjects, whom they refer to as 'experimental subjects'."

Stephany and I were undoubtedly among these experimental subjects, and it was likely that many others worldwide shared our geic makeup.

"To gain further trust from the wealthy and secure their funding, these experimental subjects were implanted into the wombs of ordinary mothers. They were born, raised, and integrated into society. Each was closely observed by dedicated personnel documenting their behavior.

"These subjects exhibited

exceptional intelligence, acute

perception, and physical prowess far beyond that of ordinary individuals. They excelled in various fields, including sports, finance, and

scientific research.

"The success of these experiments attracted more wealthy individuals, who offered their own children-embryos, to be precise-as subjects for what they deemed as 'genome editing' experiments'." It was evident Steven was one of those who had undergone genome editing-a so-called customized baby of the wealthy.

The Lincoln family had invested in the project because Ignatius wanted a stronger descendant to succeed the Lincolns. However, Steven's "awakening" came too late, so he was deemed a "failure" and heartlessly abandoned at the orphanage.

It was evident that the wealthy never

considered geically modified children as their offspring, treating them more like mere toys. Even Stephany and I were subjected to complete geic optimization, treated as mere experiments as well.

Indeed, human nature could be terrifying.

"Clearly, Genome Society hasn't ceased their development of this technology," Steven said, his eyes filled with sadness as he looked at me.

I realized we were merely sacrifices

of the era, mere stepping stones in the guise of so-called scientific progress. It wasn't immediate but rather required years of

experimentation, observation and

data accumulation.

If geic modification were to become a global trend, eventually legalized, then we would be destined to be footnotes in the annals of history.

Hence, the Rebels chose to stand up and fight against Genome Society, against the powerful and wealthy...

It was akin to a tiny ant attempting to topple an elephant. The mere thought of it left me feeling suffocated and overwhelmed.

"Jimmy is one of the highly intelligent individuals created through genome editing. Martin did it behind Ignatius' back."

Martin's ambitions were immense. If Ignatius had discovered Jimmy's existence, he would also uncover Martin's ambition to take over the Lincoln family.

After all, Martin was merely a collateral beneficiary of the Lincoln family, a relative.

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Though Martin was merely a relative, his ambition to take over Ignatius' fortune was palpable.

Steven continued, "Andy Lincoln died... because he opposed genome editing, condemning it as inhumane. When I, labeled as a defective product of genetic modification, was cast into the orphanage, Andy fought to bring me home.

"However, Ignatius and the other Lincolns strongly opposed him, viewing me as a stain on their reputation... It was then that Andy committed himself to fighting against Genome Society, adamantly opposing their unethical human experiments."

That explained why Andy Lincoln, heir to Huma's wealthiest dynasty, met a mysterious end. Ignatius chose to remain silent, relinquishing any pursuit of the truth following the loss of such a remarkable son.... It was evident that the figures behind Genome Society were truly formidable.

"Why did Jimmy propose cooperation?" I asked Steven.

"He's against genome editing experiments," Steven replied.

His response surprised me.

He then elaborated, "While we oppose the experiment due to the loss of our kin and loved ones, aiming to prevent such tragedies from recurring, Jimmy's motives are different.

"He seeks to preserve his privileged status as one of the highly intelligent individuals. He doesn't want more highly intelligent individuals like himself to emerge as they would compete with him for upper-level resources."

I nodded in understanding. As I had anticipated, the murderer's real target was Genome Society. Killing Stephanie Carlson, their most significant experimental subject, served as a demonstration of their intentions.

In other words, even if Yasmin hadn't lured me out that fateful night, I would have ended up dead anyway. My name was on the Death List.

"Stephany Larson! I'll kill you!"

As we were about to enter our car outside the hospital, a frantic figure rushed toward me from the crowd. The glint from the fruit knife in her hand could be seen. Instinctively, I raised my hands, aiming to grab the knife. But Steven acted swiftly, seizing the handle before I could.

"Stephany, why won't you die? You

did it on purpose, didn't you? You knew Quinn was an AIDS carrier, you knew it all along! I'll kill you, I'm going to kill you!" Yasmin cried and screamed, her demeanor disheveled and frantic.

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"You've destroyed my life! You've ruined everything!" She collapsed onto the ground, her sobs echoing loudly.

Michael rushed to her side, yelling at her, "Yasmin! Come back with me this instant!"

Yasmin struggled as she wailed.

"She ruined me. I won't let her get away with it. I'm going to make her pay! Kill her, Michael! Kill her for me!

She's not Stephanie Carlson She's really not Stephanie Carlson!"

Yasmin's cries resonated with despair. Contracting AIDS was tantamount to a death sentence for her. Her life was truly ruined.

Looking down at Yasmin, who had become hysterical with pain, I said solemnly, "Humans should never go against nature... What goes around, comes around. You should've expected this when you did what you did."

This was Yasmin's retribution, the consequence of her malice.

"What about you, then? Do you really think you're some kind of saint? Your hands carry more sins and blood than mine, Stephany...

"Drop the act, stop pretending! No matter how innocent you pretend to be, it doesn't change your nature!" Yasmin threw some photos and documents at me in a fit of madness.

"Steven! Michael! You've all been

deceived! Look for yourselves. This is the observation data Genome Society has on Stephany. I snuck it out! See for yourselves!" Yasmin shouted uncontrollably, her eyes filled with hatred as if she were facing the devil.