

## After Death 471

### Chapter 471

The woman wearing glasses exuded an air of sophistication and composure. She appeared to be older than I was. Yet, her flawless and refined complexion made it impossible to guess her true age. I stared cautiously at the woman standing before me, sensing a strange feeling of danger.

"The situation in which Stephany injured Madison's husband was an act of self-defense. It was Madison's husband who attempted to harm Stephany with a knife. She acted to defend herself, managing to grab the knife and fight back, resulting in only a minor injury."

Eason had finally finished vomiting, and now, he could showcase his intellect.

He pushed Joel away in disgust and walked over to Charles and Martin. "As Stephany's father, did you say that your daughter has been emotionally unstable since she was a child?"

Charles furiously pointed at Stephany and exclaimed, "Yes, this little bitch has been a lunatic since childhood. As a parent, I request her to undergo a psychiatric evaluation!"

Eason sneered.

It appeared that the expert had already provided some advice before Charles arrived. It was a shame that Charles didn't seem to grasp it.

"Stephany was taken away by your former nanny, who also became her adoptive mother, shortly after she was born. She has not been living with you ever since. You've never been involved in raising her. So, why do you claim that she has been emotionally unstable since childhood?"

"I believe you're the one who's emotionally unstable and in need of a psychiatric evaluation.

"As long as she's a mentally stable person and entitled to basic human rights, no one has the right to restrict her freedom and confine her to an asylum!" Eason added firmly.

The woman with glasses smiled and calmly moved Charles aside before walking to the front. She wore a suit skirt and high heels. She effortlessly took out her phone.

"I have a video here of Stephany instigating a homeless teenager to seek revenge against her classmates. This form of aggression, you see... Shouldn't the family be concerned about this?"

Martin was surprised and smiling. He seemed pleased with today's reinforcements.

Frowning, I glanced at the video playing on her phone. Stephany had been caring for those homeless children since she turned 18. These children deeply respected and admired her, to the point where they would bravely defend her if anyone dared to bully her.

"This video can only show that these children must have witnessed Stephany being threatened and hurt, so they immediately rushed to protect her." Eason made it clear that he would never let anyone take me away today.

"Is that so?" The woman smiled and gave Martin a thoughtful glance.

Martin nodded and gestured toward the surrounding subordinates. She was deliberately wasting time to target me...

I saw the people around Martin suddenly turning around and walking toward me. Although he was unarmed, the threat looming over him was exceptionally grave.

Almost subconsciously, I wanted to fight back, but Steven hugged me tightly. He shielded me in his arms, immediately stepping forward and kicking at those about to approach me.

Eason sneered and said faintly, "Only mentally ill patients with violent tendencies can be subjected to

compulsory medical treatment. No agency has the right to confine citizens in an asylum without a court decision.

"Madam, I understand your desire to provoke Stephany. However, it's important to note that even if you manage to anger her, sending someone to an asylum in Huma requires a court decision."

She nodded with a smile. "You misunderstood."

I gripped Steven's wrist tightly. She was deliberately trying to provoke me...

"Stephy, aren't you curious about my identity?" The woman exuded confidence and appeared to have numerous means to have me sent to an asylum.

I looked at her warily. I was not curious at all. Steven instinctively positioned himself in front of me, glaring at her with a clear sense of warning,

"Who are you? Charles is Stephany's father, after all, and Martin is also a member of the Lincoln family. What about you?" Eason signaled to the approaching woman to stop.

"Hi, I'm Nancy Lee, a doctor in the field of psychiatry and also Dr. Peter Jones' senior," she confidently introduced herself as a psychiatrist with a smile.

I glanced at her instinctively. Was she Peter's senior? Peter was approaching 50 years old. I couldn't help but wonder about her age...

"Doctor? You look like you're in your. But you're a doctor?" Eason scrutinized Nancy from head to toe.

Nancy flipped her hair. "Thank you so much. I'm 52 years old."

As soon as Nancy uttered those words, all eyes turned toward her. 52?

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If Nancy dressed more youthfully and claimed to be 25, some people would actually believe her.

Nowadays, medical technology had advanced tremendously, making medical aesthetics incredibly powerful. Many celebrities appeared to be in their 20s when they were actually in their 40s.

However, aging remained an undeniable force and could still be detected through various visible signs. Nonetheless, the woman in front of me exuded a mature demeanor, making it difficult to accurately determine her age by solely observing her face or neck.

"Are you seriously 52 years old?" Zion was equally astonished. It was difficult to tell her age.

Nancy smiled and spoke, her eyes locking with mine, "In today's world, the field of medical aesthetics has significantly advanced, ensuring that patients receive excellent care and maintain a

positive mindset. Stephy, are you really not going to talk to me? Biologically speaking, I'm your mother."

I suddenly released Steven's hand and looked at Nancy in disbelief. Mother? Ha... she really had the nerve to say that.

I sneered and shifted my gaze to Nadia. "I should be a mere genetic experiment for some organization. Mother? Do I even have a mother? Wasn't I supposed to be born after her ten-month pregnancy?"

"Mrs. Larson and Mr. Larson were unable to conceive due to infertility. They did not have their own viable eggs or sperm. However, Mrs. Larson underwent in vitro fertilization using my eggs and the sperm of another remarkable man."

Nancy didn't try to conceal it whatsoever. She even dared to mention it right in front of the police. Evidently, following Peter's demise, the organization wanted her to closely surveil my every move. "What does it have to do with me?" I asked Nancy.

Nancy just smiled. "Stephy, you and Stephanie... are both my daughters."

I chuckled. "Bah, aren't we all just your experimental subjects? Are you the leader of Genome Society? What's the matter now? Finally ready to stop hiding and show yourself?"

The genetic organization selected excellent test products, ensuring high-quality talents as genetic candidates. Nancy, being a doctor in psychiatry, undoubtedly represented a standout individual.

Her eggs needed to be combined with the sperm of another exceptional man to create an experimental embryo like Stephanie.

This embryo would undergo genome editing and artificial intervention, followed by cloning experiments to yield multiple experimental subjects. This was how Stephanie and Stephany were created.

"Stephy, what are you talking about? Why can't I understand?" Nancy asked with a smile.

"You don't get it? Your people watch me every day as if they want to put a camera on my head... What part of that don't you understand?" I gazed at her cautiously.

She remained calm and perceptive, able to discern the other person's emotions and identify flaws in their words. "Stephy, you're experiencing delusions of persecution, and it's a serious matter.

"After all, Mrs. Larson is the mother who brought you into this world. She's acting out of concern for your well-being. You need to come with me for treatment."

She began making accusations against me, gradually driving me to madness. Eventually, she would take

me away.

I had a strong feeling that the organization had suffered a major blow this time. Quinn had exposed their facade, and now they were desperate to regain control. And unfortunately, I was the one they were determined to apprehend. They were determined to bring me back as their experimental subject. Hence, Nancy's sudden appearance was just to ensure that I would be brought back properly. It was clear that the police had their eye on me, and only a "reasonable" arrest could alleviate their doubts.

"Stephy, you have a sister who's the same age as you. Don't you want to meet her? Four years ago, Andy and Stephanie's parents had a car accident on the viaduct. My daughter was in Andy's car.

"She and Stephanie are identical twins, and they look almost exactly the same. She lost her memory after she woke up. Recently, she suddenly regained her memory and said she was Stephanie."

On the other hand, Stephanie, who was me, awoke with amnesia and appeared to be an entirely different individual.

"I have a suspicion. During the chaotic car accident, Michael Ford mistakenly took the wrong person. He took my daughter away, and the real Stephanie was mistakenly identified as my daughter and returned to

me,"

I gazed at Nancy, my entire body tense and my fingers trembling. Despite being aware of Nancy's deliberate attempt to provoke me and the presence of glaring loopholes in her words, I found myself unable to control the tremors coursing through me.

It dawned on me that her words were not only aimed at me but also intended for Steven.

"Steven, don't you want to meet the real Stephanie?" As expected, Nancy directed her question to Steven.

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I couldn't help but glance at Steven. When Yasmin pretended to be Stephanie, I wasn't really worried.

Only someone as gullible as Michael would fall for it... But when even Michael didn't believe Yasmin, I realized just how lacking her disguise skills were.

Peter exploited Yasmin by using her to impersonate the supposed reincarnation of Stephanie to deceive Michael and Steven. However, Yasmin's lack of acting skills and low IQ were ultimately detrimental to the plan.

Given Peter's intelligence, one would assume that he would refrain from making such a foolish error. Surprisingly, he allowed Yasmin to proceed with it nevertheless.

Linda also mentioned that Peter was a kind person. He supported Stephanie's parents and was the one who looked out for Stephanie.

Upon reflection, it appeared that Peter might have been acting as a whistleblower. It seemed he intentionally allowed someone with a low IQ like Yasmin to attract our attention. He wanted to disclose the information beforehand, showing that there were multiple 'Stephanies' within the organization.

I found myself subconsciously glancing at Steven, nervously reaching for his hand. If it were Yasmin, there would be nothing to worry about.

But what if there truly was another Stephanie? Stephanie herself was an experimental subject, and her identical twin with the same gene could be even more alike.

"I want to see her," Steven declared, expressing his desire to meet that "Stephanie."

My fingers stiffened for a moment, and then I gradually released Steven's wrist.

Nancy smiled and gestured for Steven to follow her. "Let's go."

Steven glanced at me and gave me a reassuring look. I firmly grasped his wrist again and met Nancy's gaze. "I'm going too."

Nancy did not stop or refuse. It was as if she had been expecting it.

Zion and Eason exchanged a glance before declaring, "We'll go as well."

Nancy glanced at Zion. "I'm sorry, Officer Landon. There isn't enough room in my car."

Zion placed the extinguished cigarette butt in Eason's hand and suggested seriously, "My car is larger. Steven and Stephany will ride with me. We'll follow you."

"I'm going too!" Joel exclaimed, raising his hand like an eager primary school student.

Nancy smiled and got in the car without retorting. Charles grumbled and was about to utter something more, but Martin quickly stopped him.

Steven and I hopped into Zion's car.

In the meantime, Eason couldn't help but react as he caught sight of Zion's discarded cigarette. "Zion! This is truly going too far. I'm your leader! Your direct superior!"

"I apologize, Boss. I forgot. I mistakenly thought this was a trash can," Zion said as he glanced at Eason before getting into the car directly.

Eason was seething with rage. He was on the verge of exploding. Right then, Joel seized him by the collar. "Stop arguing. Get serious and get in the car."

As Eason was forcefully tugged by the collar, he glanced back at the young high school student. Despite being much younger, Joel spoke to him in a strangely persuasive tone as if he were addressing a child. It had been a tough day for him.

Eason held back his sharpness and posed a question to Joel before entering the car, almost as if he were pondering aloud, "Joel, let me ask you... When I was investigating the organization's base, I stumbled upon their feasibility plan for soul reincarnation and memory transfer..."

"Do you believe that the soul can truly be reincarnated?"

Joel was taken aback for a moment, and his gaze was fixed on Eason. "Theoretically, one could argue that the soul may continue to exist in a different state after departing from the physical body."

Eason shuddered, and he clasped his hands tightly. "Oh, may God bless me." He then fervently made a series of prayerful gestures. "Amen..."

Eason whispered, "Please bless me and protect me from evil spirits. God, please rewrite my fate. Please shield me from being pestered by Simmy."

Joel stared at Eason as if he were a fool. He briskly opened the car door, forcefully guiding him toward the passenger seat. Joel then slipped into the car, casually positioning himself between Steven and me.

For a brief moment, I was stunned. I glanced at Steven, and then at Joel, who seemed completely unaware that anything was amiss. Steven appeared somewhat absent-minded, constantly gazing out

the window. I had initially desired to switch seats with Joel so that I could sit next to Steven. However, I soon realized that Steven seemed preoccupied and absent-minded, which made me feel incredibly uneasy.

Did he doubt it? Or did he believe what Nancy said?

Zion spoke while gazing carefully at Steven's reaction in the rearview mirror. He was worried about upsetting him. "After Stephanie's body was found, the forensic doctor confirmed the features that Michael had mentioned. There was a mole on her left chest and a birthmark on her perineum."

Steven's clenched hands were clearly visible, and a heavy silence enveloped the car.

"Even though identical twins may look alike, the small birthmarks on their bodies are unique. You and Stephanie have known each other since childhood. Does she have these birthmarks on her body?" Zion asked tentatively.

Steven fell silent and did not speak. I also averted my gaze and peered out the car window.

Back then, Steven cherished "Stephanie" too much. He had never engaged in any sexual activity with Stephanie. So, how could he possibly be familiar with the birthmark on her private parts?

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This seemed to have provided Nancy with an opportunity to validate her statements. The deceased Stephanie was not the authentic 'Stephanie,' after all. The real Stephanie lost her memory in a car accident four years ago and was subsequently taken away by the organization.

"Steven, do you believe what Nancy said?" Joel inquired the same question I intended to ask.

He didn't answer. Instead, he just glanced at me. I felt overwhelmed with a profound lack of reassurance.

"Why are you sitting between my wife and me?" Steven asked after a long silence, the atmosphere heavy with tension.

I looked up without thinking, my eyes slightly puffy. I saw Steven kick Joel and reach out to hold me. "I want to sit next to Stephe."

Sitting in the passenger seat, Eason pursed his lips irritably and shook his head. He started imitating Steven, "I want to sit next to Stephe..."

Joel was forced to swap seats with Steven, who ended up in the middle seat.

"I couldn't help but wonder why the organization abruptly released Nancy, the parent character, and substituted Stephe with a new experimental subject.

"It seems they intend on retrieving the experimental subject 'Stephy,' releasing a new counterpart, and then... suspending operations temporarily, biding their time, and resuming operations when the time is right," Steven whispered.

Eason gave Steven a thumbs-up. "I think so too."

Steven tightened his grasp on my hand. "That means... Stephe will be in danger."

They would definitely use various methods to take me away.

I looked out the car window and said, "I think Nancy might be right. Stephanie may not really be Stephanie, but the one in her hands is Stephanie. Steven, the Stephanie you love may have never loved anyone else. She's still Stephanie."

If this was indeed the ending, then it was undeniably the best possible ending for Steven.

"Stephie..." Steven tightened his grasp on my hand once more. I glanced at him with mixed feelings.

Nancy's car stopped in front of a villa nestled in the suburbs of Huma. It was at the top of a mountain, and the environment was absolutely stunning.

As I stepped out of the car, I caught sight of a figure standing on the second floor. She was wearing a white dress, and her long hair was fluttering in the wind. A sudden tightness gripped my heart, and my steps began to stiffen.

She didn't just resemble Stephanie; she was a replica. As she glanced in our direction, her gaze eventually locked onto me. Our eyes met, and at that moment, my heart began to race,

Clones and identical twins... Ha! What a fascinating experimental subject, indeed.

Steven was clearly astonished. He found himself inexplicably drawn, and without thinking, he stepped inside the yard.

Zion cursed in shock and turned to Eason. "Damn it... If I hadn't seen Stephanie's lifeless body with my own eyes, I'd probably think she's Stephanie herself."

Eason looked concerned. "Isn't it scary? If Stephanie's body weren't found and her DNA was a match, no one would believe that the real Stephanie was dead..."

If Michael hadn't laid eyes on Stephanie's lifeless body and had instead encountered this woman standing before him, he would most likely have been the first to wholeheartedly believe that Stephanie was alive. The mere contemplation of such an occurrence was truly chilling.

Was this the reason why Stephanie's body was placed in a glass display cabinet to be publicly viewed after her death? She didn't want to die in such a mysterious way, nor did she want to be easily replaced.

Eason whispered, "Was it Stephanie who planned everything? Could it be that she took her own life... No, she's probably the mastermind behind the serial murders, isn't she? What we discovered in the ruined building is"

"Shh!" Zion frowned and interrupted Eason's words.

Eason was stunned and didn't say anything else. Joel also looked up at the woman upstairs.

Nancy stood behind me and whispered, "She's Steven's Stephanie... Hasn't this realization deeply unsettled you? Steven's Stephanie should be pure in soul and body, not in love with Michael, let alone have a child with him..."

"Shut up!" I couldn't deny the fact that her words had provoked an intense fury within me, causing my emotions to spiral out of control. My entire body trembled uncontrollably. However, I was unable to counter her argument. I appeared to be furious.

"You're a defective product. If the organization desires to recycle you, you should discreetly disappear and return the perfect and unspoiled Stephanie to Steven. The organization will cease its activities globally, and Steven and Stephanie will pursue a secure life.

"This is the chance the organization is offering you... Sacrifice yourself and join us. The organization will release Steven and provide him with an untarnished and whole Stephanie," Nancy continued. The terms she offered me were extremely tempting.

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L ignored Nancy and stared up at "Stephanie" on the balcony.

She was like a hollow shell, her eyes empty and listless. However, her gaze was fixated on Steven.

Steven stood below. He couldn't help but be attracted to the woman who looked exactly like the woman he loved...

"Steven..." She called out his name after a prolonged period of time.

I saw Steven's body visibly tense up as he tightened his fists.

Nancy seemed to be very confident. After all, this was a one-to-one clone of Stephanie Carlson born from the same embryo.

It was only natural that Steven was attracted to her.

"Simmy..." "Stephanie's" gaze then fell on Joel. Her eyes looked barren as she blankly called out Simeon's

name.

Joel furrowed his eyebrows. He stood in place, staring intensely at the woman.

Eason, on the other hand, was getting goosebumps all over. He scooted nervously toward Joel and asked, "Who is she talking to? Where is she looking at? She looks a bit creepy to me.

"Why is she calling out Simeon's name? Did you feel a cold breeze just now?"

Eason was making his fear of Simeon increasingly obvious.

I didn't know what happened between them. Even his new name was established in order to deter Simeon. "She's talking to me," Joel said coldly.

Eason took a good look at Joel and looked relieved. "That scared the wits out of me. Now that you mention it, you do look quite similar to that lunatic, Simeon."

Joel furrowed his eyebrows and didn't say anything else.

"The two lunatics in our class are idiots... All they do is try to prank me. They weren't even self-aware when someone ended up taking their lives." Eason sounded like he was still mad.

He then continued, "If ghosts do exist, they should go after those responsible for their deaths..."

"Aren't those people already dead?" Joel asked with the suspected intention of trying to scare Eason.

Eason's body stiffened. His head violently shot up and he looked at Joel.



"Yeah... All the people who hurt Simeon and got him killed are all dead... The people who died in the series of killings were all those who hurt him in the past..."

He was right they were all dead. All that was left was Yasmin, who hurt Stephanie and Taylor. She was barely alive.

A game of death at the abandoned building had gotten rid of all those people.

"She's almost completely identical to Stephanie," Joel looked at Steven and said again.

"But Stephanie's body was displayed in the glass case to remind people that she was dead," he explained. "If anyone were to appear in the future, it wouldn't be her. She's the one and only... She's irreplaceable."

If Joel were to guess, Stephanie died in the display case in front of everyone to prove that she was dead.

The way he saw it, she'd already known the society might send a replacement.

My head was hurting quite a bit. Certain memories, especially memories regarding my murder, were completely impossible to recall.

I'd remember fragments from time to time, but I could never put them together to form a complete picture. Sometimes, I even started to wonder if I was actually Stephanie Carlson....

"From a certain point of view, she is and isn't Stephanie at the same time," Steven glanced at the woman standing above as he spoke. "Her genes, appearance, and even her memories... might be Stephanie's, but she's just the result of an experiment..."

The "Stephanie" on the floor above suddenly laughed. "Everyone is the result of an experiment. How are you so sure that the Stephanie who died is actually her?"

Her originally hollow stare turned piercing cold as she opened her mouth to speak.

It was evident that she was void of emotion. She resembled how I appeared in the past from my memories -numb to everything and everyone.

The way she looked at Steven wasn't gentle or loving. In fact, it didn't even contain any form of emotion... Other than the fact that her body was untouched, leaving a "Stephanie" like this behind for Steven was of

no use.

"She's your Stephanie. We switched her after the accident. If you insist on investigating further, this is the last warning Genome Society is offering you only because you're Andy's son," Nancy said, walking toward Steven.

She continued, "I can tell you without a doubt that she's Stephanie Carlson."

Steven frowned as he looked at her.

"The one who died was not the real Stephanie. She wasn't the one that you met when you were younger either. The so-called memory loss and confusion are things that happen to the clones after they die.

"So far, the data hasn't been able to explain or control this." Nancy turned to glance at me before continuing. "So, Steven, you can only choose to take Stephanie or Stephany behind you."

"You understand what the society is capable of... This is not a discussion. You have no means to go against the society right now."

Nancy had presented him with a choice. He could either take Stephanie upstairs or me.

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I looked at Steven as he turned to look at me. Neither of us said anything.

A moment later, he pointed at the woman on the second floor. "I want to take Stephe with me."

His finger was pointed to the woman upstairs, but his gaze stayed on me.

My eyes welled up with tears, but I stood still without a single word.

Nancy shot me a glance and appeared extremely confident. This was the outcome she predicted.

"As your biological mother, I have the right to send you for a psychiatric evaluation."

I stared at her for a prolonged period of time before scoffing.

Eason and Zion looked at each other in confusion. "What's going on? What did you agree to, Stephany?"

I didn't say a word or offer an explanation.

Nancy told me that Genome Society would let Steven off the hook if I surrendered myself.

If it were up to me, I wanted Steven to spend the rest of his life in peace.

There was no fault in him for choosing the woman upstairs either.

Genome Society wanted to take back the failed experiments, and I was the most valuable one out of all of them. Hence.... they wanted to take me away.

Going with Nancy was the quickest way I could come in contact with the higher-ups in the organization. "One for one... He chose Stephanie," I tried to sound nonchalant, but I couldn't stop my voice from choking.

Joel stared at Steven for a long time before asking, "Are you sure?"

Steven shoved Joel's arm away. "She's Stephanie..."

"What about her, then?" Joel pointed toward me.

"She's just Stephany who has parts of Stephanie's memories." Steven's voice was hoarse, and he didn't look into my eyes.

I averted my gaze and laughed bitterly.

"As it turns out, all you ever wanted from the start was just the cold, unfeeling Stephanie Carlson..."

He lowered his head and said again, "I'm sorry..."

"You don't need to apologize to me." I shrugged nonchalantly. "Even if you hadn't made your decision, I'd end up doing it for you. I just want you to live well."

I just wanted him to live well... This used to be what Steven had hoped for Stephanie.

Now, my wishes aligned with his.

I just wish he'd live well and stay alive, safe and sound.

As Stephanie descended the stairs, she shot me a cold glance, as if able to detect that we carried the same DNA.

"You're nothing but a defective product..." She laughed condescendingly.

In a voice that was only soft enough for us to hear, she called me defective as she walked by.

"You end up possessing flaws and weaknesses the minute you develop feelings. When Genome Society ran tests on us again and again, we were only able to deceive everyone else if we first fooled ourselves.

"Tell me, Stephany... Did you really develop feelings? Or is this all just pretend?" She leaned in and asked in a hushed voice.

I didn't reply and only stared at her in silence.

She let out an icy laugh and approached Steven.

"Are you really willing to let her go?" she asked.

Steven took her hand. "I'm sorry it took so long for me to find you..."

"It doesn't matter to me. As long as you can keep me hidden, it doesn't matter if it's you or anyone else," Stephanie" said emotionlessly.

Steven's fingers stiffened for a moment before he took her away.

Joel furrowed his brows and wanted to say something, but he didn't manage to get any words out in the end.

Zion didn't understand what was going on. He turned to look at me. "Come with me for now, Stephany."

I took a step forward before Nancy reached an arm out to stop me.

She flashed me a smile and swiftly lowered her arm. "I'll be waiting to hear from you."

She was confident that I'd return to look for her soon. Because now that Steven had taken "Stephanie" with him, there was no way he'd keep me around any longer.

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On the way back, Steven sat in the backseat with "Stephanie." I wanted to get in the car, but I realized there was no longer any room for me.

"Stephanie" was extremely against it. The air around her was extremely depressive. She shot Joel a look and naturally lifted her chin.

She was telling him to shut the door for her.

Joel instinctively obeyed before freezing up afterward.

I stood in place silently.

"My driver will send all of you back." Nancy walked out.

Joel looked at me and said, "I'll go with you."

Eason hopped into the passenger seat of their car, and Zion drove off.

I stared at Steven, but he didn't turn to look at me at all.

Seated side-by-side, Steven and "Stephanie" looked like a great couple.

But who was the real Stephanie Carlson?

"What do you think of the new Stephanie?" Joel asked after getting into Nancy's car.

"I can't ... tell who the actual Stephanie is right now." I shook my head and looked at the driver through the rearview mirror.

Joel didn't ask any more questions. This was somebody else's car, after all. It wasn't safe.

"But Steven seems to believe that she's Stephanie without a single doubt. Nancy knows him well. She seemed aware that he'd lose control over Stephanie-related matters and that he'd choose her over everything else no matter what."

My voice was small, and my fingers were gently tapping on my leg.

Joel stared at my fingers and didn't say a word.

Nancy's driver dropped us off at the door of Steven's home. Zion and the rest of them were already there.

After Steven got out of the vehicle, Stephanie casually lifted her hand, wanting him to help her get out of the car.

He reached out to hold her wrist and escorted her out of the vehicle.

In the front yard, Stevie was barking as it was feeling unsettled. However, it quieted down the minute it saw "Stephanie."

It seemed to be in shock. It sat on the ground and stared fixedly at Stephanie. Then, it shifted its gaze toward me.

"Is this my Georgie?" "Stephanie" asked Steven.

Steven didn't reply.

"Offspring, or clone?" she asked again.

"Clone," he responded.

She didn't seem surprised. She seemed to have known that Steven would do something like this.

Me, on the other hand, was stunned for quite some time.

Stevie was a cloned dog?

"Are you sure you want her to live here with me?" she asked Steven, making him make a decision.

The man looked at me with a complicated gaze. "I'm sorry. I have another home in Salburg that you can stay at for now. Please give me some time to deal with our marriage."

He wanted to get a divorce.

I stood in place and clenched my fists.

"No need... We can get the divorce now," I rasped.

"I... have no time today." He turned and looked at "Stephanie."

I laughed bitterly. "Alright, I'll wait for you."

I turned around and willed my tears not to fall.

Nancy's driver was watching from the car.

I pushed Joel aside and got into the vehicle.

"Please send me to the Landing Hotel."

The driver nodded and drove off.

I sat in the car and watched as Steven's figure gradually grew smaller from the rearview mirror... I couldn't stop my tears at all.

"We're here, Miss," the driver reminded me upon arrival.

I snapped back into reality and swiftly got off after wiping my face.

He looked at me again before driving off.

I watched the car pull away before turning around, drying the tears off my face as I walked into the hotel. As my eyes were bloodshot and my expression was sad, the lady at the reception was extremely careful when checking me into my room.

I took the room key card and walked into the elevator. I lifted my head so as to keep my tears from gushing out.

Steven... and Stephanie looked really good together.

After entering the room, I sat numbly on the couch. I had the front desk send me a bottle of wine. I downed the entire bottle before I started becoming numb.

Subsequently, I started going off the rails due to the alcohol. I started making calls to Steven.

"All because... she's more like Stephanie than I am? Is that it?" I questioned him, sobbing.

He picked up the phone call but didn't utter a single word.

In tears, I asked him why he chose to believe that woman, but he didn't respond either.

In the face of reality, reincarnation was nothing more than a calculated guess. With a real and complete Stephanie Carlson standing right there, who would care about a theoretical like me?

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I hung up the phone in tears. Then, I smashed the wine bottle and the glass like a madwoman and stepped on the broken glass. The blood from my feet stained the floor.

I went into the bathroom and washed myself in the shower.

My senses were amplified. I started going mad. I started feeling like there were cameras everywhere.

I began smashing the hotel room and its amenities. I broke the mirror and messed up everything in the room. Then, I chuckled bitterly upon seeing the camera hidden inside.

There was really nothing Genome Society couldn't do.

I slept in the hotel for an entire day. The following day, I used Steven's card to pay for the damages and left. Steven was waiting for me in front of the courthouse.

He wanted to file for divorce.

"So, you're sure?" Slight exhausted, I asked if he was sure that the woman was indeed Stephanie Carlson.

"I'm sorry... She's Stephanie," he looked at me and responded firmly.

"You used to tell me that I was Stephanie with the same conviction." I held eye contact.

He averted his gaze. "Sorry... I was lying to myself."

I scoffed. Then, we signed the divorce agreement. We were told to go through a cooldown period for one month before returning afterward to finalize the divorce.

"Is it possible to not wait for a month?" I asked.

The staff member shook his head. "No, this is standard procedure."

I didn't say anything more and turned to leave after signing the papers.

As I left the courthouse, the sky was gloomy, and it had started to rain.

I was walking along the road when I suddenly lost any form of motivation to stay alive...

Instead of living in a world where I would always be put under surveillance, I'd be better off dead but free from everything.

I walked to the edge of a lake and jumped in without any hesitation.

After the sound of a loud splash, I was engulfed by the icy water.

I couldn't breathe. My instincts made me struggle against the water, but my conscious willed me to continue sinking further.

Then, I heard a splash.

I looked toward the gleaming surface of the water.

Steven reached out and pulled me into his embrace. Then, he kissed me. He was trying to give me air underwater.

Assuming he did it on purpose, I clamped my mouth shut.

He looked somewhat resigned.

I coughed violently.

He had finally pulled me out of the water.

I took in deep breaths of air, my ears ringing from being filled with water.

"You're crossing a line..." Steven seemed to be mildly angry. He shot me a glare from a spot where no one could see him.

I lay on the grass and started laughing.

In order to deceive everyone, you first had to fool yourself.

Steven used to tell me to firmly believe that I was the original Stephanie. I was who I thought I was, and it didn't matter what the others said...

Genome Society underestimated me and Steven.

"Stay alive," he said to me before he left.

Stay alive.

"Steven Lincoln!" I yelled his name while lying listlessly on the grass, anticipating what was to come.

He stopped in his tracks with his back faced toward me.

"Stay alive..." I choked.

We both needed to stay alive.

Then, we needed to let those people know that we were humans! We were living people with rights and feelings, and we had unwavering hopes and beliefs.

I stayed on the grass for a long time. The rain fell on my face, and my thoughts gradually became clearer. From some point onward, Steven and I didn't require verbal communication to understand one another. After the grueling escape from the abandoned building, he seemed to have opened up to me completely. I didn't know if this was a good thing or a bad thing. However, at the very least, I was willing to trust him unconditionally.

At Nancy's place of residence, the sky was dark when I finally got to her villa on top of the hill.

She seemed to have anticipated my arrival.

"I can go with you... but I want to know the truth." I stared at her, looking unusually disheveled.

"You're not going to wait until the divorce is finalized?" Nancy asked with a smile.

I laughed coldly. "As long as I don't get the divorce done, Steven Lincoln's wife... will still be me."

Still smiling, she nodded and continued, "Where would you like me to begin?"

"The death of my parents and Andy Lincoln."

## Chapter 479

Nancy laughed.

"I thought you'd want to start from your birth. Instead, you're more curious about the deaths of your parents and Andy Lincoln..."

She looked at me curiously as she gradually approached me. "By parents, did you mean Stephanie's parents?"

I furrowed my brows and didn't respond.

"Do you actually think you're Stephanie Carlson?" She gripped my chin and looked at my face.

"I'm guessing Genome Society probably used all the necessary means to prove that you're the reincarnation of her... That band of lunatics so desperately wanted to show that you could bring back a dead soul," she said.

She suddenly let out a laugh before continuing, "Once someone gets money and power, they start wanting more and more... So many of the rich invest an absurd amount of their wealth into achieving immortality. "They utilize the most advanced technology and medicine found in modern day, the most expensive substances and inhumane ways to prolong their life... all because they have the money to do so.

"What a shame, though. Ultimately, you just can't go against the law of nature..." Nancy's voice turned low. "When the time comes, you'll end up dying anyway. So many of the rich lay on their deathbeds, wishing the way to immortality was discovered while they were still alive..."

I frowned and remained silent as she spoke.

"Your very existence will have those crazed millionaires bewitched... As of now, you're the most valuable one among all the other experiments. As an experiment, you're a product belonging to Genome Society," she said with a smile.

"Genome Society will put all of you on display for the wealthy to admire and invest in. Then, they'll tell Genome Society what they're curious about, and the lot of you will get selected... for experiments."

Like cloning, organ transplants, cord blood... et cetera.

"In recent years, medical advancement has reached its limits. The average lifespan has been restricted by factors such as genes and environment. The wealthy reach the average age of about 90 to a hundred years old at most.

"Genome editing might be one of the most successful projects Genome Society has under their belt, but this concerns future generations... The wealthy care more about themselves,"

Nancy brought me into the villa. She told me that they weren't as willing to invest money in Genome Society anymore. Genome editing had matured. There was nothing new that excited them anymore. Hence, they weren't willing to invest.

"And Stephanie... has given us a very big surprise." She placed Stephanie's files on the table.

Nancy continued, "Stephanie died. The experiment that's been under strict surveillance ever since birth was murdered right before our eyes..."

"The body was even displayed in a glass case. This was a blatant provocation from the Rebels to Genome Society,"

She smiled as she spoke again, "But that wasn't all. The surprise 'Stephanie' gave everyone was... she reincarnated. She reincarnated into Stephany's body."

This topic immediately caused a stir. The conglomerates behind Genome Society were all excited.



They were all of old age, and they didn't want to die. All of them wanted to know the secret to immortality and eternal life.

"Since historical times, after power and money, the hunt for immortality grew crazier as time passed..." She leaned against the couch. "Three years ago, Steven Lincoln joined Genome Society through the Lincoln family.

"He mentioned the possibility of reincarnation and transfer of memories. At the very start, his plans didn't gather much attention."

Nancy was telling me about Steven joining Genome Society. She wasn't in a hurry to tell me about the deaths of Andy Lincoln and my parents.

"The rich weren't idiots-they thought it was nothing more than a fantasy." She then pulled out a couple of photos. They were photos of Joel from his early childhood to photos of him in high school uniform. I looked at her apprehensively. Had Joel already been targeted by Genome Society?

## Chapter 480

"Calm down. Joel was just a name Steven submitted to Genome Society. Steven was too smart. He was so smart he was like a stubborn madman." Nancy laughed.

"All his wits were used on this. He seemed untouchable-but everyone has their weaknesses, and his happened to be Stephanie."

"In order to get into Genome Society, Steven needed to secure the conglomerates' interest and acknowledgment. He put forward the idea of reincarnation, and he used Simeon's clone, which was Joel," she said nonchalantly.

At this point, she didn't care if I knew about these truths, because she wasn't planning on letting me go. I inhaled sharply... Joel was Simeon's clone.

The so-called secret to reincarnation had to be related to the cloning experiments and genetics.

"Steven was a gift Genome Society gave to the Lincolns. He was the perfect offspring crafted from the modified and improved version of Andy's genetics.

"Whether it was IQ, physical abilities, or appearance, Steven's genetics were optimized to the maximum point. That's why he's a one-in-a-million genius... a man-made genius."

She sounded mildly annoyed. It was evident that she didn't think much of genetically altered geniuses.

"But Simeon was different. He was a born genius. Genome Society only noticed him because of Steven. A carefully crafted genius and a normal person who has never undergone any form of genome modification ... Simeon's existence soon captured their attention...

"Under the front that they were performing check-ups, they took living cell samples from Simeon, the boy who showed great potential."

Simeon was only a seven to eight-year-old boy then.

"Simeon's clone had always been in the laboratory. He never left. Three years ago, Steven entered Genome Society and claimed he could prove the existence of reincarnation. He took Simeon, who just died, and Joel, the clone, and experimented.

"It was a success. A lot of the conglomerates were shocked, but there remained a lot of those who were in doubt. It was a one-time occurrence, after all."

She continued, "Clones were disguised under the memories that belonged to the body. It was difficult to tell what was real and what wasn't. It felt like a magic trick without a way to discern what was true.

"No one knew if Joel was actually the reincarnation of Simeon or an actor that simply had the memories as the boy."

Nancy looked at me with a solemn gaze. "Your existence, Stephanie, has shocked the wealthy once again. "They're paying big bucks to have you taken back into the lab. They're asking for public research and experimentation to prove if you're actually a reincarnated being or if you just possess the same memories.

I laughed in realization. No wonder Jimmy said I was the most valuable experiment right now.

"As for why Andy died, he led the Rebels when he was the leading man of the conglomerates in Iluma. Genome Society had to get rid of him. If he influenced the other conglomerates, Genome Society would be done for... Hence, Andy Lincoln had to die," Nancy explained.

She continued, "As for Stephanie's parents, Despite being scientists trained by Genome Society, they developed feelings toward an experimental subject that had no blood relation to them.

"They even tried to protect and take the subject away. How could Genome Society tolerate the existence of such traitors?"

Her voice grew low, and the way she was looking at me grew more and more complicated. "It was extremely difficult for Stephanie's parents to leave Genome Society. They had help-Peter Jones. The pair wanted their daughter to live like a normal human being.

"Hence, they completely changed their identities and made preparations to leave Genome Society. Peter aided them under the pretense of conducting experiments."

How ironic... Peter Jones wasn't trying to harm me, after all.

"It was a pity, though. Their fight against Genome Society was like a mantis trying to stop a chariot." Nancy was mocking their idiotic behavior, but I also noticed a tinge of bitterness laced between her mockery.

Nancy ... probably harbored a complicated feeling toward someone between Andy, Peter, and my parents.

A normal person had feelings and desires. It wasn't possible for them to be cold and unfeeling. The cloned "Stephanie" was right. As long as you had feelings, you'd have weaknesses.

"I want to know who the leader behind all of this is..." I looked toward Nancy and asked the question I wanted the answer to the most.