

After Death 491

Chapter 491

There were chaotic sounds outside the lab, and then everything calmed down. I leaned against the pod's door, feeling my heart sink. It seemed like they were unable to escape.

In a moment of despair, I found myself sitting on the ground. I leaned against the wall as I slowly closed my eyes. It was an overwhelming sensation—a mix of despair, anger, frustration, and a loss of control. It was a truly peculiar feeling as all these emotions swirled together within me.

"Subject Number 71 is showing no signs of life. Subject Number 69 has executed a suicide attack but was promptly apprehended and destroyed.

"Attention! Attention! Both Subject Number 63 and Subject Number 3 have successfully escaped. Attention! Attention!"

Suddenly, an alarm went off outside the lab. I sprang to my feet with excitement and opened my eyes wide.

Did the leader of the experimental subjects and the newborn baby manage to escape?

"Attention! There's an attack by the Rebels. They've arrived to retrieve Subject Number 63! Attention!"

I held my hands in excitement as I looked outside the lab. They had been saved.

For unknown reasons, I found it hard to breathe, and my eyes started to well up. They escaped, they broke free! It was as if I could finally see the light at the end of the tunnel... They escaped!

The two experimental subjects bravely held off the mercenaries by sacrificing themselves, allowing Subject Number 63 to escape with the baby.

As I turned to see the other experimental subjects in their pods, they were standing at the door in perfect unison as if they had suddenly glimpsed a spark of hope. Their once vacant eyes now shimmered with newfound light.

The male experimental subjects did not take the pregnant or non-pregnant female experimental subjects away because they understood that leaving the pods would mean almost certain death.

They understood that leaving would lead them to a dangerous situation. However, if they saw any chance of hope, they would definitely come back to save them.

"Subject Number 63 escaped!" Nancy quickly led staff outside the lab to inspect and observe.

With a furious kick to the door, she clenched her teeth and exclaimed, "We can't allow the experimental subjects to escape from the organization. They must be eliminated!"

Nancy was in charge of this laboratory. She knew that if a major accident occurred, the person in charge would not let her off easily.

Experimental subjects who had never undergone socialization were like blank canvases to the outside world. They lacked any identity information, birth certificate, or any trace of existence...

Once such a person entered society, it was impossible to find them. They didn't even have fingerprints on file, so their DNA was likely identical to that of the socialized experimental subjects.

From a chilling point of view, if the experimental subjects from the laboratory committed murder and left behind evidence like fingerprints or blood samples, the authorities would apprehend those experimental subjects who had been socialized in the outside world.

For instance, if Stephanie No. 2 committed murder, DNA analysis could lead them to Stephanie instead. "Eliminate Subject Number 63 at any cost," Nancy said again, her voice trembling. This was a major

incident.

I stared at Nancy with a triumphant grin and sneered. "Once the experimental subjects are revealed, undeniable proof of Genome Society's Godmaker Project will be exposed to the world. And when that happens... No matter how you try to hide, it'll all be in vain."

This incident proved to be a complete disaster for the organization.

Nancy's anger hadn't subsided, and she turned to me. "The Rebels haven't been able to pinpoint the laboratory's exact location, yet here they are... They managed to uncover the site and execute a well-planned rescue operation. Stephany... you're truly capable."

Nancy believed that I conspired with the Rebels and then saved Subject Number 63.

"The laboratory has strict protocols in place. How could I rescue people from inside?" Her high opinion of me made me smile.

Nancy walked into my lab and suddenly pressed the button on the outside. Gas was released, and I found myself unable to breathe. I fell to the ground in excruciating pain.

"Examine her entire body meticulously to determine the presence of any tracking device!" Nancy continued to doubt me.

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As my consciousness faded, I slipped into unconsciousness.

I knew all too well that Nancy was redirecting her anger toward me. Before the leader of Genome Society could reprimand her, she would undoubtedly take it out on me.

As I had anticipated, I found myself in the operating room upon awakening. Nancy had intentionally prevented the anesthetist from numbing me before forcibly extracting my premolar.

Feeling the pain and tasting blood in my mouth, I clenched my fists. I pounded the bed in anguish.

"Feeling the pain?" Nancy's voice dripped with fury as she held my tooth with forceps.

"Stephany Larson, you implanted such a sophisticated locator in your tooth just to reveal the location of our laboratory, didn't you?"

"I knew it... You're a wildcard. Reincarnation is nothing but a fabrication to entice Genome Society's interest in you, luring them to bring you back!"

I was stunned, staring at the tooth Nancy was holding.

Why was there a locator in my tooth? I hadn't undergone any dental procedures since my reincarnation... which implied it was Stephany who had implanted it.

A shiver raced down my spine as I pondered. Was Stephany a member of the Rebels?

"I've told the organization countless times there's no such thing as soul reincarnation technology in the world! Yet they persisted in bringing you back, believing you can offer more value..." Nancy flung the tooth aside and seized my neck.

"You're not the reincarnated Stephanie Carlson. You're Stephany Larson. You deceived yourself just as much as you deceived us." Nancy's sudden smile hinted at a revelation.

Then, she turned to the mercenaries, her gaze piercing. "Did you uncover what I requested?"

"We've apprehended Peter Jones' daughter," the mercenaries responded.

Linda? Had they brought Linda here?

I struggled vigorously, spitting out blood before managing to speak, "What are you going to do to Linda? I truly have no idea what you're talking about!"

"You'll find out soon," Nancy said firmly, grabbing my hair and gesturing for the others to escort me to the interrogation room.

Nancy seemed determined to unearth the truth before facing any consequences from Genome Society. Feeling a rising sense of dread, I followed Nancy to the interrogation room. Inside, Linda was bound to a chair. She was screaming and shaking her head. It was clear they had drugged her.

"My dad... knows Stephany Larson..." Linda's words confirmed Stephany's connection to Peter.

"After Stephanie Carlson's death, my dad had Stephany Larson assume her identity, claiming it would attract attention from Genome Society and the conglomerates, prompting them to bring her back as a valuable subject. Then... the location of the laboratory would be exposed..."

"My dad is a member of the Rebels.... One of the masterminds behind the serial murder case..." Linda's voice cracked with anguish. Tears streamed down her face as she clenched her fists tightly.

In essence, Peter was both a victim and a perpetrator in the serial murder case. Yasmin was merely one of

his pawns.

His true aim was to dismantle Genome Society.

"We received news from the hospital today that Peter is dead," Nancy said coldly, seizing my hair once more. "I must admit, Peter was quite cunning. Who would've guessed he was one of the leaders of the Rebels?"

Indeed, it was unfathomable that the psychiatrist trusted by Genome Society was also a key figure in the Rebels.

"The inspectors in Huma have uncovered the mastermind behind the serial murder case. In the basement of an old asylum, they found evidence of Peter's murder plan as well as proof of his purchase of the ruins in the north of Myrindara.

"Peter has been scheming everything for years... Stephanie Carlson's parents and Andy Lincoln, they were all founders of the Rebels..."

Nancy took out her phone and showed me the day's news, titled "Serial murder case solved! Peter Jones, the renowned psychiatrist, revealed as the true culprit!"

The serial murder case was declared solved. However, was Peter the sole orchestrator behind it all? Was this truly the end of the serial murder case?

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"She's not Stephanie Carlson... She's Stephany Larson..." Linda trembled uncontrollably, as if unable to resist the effects of the drug. "She was hypnotized to believe she's Stephanie Carlson..."

According to Linda's statement, Stephany and Peter were colluding together. I was never Stephanie Carlson; I had always been Stephany Larson.

Stephanie had died since the police discovered her body in that glass cabinet. Peter's hypnosis had successfully deceived me into believing otherwise.

Nancy grabbed my hair, slamming my head against the wall. Blood trickled down my forehead.

Ha... What a joke I was.

"Stephany Larson, you and Peter were in cahoots. Peter was always a traitor to the organization." Nancy tightened her grip on my hair, forcing me to look at Linda.

"Did you hear what she said? Her father hypnotized you, making you forget everything and implanting Stephanie's memories into you. All this was to fabricate the illusion that you were Stephanie Carlson reincarnated.

"Peter provided you with lots of Stephanie's information, including the experimental records and observation diary the organization had on her... You studied them thoroughly so that you could easily impersonate Stephanie."

Nancy smiled and continued, "You're not Stephanie Carlson. You're Stephany Larson! To make it more convincing, Peter had to help you deceive yourself. Only when you believed yourself to be Stephanie Carlson would others believe you..."

Nancy looked at me with pity in her eyes. "You're nothing but a poor creature who doesn't even know who

you are...

"Peter's hypnosis made you firmly believe that you're Stephanie Carlson. So when you woke up in Stephany Larson's body, you believed you had reincarnated..."

"This was just a false premise, a ploy you and Peter came up with to reveal the existence of Genome Society, to expose us to the police..."

Nancy suddenly pushed me away. She instructed her assistant in a low voice, "Get rid of her and throw her into the sea. Make it look like a suicide."

Stephany Larson had a social identity, so Nancy couldn't dispose of me like other experimental subjects and leave no trace behind.

Nancy's assistant was visibly nervous. "But there might be consequences if our superiors find out we acted without orders. Plus, Crowdstar Group has just taken her under their wing. If we kill her now- "

Nancy interrupted her with a sharp slap across her assistant's face, her composure unraveling. "I said, kill her! I'll take the blame alone! We'll simply inform Crowdstar Group that she died on her own! This woman must die no matter what!"

Her assistant glanced at me anxiously, clearly concerned about potential repercussions from higher-ups. "Why involve others when you can do it yourself? Don't you have the courage?" I challenged, leaning against the wall and forcibly swallowing the blood in my mouth.

My heart throbbed with pain. Despite the evidence, I struggled to accept that I was not Stephanie Carlson but Stephany Larson.

If it were true, it wouldn't be fair to Steven...

So, my memories were implanted through hypnosis, huh? It seemed that I had fooled myself quite effectively.

"What are you waiting for? Kill me!" I shouted at Nancy, realizing that my chance of survival in Nancy's laboratory was nonexistent.

Believing Linda's and Nancy's words had left me hopeless.

If I was indeed Stephany Larson, then I should end it all here and now. That way, I wouldn't have to continue deceiving Steven.

Steven had suffered enough from losing the real Stephanie Carlson. Now that he had another Stephanie Carlson with him, I should let him spend the rest of his life with her.

"Do you think I wouldn't dare?" Nancy sneered, turning around to retrieve highly concentrated drugs from the medicine cabinet. "Once I inject this into your bloodstream, you'll be gone in seconds!"

Nancy's face contorted with grim determination as she approached me with the syringe. Her assistant tried to intervene but was mercilessly kicked away.

"I don't give a damn whether you're Stephany Larson or Stephanie Carlson. Both of you deserve to die! Especially Stephanie Carlson... If it weren't for her, Andy wouldn't have died..."

Suddenly, she chuckled darkly. "Well, it's not so bad now that he's dead... After all, he never loved me... So, it's good that he's gone..."

It all clicked into place for me. Nancy had been consumed by unrequited love for Andy Lincoln, driving her to madness.

"Andy Lincoln didn't have any feelings for you..." I taunted her with a cold smile.

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"He had no feelings for that wife the Lincoln family forced him to marry. He loved me, not her!" Fazed by my words, Nancy seized my neck, attempting to plunge the syringe into my vein.

She was delusional, convinced that Andy's love was hers to claim.

Perhaps Andy was deeply in love with another woman, but that woman wouldn't have been Nancy, who was so selfish and obsessive.

"The thought of my blood carrying your genes... truly disgusts me," I remarked, finding it sickening.

Regardless of who I was, both Stephanie and Stephany shared Nancy's DNA.

"Disgusting? Haha... Even if Andy never loved me, his son is hopelessly drawn to my genes!" Nancy laughed maniacally, reveling in her delusions of revenge.

"Even a genius like Steven Lincoln can't resist the allure of my genes... With Stephanie No. 2 in my grasp, he's completely under my control," Nancy declared, convinced of her power over Steven.

As my body had weakened from the effects of the toxic gas I had inhaled, Nancy managed to slowly insert the syringe into my neck. She injected euthanasia meant for small animals.

Feeling a surge of heat coursing through me, I knew my chances of survival were slim.

"Steven... isn't as weak as you think," I muttered through gritted teeth, grabbing Nancy's wrist and using all my strength to pin her down.

Seizing the syringe from her hand, I drove it into her neck, declaring, "Let's go to hell together..."

Only with Nancy dead could Steven be safe.

Blood poured uncontrollably from my mouth, my eyes reddening as if blood were about to seep from them. As my body convulsed, I felt my heart growing numb...

Nancy stared at me in horror. Before her assistant could pull me away, I injected the remaining lethal dose from the syringe into her body.

Twitching uncontrollably in pain, I convulsed on the ground as consciousness slipped away. I was experiencing my second death...

I marveled at Peter's hypnotic skills. If I truly was Stephany Larson, he had indeed done a remarkable job in hypnotizing me. He even implanted Stephanie Carlson's experience with death into my memories.

Therefore, when death came knocking again, I wasn't as afraid. Instead, I felt a sense of peace.

The drug began to take effect in Nancy's body too, causing her body to convulse. She gazed at me as if this wasn't the end.

"The Rebels... won't succeed," she croaked.

My vision dimmed. I curled up in the corner and slowly closed my eyes. My tears mixed with the blood streaming down my cheeks.

"Steven..." I whispered Steven's name in my final moment, realizing I had indeed fallen for him—deeper than I realized.

But alas, I might not be Stephanie Carlson, the one he truly loved.

My love felt meaningless and worthless.

"Stay alive... Steven..."

"Stephie!"

"Stephanie!"

"Wake up..."

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The laboratory door burst open, and a rush of people flooded in.

"Stephanie!"

"Stephie..."

Was it just my imagination? I could swear I heard Zion's and Rachel's voices.

"Stephie..."

Now it was Steven's and Michael's voices.

"Don't touch her! Back off!" Steven shouted frantically. He held me tightly in his arms, warding off anyone who dared to approach.

The police had surrounded the laboratory, and all the experimental subjects from the pods had been set free.

With Subject Number 63's escape and the Rebels' discovery of the laboratory, it was only a matter of time before the police intervened.

Initially hesitant to alert Nancy and her accomplices, the police's timely arrival was likely due to Steven's concern for my safety.

However, now that this laboratory was exposed, Genome Society would cut all ties with it. That would only make it harder to track them down.

"Steven..." My consciousness fading, I weakly reached out to touch him. "You shouldn't have... come."

He should have stayed back and let the police handle Nancy. They would eventually catch the mastermind. Yet, he chose to come for me, risking exposure to the organization.

"Nothing is more important than you... No one is more important than you..." Steven said frantically, holding me tighter. "Stephie, you'll be fine. I know you will."

"I... love you." As my fingers brushed Steven's face, I lost consciousness completely. My hand fell limp.

I wasn't certain if I had expressed my love clearly or if Steven had heard it at all.

Still, I felt compelled to say it. Otherwise, I might regret not doing so.

"I should've taken her away from you back then! Steven Lincoln, you've been using her as bait to find this place, haven't you? You bastard! Now she's dead because of you!"

Michael's voice erupted with anger after he saw that I had stopped breathing. He lashed out, landing a punch on Steven.

I watched in astonishment as the scene unfolded before me. Though I tried to reach out to Steven, my efforts were in vain.

Once again, I felt the sensation of my soul leaving my body. It was just like Stephanie's near-death experience.

It seemed to confirm the truth that during the moment of death, one's consciousness remained intact, and the soul could detach from the physical body.

"Don't touch her!" Steven fought back, landing a punch of his own against Michael.

If it weren't for Zion and Eason's intervention, they would have come to blows then and there.

Having gone through this before, I remained calmer this time. I quietly observed the chaos, realizing there was nothing I could do to stop it.

"Stop fighting! Stephe's not dead yet!" Rachel intervened angrily as she felt my weak pulse.

"Quick! To the hospital!" Zion said, lifting me off the ground and refusing to let Steven hold me, given his agitated state.

Walking behind Steven, I reached out to hold his hand even though I knew I couldn't touch him. At least, I felt connected.

Michael followed anxiously behind Zion, closely observing my condition.

Suddenly, Steven halted, glancing sideways in my direction.

My heart raced, wondering if he could somehow see me.

"I know you're there..." Steven whispered softly even though he couldn't see me.

Although souls shouldn't have a heartbeat, his words made my whole body tense with emotion. Warmth slowly spread through my chest and into my body. I felt the urge to cry, but there were no tears.

Leaning gently against Steven's shoulder, I wished we could stay like this forever.

Perhaps I had grown accustomed to this peaceful life. I found myself wishing we could escape to some isolated place that was far away from everything and spend the rest of our days in peace together.

"Steven, Genome Society will never let us off... As long as the leader remains at large, we won't be safe anywhere," I whispered softly as I walked beside Steven.

"When everything is over..." I murmured softly.

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"When everything is over..." Steven's sudden words echoed mine even though he couldn't have heard me.

I looked at him in shock, my gaze flickering.

"We'll find a deserted island... and start new," Steven whispered softly, his voice hoarse.

I stared at him for a long moment before quietly responding, "Okay, we'll do just that."

Even though we couldn't physically touch each other, there was still a profound sense of connection between us.

While from a scientific and medical standpoint, such occurrences might be perceived as some form of mental anomaly, I firmly believed that the souls of the departed lingered around us in some way.

Even if it was just wishful thinking, it provided solace to our lonely souls.

"Stephie, you're here with me, aren't you?" Steven asked softly.

"Yes, Steven, I'm here," I replied with a smile.

Though he couldn't feel my touch, see me, or hear me, I felt compelled to respond to his words nonetheless.

"The laboratory is nestled in the undeveloped mountains of Yesa, bordering Myrindara. It's secluded from the public eye. While it masquerades as a retirement haven for affluent retired scientists, beneath the surface lie three hidden levels of laboratories.

"Nancy is the overseer of this facility, wielding complete control. Though it's reported that Genome Society has numerous labs across the country, this is the only facility that has been unearthed thus far.

"We thought we could trace the entire organization network starting from Nancy's lab, but we underestimated the power of Genome Society."

Zion explained outside the emergency room, his frustration palpable.

"Each lab within Genome Society operates independently, cultivating its own experimental subjects, researchers, and medical staff. There are no connections between them.

"In essence, if we aim to dismantle the entire organization like a spider's web, we have only two options."

Eason glanced at Zion and picked up where Zion left off, "We gather information from either Nancy or the human traffickers, peeling back the layers one by one."

It was clear that their attempt to rescue me had startled the traffickers, leading to a dead end.

"How's Nancy doing now?" Zion inquired.

"The doctors are still working to save her, but the outlook isn't promising. Unlike Stephany, she lacks a resistance to drugs," Eason explained with a shrug.

He then continued, "Luckily, the dose she received wasn't fatal. The doctor mentioned we can only hope she doesn't end up in a vegetative state."

Steven sat on the ground, looking dejected. I joined him, resting my head on his shoulder.

So, this was what it felt like to be in love, wanting to be by his side always. I only felt safe when he was

around.

It was a stark contrast to how I felt with Michael before. Back then, I only felt like I was compromising. Reflecting on the past, my gaze dimmed as I wondered if I was truly Stephanie Carlson or not.

Were all Stephanie Carlson's memories in my mind merely a memory implant?

Was I truly Stephany Larson herself and not Stephanie Carlson?

"Zion, we found this in the lab-" Phil suddenly rushed over. Noticing the presence of others, he hesitated before continuing, "Can I say it here?"

Zion nodded.

"Linda, the teenage girl, has awakened safely with no major injuries. She was administered a truth serum and disclosed information about Peter and Stephany Larson's plan... Here's all the evidence.

"Stephany Larson was merely impersonating Stephanie Carlson at Peter's behest. After thoroughly studying Stephanie Carlson, Peter hypnotized Stephany Larson... In essence, Stephany Larson isn't Stephanie Carlson," Phil said the last part in a hushed tone.

While Steven remained motionless with his head lowered, I grew a little panicked and avoided his eyes. Upon hearing Phil's words, Michael hurriedly approached them and snatched the evidence from their hands. His fingers were stiff. "What's the meaning of all this... Implanted memories, hypnosis?"

"It means Stephanie Carlson is truly gone. She perished due to your carelessness and arrogance, Michael," Zion replied in a low voice, each word a jab at Michael.

He then concluded, "There's no coming back from death. The supposed reincarnation was just a ploy by Peter to expose Genome Society's laboratory, nothing more."

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As Michael looked at the evidence, he suddenly burst into crazed laughter. His hands slumped down dejectedly, scattering the evidence all over the floor.

"Are you out of your mind?" Eason scolded, bending down to pick up the evidence.

"Impossible!" Michael snapped at Eason furiously. "This is outrageous... She's Stephe. She is Stephe!"

Eason ignored entirely him, regarding him as being delusional.

Michael lost control. He squatted on the ground with bloodshot eyes, refusing to accept Stephanie was gone for good. He wasn't able to accept the fact that his selfishness and arrogance had led to her demise.

I couldn't help but sympathize with Michael. Though I wasn't certain if Stephanie had truly loved him, his realization of his love for her came too late.

Suddenly, the door of the emergency room swung open, and the doctor emerged.

Steven anxiously rose and hurried to the doctor. "Doctor... is she-"

"The patient is temporarily out of danger, but we can't predict when she'll regain consciousness."

The doctor sighed, adding, "Fortunately, the dosage she received wasn't fatal. Upon examining the syringe Officer Landon provided, it contained a dose typically used to euthanize deformed infants at birth. "While the dosage wasn't lethal when administered to two adults, it's still highly perilous. We'll need to continue monitoring the patient."

I looked at the doctor, aware that the euthanasia injection was intended for the experimental subjects. If the subjects failed to meet the organization's criteria at birth, they were euthanized and cremated.

That underground laboratory was akin to a vast furnace and purgatory. Some subjects might have spent their entire lives there, from birth to death, without ever catching a glimpse of sunlight or the blue sky... It was truly chilling.

"Once Nancy's crimes are exposed, it could send shockwaves across the entire nation," Eason remarked, massaging his temples. "How deep does the darkness of human nature truly go?"

He continued, "Years ago, I worked on a case with my mentor. A 13-year-old gathered a group of 13 to 14-year-olds and kidnapped young couples who were hiking in the mountains.

"Surveillance wasn't as advanced back then, making it difficult to locate missing people in the mountains. Within a year, three young couples had disappeared one after another. It wasn't until the fourth couple was abducted that the case finally broke open."

"The boyfriend of the fourth couple had bravely fought back, allowing his girlfriend to escape. Upon receiving the girlfriend's report, the police found the crime scene. The minors were still carefreely frolicking in the mountains at that time.

"The boyfriend was found dead, brutally murdered. The minors had mutilated his body and removed his organs. When asked why they did it, they simply said it was fun, and they wanted to see what was inside a human's body...

"We eventually discovered the bodies of the other three missing couples in the mountains. Some had suffered severe abuse leading to death while others had been buried alive. All the females had been subjected to sexual assault.

"After the incident, the local police provided us with information, mentioning that they had encountered those kids in the mountains during their search for the first missing couple. They had asked the kids if

they had seen the missing couple, but the kids lied without hesitation."

"The darkness of human nature knows no age limits. It's as if some people are born with it," Zion said solemnly.

Who could've imagined that a group of minors would commit such heinous acts?

"It's clear that a person's propensity for good or evil is inherently ingrained in our genes. Some people are born malicious, irrespective of the education they receive," I murmured softly, leaning against the wall.

Steven and Michael remained motionless at the door of the emergency room, observing as the doctor wheeled me out. My face was pale.

"Stay away from her. It's your fault she's in this state," Michael blamed Steven for handing me over to Nancy.

Steven stood despondently in place, saying nothing.

Michael followed the doctor to escort me to the ward.

I stood beside Steven, gently comforting him, "Steven, don't let his words get to you... He's delusional..."

If Michael had truly cared for Stephanie as he claimed now, perhaps things would have turned out differently for her.

Facing Steven, I observed his bowed head and reddened eyes. His sorrowful and remorseful demeanor stirred both sympathy and a touch of affection.

Was he crying in secret?

"Steven..." Feeling a pang of empathy, I reached out to him. I longed to offer solace, but my hands fell in despair.

Could I embrace him, knowing all evidence pointed to me being Stephany Larson and not Stephanie Carlson?

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I wasn't the woman Steven loved.

"Steven Lincoln, who is the woman staying at your place?" Rachel questioned Steven sternly as she emerged from the doctor's office, relieved to hear that I was out of danger.

It seemed that Rachel had discovered Steven had brought Stephanie No. 2 home, but she hadn't met her yet. Given her close bond with Stephanie, Rachel would likely be surprised upon meeting Stephanie No.2.

"Well? Say something!" Rachel pressed on, her frustration evident. "Stephie was taken by Nancy, and you stayed at home with that woman as if nothing happened?"

Steven remained silent.

"Hey, hey, hey... Rachel, I told you not to meddle in this matter." Zion rushed over, pulling her away with one arm.

"Let go of me! What is he thinking? I thought Michael was a jerk, but it turns out Steven is no better! If Stephie doesn't wake up, I'll beat him to death!" Rachel struggled angrily.

"Who's the woman, Stev-" Rachel's tirade halted abruptly as she froze, staring at the newcomer with a mix of shock and disbelief.

It was Stephanie No. 2, confidently walking toward us and openly revealing herself.

I had expected Steven to keep her hidden, but apparently not. How would she explain her presence? Oh, right. She was Nancy's daughter.

"Stephie..." Rachel exclaimed in astonishment, then glanced at me lying unconscious in the ward. She was momentarily bewildered.

"Stephie?" She pushed Zion aside and hurried toward Stephanie No. 2.

Stephanie No. 2 looked at her indifferently. Avoiding Rachel's approach, she asked in a low tone, "Who are you?"

Rachel looked at her in surprise, certain that she was indeed Stephanie... But this Stephanie didn't recognize her.

"She's not Stephanie Carlson," Zion quickly clarified to Rachel.

"To be precise, she's not the Stephanie Carlson you know. She's Nancy's daughter. She's Stephanie Carlson's identical twin who shares the same genes as her."

Rachel's disappointment was evident in her eyes. "I knew it... No matter how alike they are, she can't possibly be Stepheie."

"I'm certainly not Stephanie Carlson," Stephanie No. 2 admitted. "Stephanie and I are not typical twins. We're genetically identical cloned twins. You can call me Una."

Una was her nickname, given to her because she was experimental subject No. 21.

"Nancy will never wake up. The organization will take all necessary measures to eliminate risks, so she will die," Una asserted, glancing at Zion. "The police can't stop them."

"Committing murder right under our noses? Ha, those people think we're pushovers?" Eason scoffed in disbelief.

Una shook her head, then walked over to Steven's side.

"She's not Stephanie Carlson," she reiterated to Steven, emphasizing that I was Stephany Larson and not Stephanie Carlson.

Steven remained motionless.

"If you insist on having an exact copy of Stephanie Carlson, I'm clearly more suitable than Stephany Larson. I possess all of Stephanie Carlson's memories. If you want, I can impersonate her better than Stephany Larson," Una said calmly, hoping Steven wouldn't delude himself any further.

I stood by helplessly, acknowledging Una's superiority in resembling Stephanie Carlson, the woman Steven loved.

"Come home with me," Una urged Steven, opening her arms to him.

I stood there stiffly, feeling a sense of discomfort.

Was this what jealousy felt like? Una was getting on my nerves. Everything about her, from head to toe, irritated me especially her appearance.

"Don't embrace her..." I murmured, feeling a profound sense of injustice. I was almost on the verge of tears.

Yet, what right did I have to stop Steven?

If Stephanie Carlson was truly gone, and he had to choose between me and Una as her substitute, I clearly didn't stand a chance.

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"Let's go check on Stephany," Zion pulled Rachel away, fearing she might get emotional.

Rachel murmured softly, "You're lying... Stepheie has reincarnated. She's alive..."

Zion sighed helplessly. "As a forensic scientist, you should think scientifically."

Tears welled up in Rachel's eyes as she responded, "Science hasn't taught me how to accept the death of my best friend! Compared to science, I'd rather believe Stephie is alive..."

Despite Rachel's faith in science, it provided no solace for the anguish of losing a loved one. Hence, it was no wonder she chose to believe otherwise.

Eason glanced at Steven before silently turning away. Una and I waited for Steven's response.

"Even if Stephie has turned into a dog, I'd still recognize her," Steven rebuffed Una's advances, his voice calm yet distant.

I couldn't help but find his response both amusing and bewildering. Looking up at Steven, my tears seemed to dry up before they threatened to fall.

How could he be so obstinate, to the point of absurdity?

"Who are you calling a dog?" I retorted hoarsely, attempting to grab his shirt but failing to reach him. Una suddenly laughed. "I'd love to see how far you'll delude yourself... Anyway, now that the laboratory is exposed, the organization will want to eliminate everything related to it—including me. If I want to survive, I'll need someone to protect me, Steven."

Approaching Steven, she continued, "I have the same genes as Stephanie Carlson flowing in my body. So, you'll protect me like how you protected her, won't you?"

Feeling a twinge of jealousy, I tried to shield Steven from Una's approach, but it was futile.

I glanced down at my hands, a strange feeling creeping over me.

During my previous ordeal, when my soul was extracted from my body, I experienced unprecedented pain and despair. However, this time, I felt something different intense jealousy and possessiveness.

For a fleeting moment, I entertained a delusion. Regardless of whether I truly was Stephanie Carlson, as long as Steven cared for me, I would never allow anyone else to claim him.

Since both Una and I were mere substitutes, why should I be the one to give up on him?

He was mine and mine alone. If anyone dared to take him from me... I would kill her.

I stood frozen, my gaze fixated on Una. I was consumed by an overwhelming urge to eradicate this clone. It was a chilling impulse that sent shivers down my spine.

"Stephie is awake!" Rachel exclaimed, rushing out of the ward to find the doctor.

I was momentarily stunned, and I felt the world spin around me.

"Stephie?"

As I opened my eyes, I found myself awake in my body, though I was still struggling to gain full control. The doctor hurried in, conducting a quick examination.

"The patient is still weak. She needs rest," he declared before leaving with his team.

Rachel remained by my bedside, tears glistening in her eyes as she clasped my hand. "Stephie... I'm so relieved you're awake."

Despite all evidence pointing to the contrary, she continued to cling to the belief that I was Stephanie. "Stephie..." Steven burst into the ward and cupped my face in his hands. His forehead was pressed against mine, and tears were streaming down his cheeks.

His fear of losing me stirred something deep within me. It was a feeling I couldn't quite put into words. It was as if I had discovered the true purpose of my existence, the reason for being in this world.

At that moment, everything clicked into place. I realized that I had discovered a reason to keep living, a sense of purpose that had eluded me for so long.

After experiencing that killing game in the ruins and grappling with the madness of possessiveness in my heart, I knew I would never again entertain thoughts of self-harm or suicide.

Chapter 500

In the past, I believed that death could inflict pain on those who harmed me. I viewed it as the ultimate retaliation against the organization.

But now, such notions seemed childish. My death wouldn't harm those villains; it would only bring sadness and despair to the ones I loved, repeatedly.

Summoning all my strength, I lifted my hands to hold Steven's face, managing a weak smile. "Long time no see, Steven..." My Steven.

Steven stiffened at my touch, his eyes closing as warm tears landed on my eyelashes.

He was such a crybaby... It was hard to reconcile that with the man who went berserk and lashed out at others.

"I've prayed countless times, hoping that you'll be fine..." Steven whispered softly, his voice trembling.

"I never knew a genius would believe in a higher power too," I joked weakly.

He chuckled. "I don't... but when a heart feels empty, it needs something to lean on, Stephe."

I stared at him blankly, suddenly recalling a faint yet vivid memory buried deep within me.

In that memory, one of my high school classmates, perhaps named Cecile, was diagnosed with cancer.

Despite knowing that there was no higher power in this world, Cecile's grandmother fervently prayed every day for her. Cecile's grandmother, who was in her 60s, even climbed the mountain tirelessly each day, seeking blessings for Cecile's well-being.

My classmates mocked Cecile, deeming her grandmother's actions superstitious and meaningless.

At that time, I couldn't grasp the significance either. Despite Cecile's terminal illness, she remained content each day.

I once asked Cecile, "Do your grandmother's prayers truly make a difference? There are no gods in this world."

Cecile smiled and responded, "My grandmother is my god."

I stood there, stunned by Cecile's words. I was unable to comprehend them fully. Yet now, I finally understand their profound meaning.

Regardless of whether I was truly Stephanie Carlson, the moment Steven and Rachel started treating me as her, it seemed I had become something akin to a deity in their eyes.

Therefore, I felt compelled to keep going, to stay alive until Steven abandoned me.

"Don't be with her. Don't even look at her. Keep your eyes on me and me alone. I'm the embodiment of your love," I declared imperiously, commanding Steven to focus solely on me and to disregard Una completely.

Never did I imagine I'd feel jealous of the face of my past self one day.

"Okay," Steven replied without hesitation, always indulging my unreasonable requests.

After venting my jealousy, I drifted back into unconsciousness, or perhaps it was more like falling into a deep slumber.

With everything now resolved, I no longer needed to fret or ponder. I could finally drift into a peaceful sleep. It was a welcomed relief.

"Damn it! You goddamn bitch!" I heard someone cursing as I began to stir awake.

It was Eason, known for his colorful language.

"Mind your language. There's a high schooler present," Joel reprimanded Eason.

"Aren't you supposed to be prepping for the college entrance exams? Why are you still here? Go back, you little punk," Eason snapped, clearly in a foul mood. It was likely due to someone rubbing him the wrong way.

As I opened my eyes, I found Joel, towering nearly six feet tall, advancing toward Eason with a sinister smirk on his face.

"If you need to let off steam, do it elsewhere." He grabbed the back of Eason's shirt collar and gave him a firm shove out the door, which he slammed shut behind him with a loud thud.

Joel dusted off his hands as he turned to face Steven, who was sitting by the bed with a brooding expression.

"That was irritating." Steven's eyes were still red, emitting a fierce intensity. He then commanded in a low tone, "You too. Get out."

"Okay," Joel replied compliantly, exiting the ward and closing the door behind him.