

After Death 511

Chapter 511

I took a deep breath. The Rebels had begun arresting those rich people.

After completing the operation, Steven emerged with a slightly pale complexion. I asked nervously, "Are you okay?"

Steven shook his head. "I'm fine."

The girl sobbed and apologized, "I'm sorry... I was utterly terrified."

Rachel gently reassured the girl. "It's okay, there's nothing to be afraid of. We'll be home soon."

The girl cried even more intensely.

Steven glanced at me and said, "Follow closely and never let me out of your sight."

"They're arresting people, including the president of Crowdstar Group. At present, the Rebels only know that the president of Crowdstar Group is on board, but most of the rich people came with their relatives, friends, and bodyguards.

"They can't identify the president of Crowdstar Group because they don't have a photo of him."

The president of Crowdstar Group had successfully hidden his identity.

"Few of you, follow us!" The door swung open, and a group of armed personnel forcefully escorted us out. They led us all the way to the 16th floor alongside the doctor. Steven held my hand all throughout.

I whispered, "Have you met the president of Crowdstar Group before? Can you recognize him?"

Steven shook his head. "I contacted the president of Crowdstar Group through his assistant, so I've never met him in person."

I frowned. "He's so mysterious and good at hiding. Could he really be Boss of Genome Society?" The Boss Jimmy referred to and the person in charge of the region...

"Probably... not." Steven shook his head. I didn't say much and followed those people out of the elevator.

The entire 16th floor lay in eerie silence. Everyone was crouching down. They were trying not to make any noise, afraid of getting shot.

Some people in the middle appeared confident and strong. They were wealthy individuals, usually detached and unfazed. They were not scared by the threat and crouched down. Jimmy was there too, smiling and greeting us.

"What do you want to do?" someone questioned.

The leader of the Rebels carefully scrutinized the list until his eyes fell on Jimmy. With a commanding voice, he asked, "Who has been in contact with the president of Crowdstar Group? If you reveal his identity, I'll spare you."

The leader hoped to entice them and attempted to lure the president of Crowdstar Group. However, not a single person uttered a word.

"It seems you don't know the seriousness of the matter." The leader sneered, gesturing for those around him to take immediate action.

Someone beside him seized the rich man standing at the front, forced him into a chair, and extracted his nails with pliers. The sound of screams reverberated through the hall. Everyone huddled together in the middle, paralyzed with fear. They were too terrified to even utter a word.

One of the women was unable to bear the pressure and began to cry, shaking her head. "No one has ever seen the president of Crowdstar Group... No one. Crowdstar Group is a rapidly growing company that emerged in recent years.

"The mysterious president leading the company is renowned for his exceptional investment acumen. Not only is he involved in numerous Huma companies, but he also maintains substantial stakes in various enterprises and joint ventures in Melovia.

"We've worked with him before, but we haven't met him in person yet."

"That's right. We've only met and contacted his assistant. No one knows what he looks like," others added.

I looked around cautiously. More than a thousand people were gathered here, including chefs, waiters, actors, celebrities, as well as ordinary guests. If the president of Crowdstar Group had boarded the ship, he must be among these people.

Eason murmured, "The president of Crowdstar Group must truly be a genius. I heard about him a few years ago. None of the projects he invested in lost money. Every single one of them returned a profit of a hundredfold. It's like he could predict it."

Joel was amused. "Aren't you a genius too? Why don't you consider joining the financial industry?" "The financial industry is ruthless! I wish to live a bit longer." Eason snorted.

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"Ha... Your line of work isn't exactly the safest either," Joel retorted.

"You know what? My current job is to bring the evil-doers to justice. If I were to switch to the financial industry, it would be me who ends up imprisoned." Eason remained keenly aware of this fact.

"That means... you're not smart enough. Fool." Joel snorted.

"Could you please be quiet? Enough with the flirting! Look at where we are!" Zion couldn't stand it anymore. Could they show some respect toward these kidnappers?

"Is the president of Crowdstar Group actually on board?" Rachel asked softly.

"All club members have a chip. This cruise ship is equipped with an identification system, so once everyone boards the ship, their presence will be displayed," Zion explained in a hushed tone.

I glanced warily at Steven and said, "We need to locate the president of Crowdstar Group before these people do and ensure his safety."

Steven nodded in agreement. "Okay."

"It seems that no one wants to leave the cruise?" The leader's laughter cut through the air as he seized the rich man's hand and purposefully squeezed the wound where his nails had been ripped out. The screams reverberated once more, a chilling assertion of the Rebels' authority...

"Tell me now. Who's the president of Crowdstar Group?"

The scene was completely silent.

"Very well. Your lady? I quite fancy her... I wonder if she'd care to join us for the evening?" The leader stood up with a smile and pointed to the stunning female companion of one of the wealthy men.

The wealthy man paled and nervously glanced at the leader. "I truly don't know who the president of Crowdstar Group is."

"Since you have no idea, you're a complete waste now. Now, I'll offer you a choice. Hand over this woman for us to entertain for the night, or jump into the sea? What's it going to be?" the leader asked with a smirk.

The man's face turned pale as he looked at the leader. The next moment, he panicked and turned to glimpse the woman hiding behind him. She was stunningly beautiful, like a celebrity. She wept and shook her head, trembling with fear.

Unexpectedly, the man pushed the woman over directly. "Whatever you want... Don't kill me."

I snorted. What a coward!

The woman collapsed to the ground in despair, weeping and begging for mercy, "Please spare me."

The kidnapper showed no mercy. With a sinister smile, he firmly grasped the woman's hair, preparing to forcefully drag her away.

"Let her go. I'm the president of Crowdstar Group." A young, charismatic man among the wealthy people stood up and took the initiative to protect the woman.

The woman cried as she looked at him and shook her head. Clearly, the two of them knew each other. However, it was unclear whether the man was actually the president of Crowdstar Group.

"Ah! You finally took the initiative to come out. Well done." The leader released his grip on the woman.

The man stepped forward and quickly pulled the woman behind him to protect her.

The leader began to verify the man's details. "Dayton Sacco, your father is the president of Sacco Group, and you're the president of Crowdstar Group? Ha."

Dayton nervously shielded the female celebrity while trying to maintain a calm façade. "It's no big deal. My dad supports me in starting my own business under the tables..."

There was truly no evidence to suggest that he was not.

"Do you really believe that we can't confirm the identity of the president of Crowdstar Group?" asked the leader with a smile before instructing someone to bring a safe.

"Genome Society mandates that members store our valuables on this cruise ship. It's claimed that this cruise boasts the most secure protection system, as each safe can only be unlocked when the palm print and iris scan match simultaneously." The leader ushered Dayton toward the safe.

"If you're unable to unlock this safe, both you and the woman you protected will die."

I nervously tightened my grip on Steven's hand. "Is he the president of Crowdstar Group?"

If he weren't, he would certainly be dead. If he was, we had to find a way to protect him. Steven shook his head, his gaze intense.

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I stared warily at the leader. The leader of the Rebels was clearly intent on killing the president of Crowdstar Group to send a message to the organization. If Dayton was indeed the president, I had to find a way to save him.

"Bring him over here," demanded the leader in a low voice. His subordinates immediately escorted Dayton to the safe.

Dayton paled with fright. It was evident that he was a timid scion. Yet, it was this very timid person who stood up to protect the woman. The woman cried and shook her head, clinging tightly to Dayton.

The leader sneered as he grabbed the woman's hair and threw her to the ground.

"Hey! Could you show more consideration toward women?" I asked with a frown, diverting the leader's attention.

Steven had always understood my intentions. I wanted to protect Dayton.

"With so many of us, why should we be afraid of them? We still have a chance! Let's be brave for ourselves this time. Please help me!" Dayton looked at all the people around him, pleading for help. Those wealthy individuals, those who had once called him friends...

Those so-called friends, those who pestered him to bring them along on this cruise... Not a single one of those supposed relatives and friends dared to voice their opinions at this moment. Not a soul dared to lift their gaze.

Dayton was feeling utterly desperate. His eyes were bloodshot, and his hands were clenched tightly. He refused to unlock the safe.

The leader gazed at me with a smile. "Don't worry. You'll do it one by one. If he can't open the safe, your turn will come eventually.

"You'd better hope that you're not the mysterious president of Crowdstar Group, the secret benefactor who generously donates money and resources to the organization and provides crucial support funds!"

The leader's voice was filled with a deep, intense hatred toward the president of Crowdstar Group.

I took a deep breath warily and prepared to speak. But just as I was about to, Steven grabbed my wrist and looked at me. "Don't act rashly."

I nodded in agreement.

The leader walked up to Dayton and punched him. How could someone as delicate as Dayton endure such agony? Dayton remained on the ground with great pain and had difficulty getting up. However, he showed resilience by gripping his hands tightly and not cooperating with the leader.

This seemingly frail scion managed to change my perception of him. Despite the leader's relentless attempts to beat Dayton, he stubbornly refused to cooperate.

The female celebrity he rescued showed great compassion as she knelt on the ground, pleading with the leader, "Stop! Please, stop beating him. I'll go with you. Can you let him go? He's not the president of Crowdstar Group."

Dayton clenched his teeth and coughed up blood. "Xandra, stop begging them. Get up..."

The female celebrity named Xandra Zander shook her head.

"You're going too far!" Michael was the first to stand up, probably because he couldn't stand it anymore.

I glanced at him, wondering what kind of hero he was pretending to be. Wasn't he asking for a beating? As expected, the leader's subordinates stepped forward to beat Michael.

Yasmin hid trembling behind Michael, her voice shaking as she spoke, "Mike, don't..."

Michael had a strong presence. When he was angry, ordinary people would get a bit scared.

I rolled my eyes and proposed a bet to Rachel and the others, "Let's make a bet. Who will win?"

Rachel replied softly, "If they don't use a gun, I'll bet on Michael."

I remained silent. After all, Michael should have resisted being beaten. Right as the subordinates were prepared to proceed, their leader intervened.

"If you refuse to cooperate, I'll end her life," the leader threatened, his knife pressed firmly against Xandra's neck. In an instant, a crimson stain adorned her delicate, pale skin.

This time, he struck a nerve with Dayton.

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Dayton clenched his teeth and slowly released his grip. "Okay... I'll try. You let her go."

"Cheap bastard! If you had just listened to my instruction from the start, I wouldn't have harmed you, but you just had to put up a fight."

The leader had a strange smile and a stiff expression on his face. He was wearing a human face mask. I sensed something was wrong with him, not because of how he looked but because of his voice...

His voice had clearly been distorted, but strangely, it felt familiar. It was truly weird. It sent chills down my spine.

"Everyone must listen to our instructions and work with us to survive." The leader smiled strangely as he pulled Dayton's hair and asked him to match his irises.

He was controlling these people as if it were a game of obedience, giving everyone subtle hints.

Suddenly, the alarm of the safe blared. "Palm print does not match..."

The leader threw Dayton out and glared at everyone. "He's not the president of Crowdstar Group. Since he dares to deceive us... there will only be one outcome. Death."

The leader was approaching Dayton with a knife. Zion and Eason locked eyes and made a silent pact to rush in to save him. They refused to stand idly by, even if the odds were against them.

"Hey! In the game you planned, you're God. If God possesses the ability to manipulate life and death, what's the point of this game? If it's unfair, the participants' experience will be greatly compromised," Steven spoke before the two reckless men charged forward. His voice was low and filled with ridicule. The leader turned sharply and locked eyes with Steven, a silent challenge passing between them. As the leader shifted toward Steven, my frown deepened. I immediately stood protectively in front of him.

Michael subconsciously attempted to step forward to protect me but was stopped by the Rebels. Perhaps noticing the absence of fear in my eyes, the leader paused. He gazed at me, then at Steven, and suddenly grinned.

"You're right."

After speaking, he looked at his subordinates. "It doesn't matter. We have plenty of time. Everyone here, step forward one by one. Even if I have to go through a thousand people, I'll find him."

The leader moved a chair and took a seat. The subordinates randomly chose a person and instructed him to test the palm prints and irises. If the safe blared, it indicated that he was not the right one.

"Shouldn't the safe go into shut-down mode? They've matched wrongly so many times, and it still hasn't gone into shut-down mode," I murmured.

"This type of safe is extremely secure. The system can be customized at will. There must've been experts behind the scenes who attempted to force it open, but they were unable to do so. They can only alter the program to keep the safe from shutting down," explained Eason.

I nodded and settled on the ground, observing the scene. "The president of Crowdstar Group has concealed himself very effectively. He also demonstrates a strong sense of self-preservation. He's certainly no ordinary person. He must be a genius."

Steven responded with a hum.

I pinched Steven's waist and scolded him, "You told me not to act impulsively, but you're being a hero yourself."

Steven pulled me into his arms and replied softly, "I know how to use my brain, unlike some people who are utterly foolish."

Steven was mocking Michael. Michael clenched his hands and shot Steven a warning look.

Not far away, Una sat elegantly and calmly in the corner. She cast a fearless gaze over the room. It was clear that she was determinedly seeking the identity of the president of Crowdstar Group too.

"Even though the president of Crowdstar Group may not be a good person he provides a steady stream of financial support to Genome Society, enabling them to invest more funds in genetic and human experiments..."

"But this person is key as he can help us further understand and infiltrate to find the mastermind behind the organization," I whispered, reminding Eason, Zion, and the others.

No matter what, we had to find a way to ensure that the president of Crowdstar Group was not exposed.

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"Don't be afraid, everyone. Please come forward one by one," the leader's subordinates said to the people trapped on the cruise.

The Rebels wanted to capture their target. After realizing that the ones they caught were not the president of Crowdstar Group, they were told to leave. They were given some time off on the cruise. This made more people want to leave this frightening place quickly and start cooperating more actively.

"Whoever takes the test the last must be the president of Crowdstar Group," Steven deliberately announced to the crowd just as I was contemplating how to resolve the crisis.

This sentence seemed harmless, but it caused a huge reaction among the survivors. "That's right. I can't be the last one. I can't be at the end of the line."

"Let's go and test right away so that we can leave and still have time for dinner!" someone echoed in the crowd.

In a riot with over a thousand people, what might happen if they were given guns? Similar to a flock of sheep, individuals could struggle to unite when overcome by extreme fear. This was why a shepherd dog that could easily control hundreds of sheep played a crucial role.

"I'll do it first!"

"Let me go first!" Everyone pushed forward, eager to be at the front of the line.

Upon realizing that the situation was spiraling out of control, the leader chose not to intervene and instead allowed it to escalate. Yet, I couldn't help but notice a peculiar smile beneath his face mask. It was as if he saw everyone as sheep. He was watching a show.

Suddenly, someone from the crowd let out a piercing scream. And then, even more screams echoed.

At that moment, the leader detected something amiss. He swiftly stood up and fired. Instantly, everyone fell to the ground, clutching their heads in terror.

"Help!" The screams continued one after another.

"Someone cut my palm! It hurts so much," someone shouted in the crowd.

Although the situation was eventually brought under control, many people suffered palm injuries. Consequently, it became difficult to identify the responsible individual accurately.

Steven glanced at the crowd indifferently, his icy demeanor intensifying.

I looked at Steven and noticed the bandaged palm of his hand. I never anticipated that his palm injury would cause trouble. Eventually, the leader would surely identify everyone with injured palms as their main surveillance targets.

Eason exclaimed angrily, "I knew it! The president of Crowdstar Group is an absolute genius, and he's also extraordinarily ruthless."

The leader was furious, seemingly consumed by uncontrollable emotions. He began rampaging and smashing objects. "Do you think you can hide from me? How much longer do you think you can stay hidden?"

The leader's laughter echoed maniacally. "Those whose palms remain uninjured, proceed with the test!"

After a full night of testing, 678 out of the 1,064 individuals on the cruise went through the test. None of them turned out to be the president of Crowdstar Group.

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Of the 386 remaining individuals, all had injuries on their palms, making identification impossible. Among them was Steven.

"To those who have completed the test, you may now leave early and enjoy a well-deserved rest. I sincerely appreciate your hard work." The leader unexpectedly showed a moment of kindness and surprised everyone by allowing them to leave and rest.

I held Steven's hand. "Their focus has narrowed from over 1,000 people to just 360. It's only a matter of time before they locate the president of Crowdstar Group. We need to be proactive and ensure his safety before they do."

The leader ascended the grand podium and said once more in a peculiar tone, "By the way, I forgot to inform you of the rules of the game. The entire cruise ship is accessible and can be utilized anywhere. Everyone must fulfill their duties.

"The chefs are to promptly return to their stations and resume work. Similarly, the waiters must also return to their respective posts..."

The leader gazed at us and said, "What I want to convey to you is that among the over a thousand people before me, there are not only police officers concealing their identities but also thieves and even a serial killer with a hidden identity.

"In order to survive, you must find a way to avoid being targeted by the murderer. I'll meet you tomorrow at 3:00 pm. Have a great time on the cruise!" After the leader finished speaking, he left.

I regarded Zion warily and asked, "Is there a serial killer here?"

Zion couldn't help but reply, "Yes, this matter was only disclosed by my superior after you had already agreed to board the cruise. It's a highly confidential issue.

"This murderer escaped from Yesa. The Yesa police had clues, identified the suspect, and worked with the Huma police to arrest him. However, as they delved deeper into the case, they discovered that he had assumed a false identity and embarked on this cruise ship.

"With over a thousand individuals on board, pinpointing his exact location is proving to be an immense challenge. His ability to disguise himself is remarkable.

"He switches between women's clothing and school uniforms when engaging in criminal activities. Even surveillance cameras struggle to capture his face accurately."

Rachel scanned anxiously at the bustling crowd surrounding her. "With so many people, how will we find the murderer? If he continues to hide without killing anyone, won't he become a ticking time bomb?"

"The Yesa and Huma police departments have come to a joint understanding that the perpetrator is a mentally ill individual with psychological issues, deriving pleasure from taking the lives of others. His compulsion to kill will become intolerable if he goes without for too long.

"He must kill someone every seven days, and his targets are all women. His method of killing is reminiscent of the Huma serial murder case, as he enjoys embalming his victims and turning them into dolls."

Eason approached me and said, "Initially, the Huma police suspected that the serial killer from Yesa had escaped and committed the crime but later determined that the timing did not align. The two cases are unlikely to be connected, but they can't dismiss the possibility of a copycat crime."

"Huma is now under martial law. Why did the murderer flee from Yesa to Huma? Is he seeking for trouble?"

" muttered Joel.

Huma was also in a state of panic due to the series of murders.

Eason exuded an air of tranquility as he skillfully began his lessons with Joel. "Have you ever heard of criminal comparative psychology? Allow me to enlighten you.

"From the perspective of criminal psychology, murderers can be categorized into two distinct types, which are dangerous personality crime and dangerous trauma crime. The serial killer in Yesa, without a doubt, falls under the category of dangerous personality crime.

"This individual lacks empathy, remorselessly takes lives, derives pleasure from killing, engages in predatory behavior, and possesses an unnerving desire to exert control over their victims.

"The serial murder case in Huma is clearly an act of revenge. The murderer planned and carried out the killings in an organized manner, making sure not to harm innocent people. This belongs to dangerous trauma crime."

Joel cursed, "Fuck... So, this criminal with a twisted and dangerous personality believes that the serial killers in Huma were taunting him, so he hurried to his rivals' territory and got ready to retaliate by killing and provoking them?"

This twisted mindset was truly unbelievable.

"The psychology behind this is quite straightforward. He takes pleasure in the act of killing and believes himself to be highly intelligent as he can evade detection by the police. However, when others commit similar crimes without consequence, he's not happy.

"He feels compelled to venture into their territory and behave wildly and provocatively," Rachel explained it in more simple terms.

Joel ran his fingers through his hair and glanced back at the dwindling crowd. "My goodness... if he can kill so many people without getting caught, he must be incredibly skilled. Now I can't help but see everyone as a potential murderer."

"I think you might be one too," Eason said playfully.

Joel sneered. "If I were a murderer, you'd be the first I kill."

"Nowadays, many people can't handle stress well. Trauma crime occurs when individuals are unable to handle intense pressure and exhibit extreme and distorted behaviors.

"What we need to be vigilant about is that the murderer among the crowd is born with a criminal personality, which is more terrifying than a traumatic criminal. He lacks empathy and sympathy for the victim. He won't blame himself or feel guilty.

"He'll pretend to be superior and flawless." Rachel sighed.

"Have you heard of Dr. Hannibal Lecter? A highly intelligent criminal with a strong diathesis." Eason deliberately frightened Joel.

Steven rubbed his hands and said, "To catch the serial killer, we must be smarter than him."

Joel rolled his eyes and expressed, "You really scared me. I thought you were going to compete with that murderer to determine who's more insane."

Steven snorted. "As long as he doesn't harm those I care."

If someone were to challenge Steven's bottom line, he could be more aggressive than anyone else... I felt a chill. "The serial killer is going after women. We might be his target..."

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"Do you know who my idol is? Cinderella. She endured bullying from her stepmother and stepsisters for so many years without going crazy. Unlike these people today, who are full of shame.

"Let me protect you. Arrogant people like you are usually their target. Let's go." Joel firmly grasped Eason's hand and pulled him along.

"Go away." Eason's anger was palpable. After all, he was significantly older than him.

Moreover, as they spent more time together, Eason noticed a striking resemblance between Joel's childlike nature and that of Simeon. Simeon used to enjoy teasing him, and now Joel did too.

Eason abruptly halted his steps, feeling a surge of unexplained anger. Without a second thought, he pushed Joel away and left.

Joel was confused. "Has he lost his mind? Why did he suddenly become angry? Women have an even better temper than he does."

Zion was rendered speechless.

Rachel explained with a resigned look, "You're just 18. How old is he? You challenge Eason's ego every time. The fact that he even talks to you speaks volumes about his character."

He was somewhat arrogant, self-centered, and self-righteous. But he was also kind.

Eason stormed furiously toward the bathroom located on the 15th floor.

"Eason, it's not advisable to act alone," Zion shouted, but Eason ignored him.

Zion had no choice but to look at Joel. "Follow him. Those lunatics are familiar with our information." Thus, Joel followed him reluctantly.

I glanced at Steven and whispered, "Let's grab something to eat first. I'm starving."

As Steven was about to leave with me, Una quickly stepped in to block his path. I regarded Una with caution and uttered, "Stay away from him."

"Don't act like a fierce dog guarding its food. This will make you appear highly insecure. What are you so afraid of? Are you scared that he might fall in love with me?" Una provoked sarcastically, raising her hand to push me away.

However, before she could do it, Steven firmly held her wrist.

Steven gave Una a warning look. "Can you imagine someone falling in love with a piece of clothing while disregarding his wife's safety?"

I felt a sense of satisfaction as I gazed provocatively at Una. At that moment, my inner emotions were a captivating mix of complexity and excitement. They were feelings I had never encountered before.

It was as if all my self-assurance and confidence stemmed from my partner's preference. Speaking of Steven, he truly provided me with a profound sense of security in every aspect.

Una's expression clearly displayed her dissatisfaction. As a clone, being compared to a mere piece of clothing was undeniably distressing.

Una's gaze locked onto Steven's palm. "Such a coincidence... The safe demands palm print and iris verification, but many people are injured."

Steven disregarded Una's suspicions and firmly grasped my hand, leading me away. "Let's go."

"Steven..." Una murmured.

Nevertheless, Steven ignored her completely.

Una sneered, staring at Steven.

I frowned, gazing at her intently. Una was more complex than I thought. Although Nancy was no longer alive, Una, being her "daughter," had been brought up by the organization for countless years.

It was evident that she wouldn't be willing to simply abandon the organization. I harbored suspicions that she was still an active member.

In addition, Genome Society shared the same goal of uncovering the true identity of the president of Crowdstar Group. However, I was uncertain whether the president of Crowdstar Group could indeed be trusted.

"Stephie..." Michael had been waiting at the door. Upon catching sight of me, he seemed a little nervous. "Are you sure you're calling me? She's clearly more like Stephanie." I sneered, glancing back at Una.

Michael was stunned for a moment and looked up at Una.

"You should've witnessed Nancy's experiment and the police investigation. I'm simply Stephany Larson after Peter applied hypnosis and implanted memories, not Stephanie Carlson," I reminded Michael, urging him to refrain from bothering me further.

Michael hung his head, overcome with guilt. He probably didn't expect me to realize that he was also asking questions on the day of my lie detector test. It was funny because Michael was so immature, and it was easy to see through his behavior.

He asked me if I loved him or Steven, which was such a silly and childish question that only he would ask.

"Stephie..." Michael wanted to say something but then fell silent, probably acquiescing to the fact that I was not Stephanie. Nôvel Drama.

"This cruise is bizarre and has ventured away from the open seas. You and Yasmin should take care of yourselves." I glanced at Yasmin, who was hiding behind him.

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Yasmin had become deeply reliant on Michael. Without his support, she might not have been able to survive. Living with HIV, she had been on medication to manage it throughout the year.

It appeared that her life had been largely shattered. The Rebels were toying with her, preventing her from dying easily. Her days were filled with fear, a sensation even more torturous than the thought of dying.

"Michael, if you raise and love a cat, but it passes away, so you choose to clone its cells to create a new cat, will your love for the original cat continue with the cloned cat?"

Just as Steven and I were leaving, I heard Una's voice. She was asking Michael if he was willing to extend his feelings for Stephanie to her.

My steps froze. I was uninterested in Michael's answer. Steven appeared worried that I might change my mind, so he grasped my hand and stormed out angrily.

Suddenly, a piercing scream echoed from the staircase entrance. It was Eason's voice! We immediately ran downstairs.

On the 15th floor, Eason noticed a woman acting strangely in the restroom. She was leaning on the sink, and her eyes were red, with blood coming out from the corners.

"Do you need help?" Eason approached her cautiously and asked.

Suddenly, the woman collapsed onto the ground, leaving Eason filled with fear. That was when he unleashed a piercing scream.

Joel quickly approached Eason and asked anxiously, "What's wrong?"

Eason breathed a sigh of relief and instinctively pointed at the woman on the ground. "Call the police." Joel couldn't help but ask, "Aren't you and Zion... the only two policemen on this cruise?"

Only then did Eason realize that he was a policeman. After clearing his throat to dispel the embarrassment, Eason immediately cordoned off the crime scene with maintenance signs to restrict access and protect the integrity of the area. "It appears that the killer has begun killing people."

"In such a short period, from leaving the hall until now, he managed to silently kill someone..." Joel frowned as he spoke.

Steven, Zion, Rachel, and I hurried down and saw the body that had been surrounded.

"Look." Rachel pointed to the mirror, where the abbreviation "CN" was written in lipstick.

"What's the meaning of 'CN'?" Joel asked.

"The next victim's initials. The Yesa police said that this murderer is extremely arrogant. Before he kills the next person, he'll leave a notice in advance next to the body." Zion surveyed the scene vigilantly.

This was also similar to the Huma serial murder case. The serial murder case in Huma involved a Death List of people who were targeted to die. In Yesa, the murderer issued a notice before killing each person. It seemed that the serial murder case in Huma was more challenging, which might have led the murderer in Yesa to feel provoked.

"CN. We need to find a list of everyone who boarded the ship to protect the next potential victim from the murderer. Otherwise, we'll be lost."

Time was ticking, and this murderer was too arrogant.

Other guests screamed upon finding the body.

Soon, news of the death spread quickly on the cruise ship.

Just as we were about to approach the staff on the cruise ship to request the name list, another scream echoed from the deck.

We hurried over and caught sight of a stunning woman in a slip dress standing rigidly by the guardrail on the deck. Her face was ashen, and her lips were stained with blood. It was unmistakable that she was dead.

"How did he manage to do it in such a short amount of time?" asked Zion in astonishment, rapidly approaching to assess the situation.

Next to the body, a word was written in blood, "You." The first woman to see that body became his next target.

I turned around and looked at the deck warily. He had to be hiding among the group of people here. Otherwise, he wouldn't know who saw the body first. He would likely consider me or Rachel as his next target.

Steven stood protectively in front of me, his gaze indifferent yet daring as he surveyed everyone on the deck. It was as if he was silently challenging anyone who dared to harm the person he cared about.

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I grabbed Steven from behind and directed my middle finger at the crowd with an indifferent gaze. I was aware that the murderer possessed a strong sense of self-esteem and would not tolerate provocation from others.

Therefore, I had to take the lead in provoking... This way, he would focus on targeting me instead of Rachel.

Rachel immediately understood my intention and stepped forward in a panic to press down my arm. Stephie, what are you doing?"

I steered Rachel toward Zion. "Tell him to come to me. Get her out of here."

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Zion was about to speak, but as soon as he saw my determination, he grasped Rachel firmly. "Don't stir up trouble. Come with me to examine the first body. You're a forensic doctor. You should be able to uncover some clues."

Only after that did Rachel react. She nodded and followed Zion. After taking a few steps, she glanced back at Steven and said, "Protect Stephe."

Steven nodded in response.

"A steel nail was found on top of the victim's head, indicating she was killed by a direct blow to the skull, leaving no external wounds." Eason meticulously inspected around and discovered only the steel nail on her head.

"To ensure a successful attack, the perpetrator must possess considerable strength while the victim must have been defenseless. Given the victim's serene facial expression, it appears that she did not suffer greatly in her final moments." Joel carefully checked the corpse.

I shook my head incredulously and examined the nail cap intently. "But if a steel nail were to strike the skull, the deceased would not lose consciousness, and there would also be signs of pain on her face. Unless it was carried out with a nail gun..."

The nail gun's power drove the nail directly, preventing uneven force that could occur when using a hammer.

"The steel nail embedded in the skull wasn't the fatal injury." Steven examined the victim's mouth, nose, and eyes. The arachnoid hemorrhage appeared to be not severe, suggesting that the major blood vessels were not affected by the steel nail. The deceased likely did not die soon after its insertion.

"The victim was killed by suffocation." Steven pointed to the victim's neck. The murderer must have strangled the victim from behind.

"Then why did the murderer drive this steel nail in?" Eason was utterly perplexed. He found this completely unnecessary.

Steven followed the line of sight to the top of the deceased's head and gestured toward the railing. "To stabilize the body.

"The deceased's muscles will experience slight contractions within one to three hours after death, and the joints will become immobile, which will occur throughout the body within 12 to 16 hours.

"Assuming that the murderer was the first person to test the safe last night, then the time window for him to commit the crime was only 12 hours. However, before the body becomes completely stiff, and if he wanted her to stand here flawlessly, he would need something to stabilize it."

Steven assumed that the steel nail should have been fastened with something like a fishing line and then

looped around the railing. After the initial discovery of the first body, he discreetly severed the fishing line of the second body while no one was looking.

I carefully glanced around. "The surveillance on the deck has been destroyed. The bathroom area is actually a blind spot. This lunatic is quite clever."

"To strangle a person without resistance, the murderer must possess exceptional arm strength." Steven carefully examined the body, noting only a steel nail lodged in the head and faint bruises on the neck. The absence of any other injuries indicated a lack of struggle or resistance.

"The deceased trusted the murderer, or... did not believe that the murderer would pose a threat to her," Steven analyzed again.

In conclusion, it was dangerously easy to ignore the identity and appearance of the murderer.

Joel snuck up behind Eason, put his arm around his neck, and strangled him forcefully. Eason nearly passed out and slapped Joel's arm hard while scolding him, "Are you out of your mind?"

"With my size and arm strength, it'll still take some time to strangle him, and he can resist..." Joel was trying to convey that the murderer was significantly stronger than him.

At that moment, Zion had confined the people to the deck, forbidding anyone from leaving. However, among the onlookers on the deck, Joel appeared to be the strongest person. There was even an elderly woman with a stooped back among this group of individuals.

The elderly lady was trembling as she expressed her desire to leave the deck. "We're all hungry. Why don't you let us leave?"

The elderly lady gestured in sign language, prompting the woman with her to inquire why they were not permitted to leave.

"Allow the elderly and the weak to go down first. It's windy up there," Eason walked over to Zion and informed.

Zion nodded in agreement.

The elderly woman walked down trembling, leaning on the support of the woman.

Directly beneath the deck lay the bathroom on the 15th floor, where Rachel was carefully examining the body. Rachel looked up at Zion.

"Suffocation was indeed the cause, but it wasn't strangulation. If it were, we would see visible marks on the neck. When an external force fractures the neck, it results in a spinal cord injury.

"This will cause immediate death since the spinal cord break disrupts the respiratory center, consequently leading to respiratory and cardiac arrest. The killer violently snapped the victim's neck."

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Zion turned around and relayed the message to us, who were still on the deck.

"Being able to break someone's neck with your bare hands? I've only seen this in movies. I'll give it a try," Joel muttered, then raised his hands to experiment with Eason's head.

Eason looked at Joel warily. "Go away!"

Joel chuckled, and I found myself amused as well. Zion rested against the door frame with a helpless smile. "Enough causing trouble. Go check on the people on the deck first."

Eason nodded, his gaze shifting toward the men who remained on the deck. They didn't seem particularly strong, lacking the prowess to effortlessly snap someone's neck.

"Rachel?" Zion had just shared a few words with us when Rachel, who had been inspecting the corpse outside the bathroom door on the 15th floor, suddenly vanished.

Zion was extremely panicked. "Rachel!"

Steven and I also rushed over.

"Both of you, stay back and investigate," Steven instructed Joel and Eason.

We rapidly descended to the 15th floor and hurried into the bathroom, only to find no trace of Rachel. It was as if she vanished before our very eyes in a matter of seconds.

"Rachel..." I stood there, breathing heavily. I hit my forehead hard.

"No! This is wrong! The murderer must have just been on the deck. He couldn't have had much time to leave the crime scene. But how did he manage to take Rach away?" I looked around nervously and hastily exited the bathroom.

While I was anxiously trying to figure out how the murderer committed the crime, Steven unexpectedly kicked an elderly lady with a hunched figure. The lady screamed in fear and looked at Steven. A few of us rushed over.

"Steven, you..." Zion looked at Steven with a puzzled look.

In the past, I might have unconsciously questioned Steven's motives for attacking the elderly lady. But I now firmly believe that Steven had a valid reason behind his actions.

I stepped forward and firmly grasped the collar of the person in front of me. As my hand touched the person's skin, I noticed an unnatural texture. The person seemed to have applied a substance resembling egg liquid, and it had dried up and shrunk.

To my surprise, behind this disguise was not a woman but a man. "Where's Rachel?"

After I pulled off his wig, Zion rushed up and kicked him directly. "Where's Rachel?"

The murderer ceased pretending and leaned against the wall, laughing maniacally. "It only takes a few seconds for me to kill someone. You discovered it too late... She's already dead."

I suddenly noticed my breathing was irregular, and my fingers were shaking. As I lost consciousness, I faintly heard Zion and Eason calling my name. When I regained my composure, I realized I had pulled the murderer into the bathroom, and my hands were covered in blood.

The murderer lay dying, yet a smile still played on his face as he uttered, "We're of the same kind."

I struck him on the bridge of the nose, my voice low. "Someone who pursues perfection as diligently as you wouldn't rush to kill. You'd surely hide the person first, wait until we're far away, and then arrange it

to your liking."

The murderer stared at me, a flash of emotion in his eyes. "Are you the mastermind behind the serial murder case? The one who provoked me and urged me to board the cruise?"

I was stunned and confused. "What do you mean?"

"The Huma serial murder case... The murderer sent me letters to provoke me and even took the life of the dog I raised for six years. He said I was worthless and dared me to come to Huma and board this cruise. He said he'd be waiting for me here.

"So I've been killing people to lure him out. I'm sure he's on board." The murderer looked at me and the others who rushed in warily.

My blood ran cold in an instant. The murderer from the serial murder case... The one who took Stephanie's life, the individual seared into my memory with a distinct red birthmark on his arm, his hoarse yet all too familiar voice...