

After Death 531

Chapter 531

"Let me see!" I said through gritted teeth.

Despite everything, I couldn't do anything about it.

Just as I was inspecting his wound, he picked me up with one arm and walked toward the bed. The VIP room was excellent. It was a large suite equipped with a view of the sea.

With this environment and the view... If it weren't for the Rebels taking over the cruise outside, I'd actually think I was on vacation.

"Where are they taking the cruise?" I was slightly curious.

"They're probably headed toward war zones. There are flight restrictions, and it'll be hard to launch a rescue operation by sea." Holding me in his arms, Steven continued softly, "Stephie... they have a limited food supply. With so many people on board... I don't think it'll last very long."

"It's okay. The rations that we hid beforehand are more than enough for us," I replied gently.

"Stephie... you need to understand the horrifying reality of human nature. This is essentially like the end of the world... This cruise is a simulation of the world before it ends.

"When that happens, you'll witness the worst of humanity. The strong will prey on the weak... They might even become cannibals."

I had heard many stories like this. This was the open sea. We were above deep waters with no freshwater nor aid. It would surely bring out the worst in people.

Everyone was still calm only because there was still food to go around. Soon... that might not be the case anymore.

"If we're stocking up on rations, there'll definitely be others who are stocking up on weapons. The ones without either won't be able to defend themselves, and they'll end up becoming rations for those who are stronger."

That was the reality.

Steven held me and whispered, "You need to stay close to me, Stephie. Just like how Yasmin sticks to Michael, okay?"

I rolled my eyes and glared at him. "Don't just blindly make comparisons like that. Why would you bring them up? It ruins the mood."

Laughing, he held me closer. "I'm sorry. Sorry, Stephie..."

"What did you do wrong?"

He shook his head. "I have no clue... but I'm sorry."

"Steven Lincoln..." I sighed, feeling increasingly drowsy. "Hold me tight... I want to take a nap."

"Okay."

Then, I fell asleep.

I had an unusually good rest while being held in his arms.

However, it became extremely dark later on in the night. The deep sea seemed to have transformed into a horrifying beast.

The darkness seemed like an endless void.

A piercing scream echoed in the hallway outside.

I felt too unsettled to continue sleeping. When I woke up, Steven wasn't in the room. I got up frantically and wiped the sweat off of my forehead. "Steven..."

I got off the bed and carefully checked the bathroom. He wasn't there. I opened the door to the room and looked outside. All of a sudden, a man covered in blood ran past in a state of panic.

"Help! Murder... Murder!"

I watched as he fell onto the floor. His hand was bandaged.

"What happened?" I asked.

The man got up and tried to seek shelter in my room.

I stopped him with a frown.

I wasn't a saint. In a situation like that, I didn't trust anyone.

He stared fearfully at the end of the hallway, knocking on the door in tears. I locked the door with a chain so that he couldn't enter.

He begged, "Please let me in. They're killing people. There's a group of them... They're going after people with injured hands like me."

My heart sank. The Rebels had narrowed down the whereabouts of Crowdstar's president to within 300 people-the ones who had injuries on their palms and couldn't go through identification.

"Aren't they supposed to keep them alive?" I furrowed my brows in confusion.

"In order to obtain the right to leave this ship, these people are hunting down each and every one of us. Then, they torture us and force us to admit that we're the president."

Chapter 532

The man outside was crying as he begged to be let in.

Just then, I heard footsteps. Someone was approaching our direction while laughing. "I found one... Looks like someone slipped away."

The gang of people grouped up and headed this way. They looked like a bunch of hooligans. Some held golf clubs in their hands while others held metal rods.

The man at my door sobbed in fear. He got on his knees, desperately begging me to open the door. Worried that something might've happened to Steven, my chest tightened. I opened the door and pulled the man inside before the group could get to him.

A club hit the door just as I hastily fastened the lock. Subsequently, they began smashing on the door as if they were rabid. This was the dark side of human nature.

Suddenly, a cry was heard from outside the window. Someone was thrown off the deck. Their body hit the water with a loud splash before they sank into the depths.

I swiftly walked over to look outside. A group of lunatics was throwing people off-board from the deck. "Their hands aren't injured, though," I questioned with a frown.

The man that I rescued was trembling as he hid in a corner. "They called it the Cutback. Food and water are limited. The more people that are alive.... the more resources will be wasted... Controlling the number of people onboard will buy more time..."

I felt a chill run down my back.

It was horrifying.

No wonder Steven called this a simulation of the world before it ended.

I took a deep breath. I grabbed the knife from under my pillow and clutched it in my hand. "I need to go out for a while. Keep yourself safe."

The man shook his head frantically. "Don't go, don't go... They've gone mad from killing. Their leader established a rule-they kill at night and clean up before dawn. Don't go out when the sky is still dark."

"My husband is out there," I said solemnly.

"Don't I go. They're all dead, everyone outside is dead," he cried out, shaking his head.

The sound of bodies being thrown off the deck was heard again, and there was the sight of blood streaming downward. Blood splattered on my face as I stood on the balcony.

Steven couldn't be dead.

I turned around and marched determinedly toward the door.

"No!"

I had underestimated the man's will to survive. He picked up a vase and looked at me threateningly.

"You can't open that door. They're waiting outside. As soon as you open it, they'll rush in. I can't let you take that risk."

Then, he locked the door from the inside right in front of my face.

There was a beeping noise. Someone was trying to access the room via the key, but they couldn't get the

door to open. I held my breath anxiously.

"Stephie?" Steven's voice rang out from the other side.

I let out a breath of relief and started to unlock the door.

"Don't open it!" The man I saved, however, insisted on keeping it shut.

"Stephie! Who is inside?" Steven asked cautiously.

A commotion could be heard outside. "There's another one!"

I heard a lot of people charging in his direction, but the man beside me refused to let me open the door. My gaze sharpened. I grabbed his head and rammed it against the door, knocking him unconscious. Then, I opened the door and pulled Steven inside before the group of people caught up to him.

There was blood on his body, and he had pulled a teenage girl into the room with him.

He said innocently, "We forgot about her... We left her with Jimmy when we left. When the killing started an hour ago, he came to me and told me she'd run off."

There was blood on the young girl's face. She sat on the floor trembling while hugging her knees. "So many... people died."

Chapter 533

Steven glanced at the unconscious man on the floor. "What's up with him?"

"His palm is injured. The men outside wanted to kill him, so I saved him. But he didn't let me open the door, so I knocked him out," I said resignedly.

Steven grabbed my wrist and said solemnly, "Remember to never trust anyone on this ship. Even if you hear my voice outside the door, don't open it unless you're absolutely sure."

He looked very serious. The situation outside must've been dire.

"From now onward, remember our code." He shot me a knowing look.

I nodded. "What's... the situation outside right now?"

"Some lunatic gathered a bunch of people. They started killing people once the sun set. While doing so, they're searching for the president of Crowdstar Group among those with injured palms."

The killing game had already begun.

"I want to go home, I want to go home," the girl cried repeatedly.

I knelt down and looked at her. "What's your name?"

"My name is Yara..."

"Be a good girl, Yara. We'll definitely get you off this cruise and bring you back to your parents, okay?" I patted her head to comfort her.

She calmed down and wiped the tears off of her face. "I'm so afraid."

"Don't be. Go get some rest. It'll be better in the morning,"

I brought her to the bathroom and prepared a bath for her.

After Yara was done, the man I knocked unconscious had also started to wake up.

He looked at us in fear. Upon noticing the wound on Steven's palm, he then relaxed. "The lunatics outside are going after people with wounds on our hands, like us. You should probably stay put."

He continued carefully, "Can I ask you a question? Are you the president of Crowdstar Group?"

Steven looked at him and replied blankly, "No."

The man smiled sheepishly. "Sorry, that shouldn't be something you disclose to a stranger... I'm not him either. I just got my hand randomly sliced open among the crowd, and now, I'm being hunted."

Steven didn't say anything. He sat on the couch and looked at me and Yara after we exited the bathroom. "Go get some rest. I'll keep watch."

"You should all get some rest. I can help you keep watch..." the man offered softly.

"No need. Just take the couch." Steven checked the time. "There's still about three hours left before the sun comes up. They aren't done with their killing spree yet. Don't open the door no matter what."

The man nodded and curled up on the couch.

He said in a soft voice, "My wife and kid were both killed by those people... It feels like I'm in a dream. How could something like this happen? Who on earth is this president? How can so many innocent people die because of him?"

"I'd step up if I were him... He could save so many lives just by sacrificing his own," he continued muttering.

Steven stared at him with a knowing gaze but remained silent.

I shot him a glance before tucking Yara into bed. "Get some rest."

The young girl lay next to me and stared fixedly at me. "Do you believe in God?" she asked softly.

I smiled. "I suppose..."

The God I worshiped was the cause I believed in.

"My mom said that God is a faith. People need faith in order to have a sense of direction in life. With faith, they can achieve the impossible, create miracles, and rid themselves of suffering," she said in a soft voice.

"We need God to save us..." She buried her face in my chest.

I shot her a glance. Her first few sentences were fine, but the last bit.

Rid themselves of suffering? Why did it feel like her mother was in some sort of cult?

"It's getting late. Hurry up and get some sleep."

Yara hummed in response before gradually shutting her eyes and drifting off.

Chapter 534

Maybe because I was too exhausted, I passed out in a blur.

I didn't know how much time had passed before Steven woke me up for breakfast.

"Is it daytime?" I opened my eyes and stretched as I looked at the sun rising over the ocean. "Did you not get any sleep? I'll keep watch. Go ahead and rest for a bit more."

He shook his head. "Let's go get breakfast."

Food was now limited. We had to go eat.

I nodded and woke Yara.

The young girl rubbed her eyes and sat up. "Mr. Steven, Ms. Stephy, I saw a kid on the lowest deck of the ship yesterday. He was so young-maybe around three or four years old. He was running around the place barefoot. It didn't look like he had any parents either..."

I looked at her in surprise. "That's impossible... There aren't any kids onboard other than you."

The police couldn't have been wrong. There weren't any minors on the cruise except for Yara. All of them had been transported off of the ship.

"But I really saw a kid yesterday. He was playing with a ball on the lowest deck. I think there were more of them, but I only saw one. I wanted to go down and check, but I got scared. It was too dark."

Yara didn't look like she was lying.

I glanced toward Steven, but he didn't say anything.

"We'll go take a look later." I wanted to check if it was true.

Logically speaking, there shouldn't still be children on board. Moreover, the lowest deck of the cruise was

a restricted area equipped with guards. Tourists weren't allowed to enter.

Why would there be kids down there?

"Please be careful, Ms. Stephy. The men guarding the place are terrible people. I saw them hit people," Yara said softly.

I nodded before getting out of bed to wash up.

The man that I rescued had also woken up. He sat up and peered cautiously at the deck above from the balcony. There was no one there.

"I suppose the killing has ceased." He then continued to introduce himself nervously, "My name is Maverick Collins. I'm a doctor, so perhaps I'd be of use to all of you. I no longer have any friends or family. Could I stay with you guys?"

"I don't know how, but they've secured a master key to the standard rooms. The rooms below the 14th floor aren't safe anymore since they have access to all the rooms..."

Since those lunatics weren't able to open our doors, only the VIP deck was safe after nightfall. It'd be somewhat cruel of us to not take him in after his explanation.

I looked at Steven. These decisions were made by him.

"I still have three male friends in another room. You could probably bunk with them." To my surprise, he agreed to let Maverick stay.

For some reason, I felt like there was a mischievous glint in his eyes. I wasn't sure what was going through his head, though.

Maverick was overjoyed. He nodded hurriedly and said, "Thank you, thank you so much. You're all good people. You'll be rewarded for your kindness."

I didn't say anything. I was used to adulations like these.

However, Maverick was someone who could offer you praises but then refused to let you open the door the next second.

"Fucking hell. What happened last night? Why does it smell so heavily of blood?" Joel complained in the hallway.

I looked at him quizzically. Did he not hear anything throughout that huge commotion last night? Eason glanced around alertly. "Have they started killing people?"

Steven nodded.

"This is Maverick Collins. His entire family was killed and now he has nowhere to go. Let him stay with the two of you." He introduced Maverick to the rest.

Eason looked at the handcuffed killer in the room. "Sure, we'll just squeeze a bit I guess."

"Yara said there's a kid on the bottom deck. They looked about three or four years old." I suddenly recalled Yara's words.

Frankly speaking, I was oddly interested in the bottom deck since I first boarded the cruise. Weirdly, I kept feeling drawn to it.

Chapter 535

"That's not possible. I don't recommend going down there either." Zion opened the door and shook his head. He didn't want us to take the risk.

He continued, "Children and infants are all off the ship. Other than Yara, there aren't anymore."

"But... There really were kids. There's more than one too. I heard them laughing. They were even playing with a ball." Yara cried before pulling on my shirt. "Ms. Stephy, it's true..."

I nodded in response. "I believe you."

"If you really want to go and take a look... We could." He looked around. "Let's get something to eat first. Rachel is still unconscious. I need to grab something nutritious for her to restore some energy."

"Keep your weapons close. Those lunatics will kill anyone," I reminded.

The group of us slowly made our way to the VIP dining area.

During the day, everything was calm. It was like yesterday's slaughter never existed.

All the bodies had been thrown into the ocean, and the blood stains on the ship were cleaned by the staff as well. From the surface, nothing seemed out of place.

Many were casually conversing and enjoying the view as they ate.

They were probably oblivious to yesterday's events.

"They started killing people from the 14th floor. Only that floor was cleared yesterday. They went into different rooms like they were playing roulette. Whoever was randomly picked, died..."

Looking around fearfully, Maverick carefully said.

Upon entering the dining area, we were stopped and asked to show our room keys.

"Sorry, this man and the little girl aren't registered under the VIP name list. From today onward, the dining areas are segregated. The VIP area is no longer open to the public. Only registered guests are allowed to dine here," the staff member said in a serious tone.

I raised an eyebrow and looked at Steven.

"How can you section people off at a time like this? It's just two people. Just let them in." Joel wanted to go inside, but the guard stopped him.

None of the guards looked friendly. It was clear that they wanted us to adhere to the rules.

"Guests in the VIP section are free to use the dining area as they please. If you don't wish to be separated, you're welcome to have your meal elsewhere," the staff member said.

"Let's go. We'll eat elsewhere." I took Yara's hand and walked outside.

"They gave everyone access to the VIP section at the start on purpose. Now that everyone onboard is aware of how much better the food is, there's no way they'll be satisfied with the meals provided in the regular section.

"If I were to guess... Soon, your identity wouldn't matter. The staff will only let you in if you possess a room key. So the VIP guests will become everyone's target."

Joel explained grimly.

This was a horrible realization.

Everyone's faces fell.

The man behind all of this was a genius. He knew exactly how to bring out the worst of human nature.

We all headed downstairs for food, but the dining hall was full. They told us that food was limited, and we had to come earlier.

With no other choice, we could only continue heading down.

The lower we went, the worse the food was. It wasn't until we reached the last deck that the staff begrudgingly let us in.

All we had was stale bread and jam. Although made from milk powder, they at least provided hot milk. "Ms. Stephy..." In the middle of our meal, Yara suddenly perked up. It seemed like she heard something. She tugged on my shirt anxiously and said, "Listen... Do you hear the sound of a bell ball below the cabin?" That was a child's toy that made noise when rolled about.

I listened carefully. "What..."

I was just about to say that she misheard it when I heard a jingle... I actually heard the sound of a ball rolling from the stairway down to the bottom deck.

Then, I heard children laughing and playing.

Chapter 536

I looked at Steven cautiously.

Then, I turned toward the others. "Do you guys hear any children?"

Zion has already picked up some food and returned to his room.

Eason perked up to listen before shaking his head. "I don't..."

Joel tried to listen as best as he could as well. "How did you manage to hear the sound of kids among all this commotion? Are you sure you're not hallucinating?"

The dining area was packed with people. To be honest, it was quite difficult to hear.

Maverick also shook his head. "I don't hear anything either."

I looked back at Steven.

The man was eating his food quietly. He didn't say that he heard anything, nor did he say he didn't. Judging by the way he was behaving, he didn't want me to risk my safety.

He didn't allow me to go down there.

Without a choice, I rubbed Yara's head and said, "Maybe we really misheard it. There are guards stationed at the bottom deck, so we can't possibly go down there.

"Hurry up and eat. We're heading back after everyone is done."

Yara lowered her head dejectedly. "When I was hiding in the cabin, I really heard them... There was someone who sent them food too."

I didn't respond.

We had no idea what the situation down there was like. If it harbored secrets like the medical capsule had, we might really end up in danger.

At times like these, it was a wiser choice to keep yourself safe.

"Enjoy your meal, everyone. Do try to eat as much as possible... because soon, there won't be enough food to go around."

The eerie voice rang out in the speakers yet again, "There isn't much time left. The ship is heading further and further away... If you want to head back... you should find the CEO of Crowdstar Group as soon as you possibly can."

I frowned at the broadcast. I had started to suspect that locating the CEO was merely a front. The Rebels just wanted to bring out the worst in people and watch them turn on each other.

They seemed adamant on making that happen.

"From tomorrow onwards, meals are given according to your room key. One key gets you a meal for two. Everyone best be keeping their room keys safe-without a key, you'd unfortunately need to starve."

The voice was giving us rules and spreading fear.

Maverick looked at his room key nervously. Keys to regular rooms were white, only room keys in the VIP section were gold in color.

"Keys from the VIP section have access to food of premium quality and luxury wines. Even the rooms are the safest. The doors are made of reinforced, anti-burglary materials.

"That means... Joel was actually right. Those in possession of gold cards were going to become the hunted," Eason said grimly.

The atmosphere became tense and awkward.

"From now onwards, do not leave your room unless you absolutely need to... Let's go back, now." Steven got up and took my hand.

The people from the dining hall were already eyeing us greedily.

"Tuck your cards away," I urged Eason to keep his card hidden.

Based on what was going on, the card was not replaceable if you happen to lose it.

I took Yara's hand and anxiously started to take my leave.

However, Yara stopped at the exit to the bottom deck. She remained glued to the floor.

"Listen, Ms. Stephy... There really are kids down there..."

I immediately ran over and grabbed her. "Let's head back first, Yara. It's not safe outside..."

"Yara!"

She suddenly broke free from my grip and dashed downstairs.

I inhaled sharply and turned to look at Steven.

We promised the police we'd bring her back safely...

Chapter 537

"Don't go down there." Eason pulled me back and shook his head. "Me and Joel will go take a look."

After all, protecting and bringing the children back safe and sound was the police's responsibility.

I shook my head in response. "It's not just for Yara. I keep getting the feeling that... something down there is calling for me."

I didn't know why either, but I felt like taking a look downstairs.

The feeling was overwhelmingly strong. I couldn't explain it, but the attraction was there.

"Let's go." Steven took my hand and led me down the stairs.

"Do you feel it too?" I looked at him nervously.

He nodded.

Joel scratched his head quizzically. He looked toward Eason and asked, "Do you feel it too?"

Eason rolled his eyes. "I just know that it might be dangerous down there. Curiosity kills the cat-I don't have that type of curiosity."

Although well aware of the risks, everyone still went downstairs anyway.

Maverick followed anxiously behind us.

"I'll keep watch," he said softly.

In truth, he was just too afraid to go with us.

The staircase leading downward was extremely narrow. It was a retractable one, and it could be kept away at any time.

I was surprised to find that there was no one guarding the place today.

It was as if... they were luring us down here on purpose.

"Hehe... Big Brother."

"Ball."

Suddenly, the sound of a rolling ball and two young voices rang out from the gloomy cabin.

I looked toward the near distance with a shocked expression.

Were there really children down here?

So far, we could only hear voices.

"Big Brother..."

There was a jingle. Then, a toy ball rolled over to us from the other end of the hallway.

I stopped and looked at the ball on the floor.

Not long after, two small heads popped up from the end of the cabins. They glanced around cautiously. Their eyes were bright and looked like stars.

"Ms. Stephy, there are kids!" Yara abruptly ran over and exclaimed, pointing at the pair of children. I was glued to the ground from shock. I believed her now-there were really kids below the deck.

"You guys..." I swiftly marched forward, but the two children immediately ran off like they were afraid.

When I caught up to them, the hallway was already empty. There was only a flickering light present.

For some reason, I became extremely anxious.

"Kids?" I yelled.

The group of us carefully made our way down the hallway and stared at the cabins as we passed them.

They were all tightly shut rooms. We didn't know what was inside, nor could we get them to open.

When we made our way to the very end, we came across Room 707. The door was slightly ajar. I was just about to push the door open when Steven stopped me.

"I'll do it." He shielded me behind himself and opened it.

Worried about potential dangers on the other side, everyone was on high alert. However, once the door was open, we were met with a surprising sight.

It was just an ordinary room-it looked like a normal three-bedroom unit.

The two children were seated in the living room. The windows were programmed to mimic an outdoor environment. The entire room felt like it was situated in a regular apartment building. You could even see and hear nature from beyond the window.

It was essentially a huge experiment room. It made you think that you were living in the city.

"Dad!" A small boy suddenly ran over and hugged Steven's legs.

Me and Steven simultaneously looked down at the child.

They were so incredibly identical.

The kid looked like an exact replica of Steven. His deep-set eyes were the same shade of the deep sea. His long lashes and chubby cheeks made him look extremely adorable...

My breath hitched in my throat. "Do you think this is your clone?"

How could they put a clone in the cabin? Was this cruise a huge testing ground? Something similar to the one Nancy had?

Chapter 538

Steven looked at the boy intensely. As he was going to speak, the boy gazed at me with a blank expression and asked, "Mom, why do you look... a little different?"

In the living room, a little girl timidly hid behind the wall and looked at me. "It's Mom!"

Then, she quickly came toward me and hugged me. I instinctively held her in my arms.

She was incredibly obedient. The little girl and the little boy seemed as if they were carved out of the same mold. At first sight, they looked like identical twins. They had deep, captivating eyes and adorable faces. They looked a lot like Steven.

"They look slightly... like you," Steven whispered.

"These two children... are so similar to you both," Joel exclaimed in amazement.

Eason was clearly confused. "Anyone who didn't know better would have assumed that you two had children."

I carried the little girl to the living room. The three-bedroom unit was plain, with wedding photos hanging on the wall. The man and woman in the photo were actually Steven and Stephanie. I looked at Steven in shock.

Joel exclaimed in surprise, "All the photos in this room feature Steven and Stephanie!"

"That's Mom and Dad." The boy pointed at "Stephanie" in a photo and declared that she was his mother. Then, he looked at me again. "Mom, why do you look different from the photos?"

I remained oblivious for quite a while, wondering what he meant.

"The entire underground cabin seemed to have been intentionally revealed to us. It was too obvious and deliberate. Someone led us to discover these two children," Steven said seriously.

"Have you two met your parents?" I asked in a hushed tone.

Both of them shook their heads. "The nanny said that our parents are scientists on a mission. It'll take a few years before they return. We must wait at home and not go out."

Gasping, I looked at the doors outside the cabin. "Is everyone here children?"

The boy suddenly replied, "They're all dead. They were eliminated..."

"What do you mean?" I felt a chill running down my back.

"The best children are the only ones who can survive and see their parents," the boy said in a solemn tone.

"My brother protected me..." The little girl hugged me tightly and whispered in my ear that her brother had been protecting her.

I didn't know what awful things happened to these two children who seemed to be only three or four years old.

"Look at this." Joel found a surveillance camera above the living room and a tablet on the bookshelf.

"This is the experimental data about you two," Joel said as he handed the tablet to Steven.

The data inside belonged to Steven and Stephanie.

"From a biological standpoint, these children are the offspring of you and Stephanie. When Stephanie reached sexual maturity, her parents obtained her eggs to use for the cultivation of the next generation

through embryonic development.

"Stephanie's genes have some defects, making it challenging to conceive healthy embryos. Hence, the birth of these two children is truly a miracle."

Joel scrutinized the experimental data and watched the confession of the experimenter displayed on the tablet. He played the video and passed the tablet to me. It turned out that the person in the video was Stephanie's mother.

In front of the camera, she repeatedly discussed the failures of the experiments and then recorded the successful embryo specimens. These two little kids were among the successful ones.

In addition to these two children, other children were born with unique conditions such as different or double pupils, or even other congenital diseases. Most of them had specific defects. However, since Stephanie's parents died in a car accident, the experiment was entrusted to others.

I examined the records regarding the two mentioned children and was appalled. Steven and Stephanie both had character flaws, and these two children were even more peculiar.

Due to a strong genetic bond, the older brother instinctively protected his younger sister from the moment he was born. He had an uncanny ability to detect approaching danger and would swiftly eliminate any animals coming close to his sister.

Furthermore, both children possessed remarkably high IQs. They were highly aggressive, and socializing them was difficult.

There was software on the tablet to view the surveillance. Upon playback, I witnessed the two little kids luring the nanny into the bedroom and locking her in.

Then, they proceeded to open the password-protected door of the lab capsule, which was the place we had just entered. If the door was closed directly, it became an invisible door that was difficult to find.

I glanced toward the bedroom and walked over slowly. All the door locks in these rooms were on the outside, which would be convenient for securing the two little kids inside the room.

When I unlocked the door, I took a deep breath. The nanny... was dead. It appeared that she had been locked in for a long time and died of starvation.

I couldn't help but glance back at the two little kids who eagerly threw themselves into Steven's arms and began to act coquettishly... A chill ran down my spine. What kind of little monsters were these two?

At that moment, I had the unsettling illusion that these two kids had deliberately lured us step by step, taking advantage of the fact that the door was locked from the outside. They eliminated the people in the cabin in advance. It was hard to believe that they were no more than four years old.

Chapter 539

I knew that the organization was conducting genetic experiments, and they were focused on combining my and Steven's genes. Shockingly, the laboratory was located on board a cruise ship, which had been sailing to different countries on the high seas, completely undetected.

Suddenly, the door of the lab capsule closed abruptly, causing the room to fall into a profound silence. At that moment, the little boy who was cradled in Steven's arms made his way toward the door and reopened it using the correct password.

"How do you know the password?" Joel was curious.

"I heard it," the boy replied innocently.

Joel couldn't believe what he was hearing. "How did you hear that?"

"They entered the password and left. I could hear the intervals and the general direction when they entered the password. After a few attempts, I managed to open it." The boy expressed himself clearly. "How old are you?" I asked nervously.

The boy came to hug me. "Four and half years old, almost five years old. Mom, since my sister and I defeated everyone, will we be your favorite children?"

He appeared to be testing us, asking in a somewhat tentative manner whether we liked him.

Growing up in an environment where they were constantly monitored and used as experimental data, there was a definite lack of love. However, their genes somehow brought them closer to me and Steven. They yearned for our approval and affection.

"Yes..." I murmured nervously, my nerves on edge. These two children were certainly not ordinary.

"What's your name?" I asked.

The boy whispered, "My name is Ashton Lincoln, and my sister goes by Xandra Carlson. We were given these names by our grandma."

Tears welled up in my eyes. At that moment, I finally grasped Stephanie's mother's true purpose behind setting up this experiment.

In my memory, she would often cry late at night. She believed that Stephanie was destined to have an incomplete life. She mentioned that Stephanie and Steven would not be able to have a healthy child in the future, and the probability of having a child was very low.

With such a low probability, having a healthy child through natural pregnancy was incredibly difficult. Therefore, she most likely wanted Stephanie and Steven to have no regrets in the future.

My heart began beating strangely as I held Ashton in my arms blankly. I couldn't ignore the powerful connection I felt with them. Was this irresistible force simply the result of genetic ties? Perhaps, at that moment, I truly grasped the depth of family love.

When Stephanie lost her parents, she likely already understood the family bond. However, after meeting Ashton and Xandra, who shared the same genes as her and Steven, this feeling started to become more tangible.

My body began to relax as I embraced Ashton tightly in my arms. Just five years old... They were only five years old.

Stephanie's and Steven's blood flowed through their veins. As I listened to Ashton's heartbeat, it felt as though our heartbeats were forming a beautiful symbiotic connection. They might not have come from

my belly, but the feeling was still absolutely incredible.

Probably sensing my relief, Ashton raised his hand and hugged me tightly. "Mom, don't abandon us." Those words had a childish tone, yet they seemed to cause undue oppression. I felt as though Ashton was threatening Steven and me. Since we had met him, we couldn't just abandon him.

Taking a deep breath, I looked at Steven. He was confused as if he still hadn't fully processed the overwhelming joy of becoming a father. Joel seemed to handle it better than Steven, considering Ashton was not his son, after all.

Joel pointed at Ashton, remarking, "At just five years old, he's quite tall..."

Five-year-old Ashton truly stood out in every aspect compared to other children of the same age.

"We can't stay here for long. Let's leave quickly." I stood up and guided Ashton out of the door.

Yara was standing in the corridor, gazing at the rooms lined up one after another. Each door was secured with a password lock, guarding the secrets of what lay beyond.

Chapter 540

"Mom, do you want to get in?" asked Ashton.

"Do you know all the passwords?" I asked with surprise.

Ashton entered the password and gazed at me with longing as if desiring praise. I approached him, gently rubbed his head, and affirmatively praised, "You're truly awesome."

"Mommy, I also know the password. If Ashton can do it, I can do it too!" Xandra exclaimed with her innocent voice while being held by Steven.

I reached out to carry Xandra, holding her in my arms and locking eyes with Steven. What should we do with these two children? Should we take them in as our own?

Steven looked at me with a serious expression. "Being a mother without the physical pain of childbirth is pretty good. The last time you experienced a miscarriage... it terrified me."

The last time, I experienced a miscarriage and lost the baby. It was a very frightening experience for him. "But..." I took a deep breath.

"If you desire to conceive a baby naturally, I'm also willing to put in the effort," Steven replied, his gaze unwavering.

I was speechless and filled with an overwhelming urge to kick him. Wasn't he afraid? Why was I feeling terrified of two five-year-olds...

After the password-protected door opened, I entered the room with Xandra in my arms. The room was nearly identical to theirs, adorned with photos on the wall and children's photographs on the table.

"They're all dead. They were disposed of and most likely thrown directly into the sea," Ashton said calmly.

They appeared to be accustomed to it at such a young age.

"Did those villains force you to... kill each other?" My voice quivered slightly.

Ashton shook his head. "Survival of the fittest. This is the law of nature."

The experimenter used a "survival of the fittest" method by having consecutive games or tests. The winners lived and the losers died. Anyway, the cruise ship sailed in the deep sea, where the endless waters could consume everything.

"Stephany, listen! There's noise in this room," Yara exclaimed as she approached a room.

I carried Xandra over. Ashton whispered urgently, "Don't open this door. There are many large, uncontrolled dogs here. They use them to study biological weapons and then send them to war zones."

Ashton seemed to know everything. He was almost like the Wikipedia of the laboratory.

I looked at Ashton in surprise. The range of profits that this organization was involved in was astonishingly vast. They were willing to do anything, regardless of human ethics. They seemed completely unafraid of facing retribution or karma.

There was a peephole on the door. Eason opened it curiously to peer inside. Suddenly, he smelled a strong unpleasant odor, and a dark figure hit the peephole with a bang!

Eason screamed in fright and almost fell, but Joel grabbed him by the collar. "Curiosity killed the cat. I thought you always mentioned that you'd never be that cat?"

Eason turned pale with fear and looked at Steven and me in horror. "What the hell are those things? Don't

let them escape, or else everyone will die."

Eason's words were a wake-up call for me. The members of Genome Society had to know what was inside. The Rebels had seized control of the entire cruise. If the members of Genome Society were coerced into releasing these creatures, then everyone onboard would be in grave danger.

"Should we destroy them?" I asked quietly.

"Mommy, big dogs are cute," whispered Xandra.

Eason was left speechless, wondering why she had described the creatures as cute.

"Exit the cabin and seal the entrance," Steven instructed as he led us out.

As we ascended the ladder, I caught a glimpse of a mysterious black shadow darting across the cabin. I was immediately alerted.

"There are still people on this floor." My gaze fixed on the empty end, the lights flickering.

Several sounds were heard. Suddenly, that door was opened. A whimpering sound emerged as a big black fierce dog stepped out and stood in the corridor, eyeing us. Its fur was shiny, and its eyes glinted with a sense of menace and aggression.

"Run!" I gasped, assessed the situation, and instantly climbed up the ladder.

Soon, a group of black dogs quickly emerged. They stopped behind the leader, and all of them stared at us. Suddenly, they all charged toward us.

At that critical moment, Joel swiftly pushed Eason up the ladder. "Hurry!"