

## After Death 551

### Chapter 551

Steven sat lazily on the ground, leaning against the wall. "Whoever I am, I'm definitely not your father."

Winston was upset as he felt the urge to shoot at Steven.

"Mr. Thorpe, we can't kill him for now. He knows too much and is likely one of us. My hunch is that he may even be the president of Crowdstar Group. I propose we deliver him to the Rebels in exchange for our escape.

"We have to get out of here before those poor crazy people outside go on a killing spree," Winston's female secretary promptly intercepted him and said anxiously.

Winston thought for a moment. "You're right."

He had acted too impulsively. "Hand him over to the leader of the Rebels to grant us a chance to leave."

"Mr. Thorpe, in that case, we..." Others were panicking.

"What's the rush? I can only rescue you after I leave," Winston deceitfully responded.

"Then what if you never return? So many others trust you." Steven sneered, sowing discord.

"That's right! What if you don't come back?" someone questioned. It was evident that Steven's words had made an impact.

While seated in a wheelchair, Winston stared at the people before him, clutching a gun. "Hmph! If I promised to save you, then I will. And even if I don't return, what can you do? You have no option but to trust me. Only if one of us survives will we find a way out."

He relished being in a position of power and having complete control.

"If you kill him, the person who delivers me to the Rebels will be spared. The opportunity for survival is a rare one." A smile tugged at the corner of Steven's mouth.

Winston fired his gun at Steven, who continuously had a smile on his face. However, the shot only struck Steven's side. Steven remained confident, knowing he wouldn't dare to injure him.

I lay in the vent above and observed everything inside the medical capsule. Upon noticing that Winston had missed the target, my tense heart finally relaxed, and my clenched hands slowly loosened.

I was concerned about Steven being here alone, so I had to keep a close eye on him. I would never allow him to be in danger by himself.

Zion and the others had already gone back to rescue Rachel. As long as they stayed hidden in the room, they should be safe for the time being. Before, we had hidden some food and water, and I had informed Zion and the others to bring them back as well.

Winston pulled the trigger, prompting an eerie silence. However, Steven was acutely aware that the darkest aspects of human nature would be amplified in the pursuit of survival.

Sure enough, after I had hidden in the ventilation duct for less than three hours, they began to fight among themselves. Someone seized the opportunity when Winston's bodyguard was not paying attention. He grabbed the gun and pressed it against Winston's forehead.

This man was also wealthy, a younger rich man who appeared to be about 40 years old.

He sneered. "Winston, you're growing old, and your heart isn't functioning properly. You have just a few days left to live. This opportunity for survival should be left for us."

Winston looked grim as he tightened his grip on his gun. His bodyguards and the other rich man's bodyguards aimed their guns at each other.

Suddenly, a gunshot rang out as the bodyguard next to Steven accidentally fired his gun, causing panic among the others who then opened fire.

In just a moment, the majority of bodyguards with guns were killed. Winston grabbed a gun and shot the person behind him. The other person also fired, and both of them lay in a pool of blood.

Having no one to worry about, Steven seemed to have unleashed his nature. He sat there, a sinister smile adorning his face. With just a few words, all the threats were resolved.

Steven reached out to pick up the bloodstained gun lying on the ground, then stood up and slowly approached the severely wounded Winston.

Winston leaned against the wheelchair, his eyes fixed on Steven with a blend of anger and fear. "Who exactly are you?"

Steven glared at Winston with disdain. "You have no chance of ever knowing my true identity."

"You're not a human being... You're the devil himself..." After uttering those words, Winston passed away.

Winston's female secretary let out a chilling scream, her tears flowing. She crouched on the ground while clutching her head. "Ah! Please don't kill me. I didn't do anything. He made me do it. Please spare my life." Steven aimed the gun at her.

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I felt quite nervous up there, fearing that Steven might actually kill someone. However, he simply gestured with the gun and the secretary fainted from fright.

With a sneer, Steven glanced back at the wealthy individuals who were screaming and taking cover. The remaining bodyguards refrained from acting recklessly and hid together. They were short-staffed, with limited guns and bullets.

More ruthless bloodshed was likely to come, and their chances of survival were uncertain.

Steven stretched his shoulders and extended his hands toward the ventilation duct opening. "Jump down."

In an instant, the anger in his body vanished without a trace as he cast his gaze upon me. He concealed his gun behind his back and smiled at me.

I couldn't help but roll my eyes and ponder when he actually found out about me. A hint of disappointment crept over me as it seemed that I couldn't match his level of intelligence.

I kicked open the ventilation duct, swung my legs, and peered down at Steven. "When did you find out I was here?"

"You're quite noisy up there, not like a little mouse at all." Steven smiled and affectionately joked with me. I snorted.

"I didn't want to deal with them that quickly. I wanted to have more fun. But you're so disobedient..." Steven sighed helplessly, as if powerless against me.

If it were not for me, he would have likely attempted to deliver Winston to the Rebels. He was set on infiltrating the enemy's inner circle. However, my presence made him hesitate as he was unwilling to risk any harm befalling me. It appeared that I was his only uncertainty.

His eyes burned with confidence as he manipulated those people into killing each other with a few words. He possessed an uncanny ability to foresee the course of events, ensuring that everything unfolded exactly as he had predicted, without any missteps.

However, I was the sole exception to his foresight.

My presence made him apprehensive as he feared any harm that might befall me, regardless of its improbability. Even with only a one in ten thousand chance of me getting hurt, he would never dare to wager on that slim possibility.

"Stephie..." he called out to me again.

I put my trust in him and leaped into his arms. I landed securely as he embraced me. Holding onto his neck, I whispered, "Steven, will we die on this cruise?"

He looked down at me. "We won't."

Because he wouldn't allow that to happen to me.

"Are you the president of Crowdstar Group?" I squinted my eyes.

"My hand hurts..." Steven began pretending again.

He carried me out of the medical capsule and refused to let go despite the pain in his hand. The silence outside was absolute, as though the entire floor was devoid of any human presence.

"Steven, there are crazy people outside killing ruthlessly, and you're still flirting here." Jimmy was leaning against the wall around the corner. There was blood on his body, and he was smiling like a lunatic.

"What are you doing here?" I frowned.

"I was waiting for you." Jimmy stepped forward, followed by Una, whose hands and face were stained with blood.

"I've eliminated all the hidden dangers. Let's head to the VIP section to dine in," Una said firmly.

When Una mentioned that she had eliminated those people, she did so without a hint of emotion. It was as if she had simply resolved an exceedingly simple matter.

Unexpectedly, the cruise ship jolted fiercely. A deafening crash reverberated from the outside.

"Attention everyone on the cruise, I urge you to listen closely. Release the hostages immediately and surrender our people. Failure to do so will result in a shipwreck warning." The shout from

outside belonged to none other than the people of Genome Society. They were confronting the Rebels.

"Those lunatics are actually planning to sink the cruise ship," I said with a hint of concern.

Steven appeared very confident. "Not for the time being. Genome Society can't afford to let all the wealthy people of Huma die here, particularly the president of Crowdstar Group."

Jimmy also smiled. "The president of Crowdstar Group is actually the biggest financial supporter of the organization. So, who do you think this person is, Steven?"

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Steven looked at Jimmy and replied very seriously, "Maybe it's your father."

Jimmy was stunned for a moment. "That can't be true. My dad lacks the intellect and capability to do something like that."

If Martin had possessed the ability, it would have been impossible for him to not have acquired the Lincoln Group by now. He even allowed Steven to sell it. I felt the urge to laugh, but I restrained myself and remained silent. Jimmy glanced at the empty corridor and walked ahead of us.

"How did you deal with all those people?" I asked Una curiously.

Una looked sideways at me. "Prey."

High-end hunters appeared as prey. With her striking appearance, Una became the target of their desire. When they were at their most vulnerable, Una systematically outwitted and eliminated them, one by one. "Don't learn from her," Steven warned me firmly, covering my ears to shield me from Una's influence.

I felt helpless because I had used this trick before. I used a knife to attack the man, and Steven broke his hand.

Una shot me a venomous glance as if to question why I hadn't vanished. Indeed, the clones despised each other, each secretly longing to be the one who stood out from the rest.

Jimmy grinned. "The dining area in the VIP section is now open. We can use the room card to go and eat. Steven, where is your room card?"

Steven ignored Jimmy. He grabbed my hand and led me to the accommodation floor.

"Be careful," Una warned as she walked ahead, her senses alert to any movement in front of her. Suddenly, she stopped and glanced down the empty corridor. There was a strong scent of blood ahead.

My breath was taken away as I gazed at the radiant beam of light illuminating the corridor. It was then that I noticed the door to Zion's room was wide open. "It's Zion and the rest!"

I felt my heart drop and ran uncontrollably to the room.

"Stephie." Steven grabbed my wrist, worried that there might still be danger in the room.

He hurriedly entered the room ahead of me, casting a somber gaze upon the disarrayed space.

"Oh, the door was violently opened. It appears that we have a fellow cruise passenger who has the skill of unlocking this type of lock," Jimmy gloated, casually leaning against the door frame.

"Eason and the rest should've been here. How could something have occurred..." I composed myself and cast a nervous glance around. The room was in disarray, yet there were no indications of a fight. It appeared as though it had been thoroughly searched.

I knocked on Eason's door and only heard a whimpering sound. Inside, I found Stan, the killer, tied up by Eason. However, both Eason and Joel were nowhere to be found.

"Perhaps they went out to eat," Una said calmly.

Steven nodded. "They shouldn't have been in the room when the door was forced open and someone trespassed."

Hearing that, I felt more relieved.

Una glanced at me with a disdainful look, mockingly saying, "It's absurd how you can't figure out such a

straightforward scenario. How stupid."

I furrowed my brows and sneered. "What could you, a being without emotions, possibly understand?"

Everyone I cared about was in the room, including Ashton and Xandra. Naturally, I would be scared.

Una walked beside me and whispered in my ear, "Emotions? Emotions will be your weakness, Stephany. You must be cautious, for I will soon replace you."

She wanted to replace me and took everything that belonged to me.

"Okay, I'll wait," I said, defiantly raising my middle finger toward Una.

Una frowned, her expression void of anger. Instead, she adorned a disdainful smile. Afterward, we took the elevator to the VIP dining area. The waiter was verifying the room cards.

Jimmy arrogantly smirked at us, looking like he deserved a beating. "What should I do? I only have one room card."

"Do you understand the importance of respecting those older than you? Of course, you must give the room card to your brother and sister-in-law first." I smiled at him, shook the card in my hand, and handed it to the waiter.

The waiter glanced at the card and allowed Steven and me to enter.

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Jimmy instinctively reached into his pocket, and he was visibly upset. "When did you steal that from me?"

"It was when the intelligent woman beside you started to doubt my intellect." I smiled at Una and guided Steven into the dining area.

"Mom!" Just as I was about to search for Zion, Rachel, and the others, Ashton and Xandra came running toward me and leaped into my embrace.

When Ashton and Xandra didn't reveal their true colors, they appeared adorable. Every passerby would marvel at their beauty. However, I couldn't ignore that behind their outward cuteness, something terrible and uncontrollable lay hidden.

The cruise ship was suddenly hit again and shook violently. I instinctively protected both children in my arms while Steven shielded the three of us.

"Hand over the list of personnel we require or the cruise will sink," shouted the people on the ships following closely outside. They demanded that the Rebels send out the people they requested.

Some passengers rushed to the windows and desperately called out to the ships for help. "Are you here to rescue us? Please, we need your help! Help us!"

They were far too naive. Within Genome Society, there were varying tiers even for the wealthy.

A major sponsor like the president of Crowdstar Group was the first passenger they sought to rescue. They would not easily give up a major sponsor who could provide the organization with multiple small project funds at once. The Rebels were also keenly aware of this.

"There isn't much time left for everyone. Anyone wishing to leave the cruise ship and survive must act quickly to find the president of Crowdstar Group and complete our game," the voice on the broadcast urged again.

This was a powerful motivator. Rescue ships were waiting outside, and the messages on the broadcast would only serve to further agitate everyone.

"Eat quickly and drink water. Conserve your energy." Steven had a bad feeling and urged everyone to eat as soon as possible.

Joel immediately grabbed a big lobster and started eating it. Eason looked at Joel in disgust. Zion cleverly packed some high-calorie food and placed it in Rachel's arms. She sat in a wheelchair and discreetly covered the food with a blanket.

I quickly grabbed two boxes of milk and stuffed them in Ashton's and Xandra's arms. I intended to make a quick exit before chaos ensued.

"That's him! He's the president of Crowdstar Group! He admitted it himself!" Suddenly, someone in the crowd shouted and pointed at Steven.

I frowned and cast a vigilant glance back at the man. He had hurried over from the medical capsule. Sure enough, we had to eliminate the source of the trouble from the beginning.

"Capture him! Hand him over to the Rebels and request them to release us!" Someone took the initiative by creating disturbances.

I glanced at Steven. Eason, Zion, and Joel exchanged glances while Maverick trailed anxiously behind them. Xandra, who had gone to fetch the fruit, also joined us fearfully. Upon her return, she held the hands of the two children.

"Run! Run separately!" I shouted, pulling Steven with me as we fled. Steven and I dashed in opposite directions to avoid bringing trouble upon them.

"Stephie, go back!" Steven insisted I return.

I firmly gripped his wrist. "No way! I won't leave you alone."

We ran into the corridor and were stopped by some people. Steven looked concerned and watched them closely. After experiencing the baptism of killing, their will to survive was now at its highest.

Just as Steven and I believed that this was a battle for our lives, the door behind us opened. A hand pulled us inside before promptly closing and locking the door.

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Steven and I stood leaning against the wall, looking at the person warily. To our surprise, it was actually Michael.

Michael glanced through the peephole. "They're breaking down the door. Someone could pick the lock. It's not safe in this room."

In Michael's room, Yasmin trembled and cowered in the corner, her eyes swollen and teary. "Mike, you shouldn't have saved them. They're nothing but scourge."

I rolled my eyes at her. "Yasmin, I can't believe you're still alive."

Yasmin tightened her grip and glared at me. Ignoring her, I immediately made my way to the balcony." Steven, let's climb up from here to get on the deck."

It was rare that Steven and Michael did not quarrel with each other. Consequently, they pushed the bedside table and coffee table against the door. Yasmin glared at me with resentment but remained silent.

Steven and I ascended to the deck while Michael escorted Yasmin to get ready for the climb. "We must make our way up, or else those people won't let us go."

Yasmin gazed at the unfathomable sea below and shook her head in fear. "Mike, I'm scared."

Michael whispered comforting words, "It's okay, don't look down."

He still expressed gratitude toward her for saving his life.

"If you ignore her, she'll manage to come up," I felt annoyed and exclaimed. Clutching onto the swimming ring at the edge, I attempted to ascend. However, the rope securing the swimming ring suddenly gave way. Just as I was on the verge of falling, a hand from above grabbed me.

Steven heaved a sigh of relief and pushed me. I grasped the hand from above, drawing strength from it to pull myself up. However, I was taken aback to discover that it was Una who had aided me.

She, Jimmy, Zion, and Eason had rushed to the deck with two children and secured the door. For the time being, the deck was safe. However, since we could climb up from the room, our pursuers could easily do so too. It was only a matter of time before they would come up.

"You're nowhere near as competent as me in any aspect. You're nothing but a failed experiment," Una said icily, taking every opportunity to deliver her biting sarcasm. It was clear that she was determined to prove that she was the best among all experimental subjects.

I was too lazy to talk to her and instead directed my gaze toward Steven, whom Zion was helping up." They firmly believe that you're the president of Crowdstar Group, and they won't back down. We can't hide here for long."

Yasmin shouted, her voice piercing through the room. It was evident that the door had been forcefully broken open.

I lay down, took a look, and shouted to Michael, "You come up first and leave her alone!"

Michael glanced at me and still decided to rescue Yasmin. I sighed, realizing that Michael was truly hopeless.

"Michael still has some kindness within him." Zion felt helpless and planned to rescue them.

I stood aside, remained silent, and made no move to help anyone.

"At the very least, you were in a relationship with him before. How could you not want to save him? You're

quite cold-hearted, after all." Una's deliberate provocation was evident in her words. She had explicitly stated that being emotional was a weakness, yet she intentionally said this to irritate me.

"Hah. You're actually the one who shares the same genes with Stephanie. Why don't you go and rescue him?" I gave Una a sarcastic look.

Down in the room, Yasmin was still screaming, crying for someone to save them. "Zion, you're a police officer. You must come down and save us."

Even in this kind of situation, she was still trying to guilt-trip Zion.

Rachel frowned, grasped Zion's arm, and shook her head at him. She didn't want Zion to be in danger. In this life-and-death situation, regardless of one's identity, it was not wrong to not save others.

It was natural to prioritize one's self-preservation, and risking one's life to save others might not seem justifiable. Zion should have understood this truth, yet he still chose to proceed.

Michael was outnumbered as many people rushed into the room at once.

Una stood by the railing and shouted, "Michael! Don't you think it's not worth sacrificing your life for someone who killed Stephanie and took advantage of your kindness too many times?"

Yasmin gazed at Una with a mixture of fear and resentment. "Why are you still around!"

She clearly resented Una, treating her as if she were Stephanie.

"That's right. I died so miserably. I had to return and haunt you for a lifetime. Say, do you think Michael would still want to save you if he learned that you weren't the one who saved his life? Or that he never owed you his life in the first place because it was all a lie?"

Una looked down with her chin raised as if admiring Yasmin's struggle close to death's door.

Yasmin turned pale. "That's not true."

Una smirked. "I didn't expose you before because I found it intriguing,"



Eason found a ladder and wanted to lower it so that Yasmin could climb up first. Otherwise, Zion and Michael would not be able to come up as they would be burdened by her.

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However, Una reached out and snatched the ladder from Eason's hands.

Eason frowned. "What are you doing?"

Jimmy stepped forward and moved her behind him.

Una smiled. "Isn't it interesting? Let's watch on for a while more."

She stood by the barricade and looked at Yasmin. "Do you want to come up?"

"Let us up! The person they're after is Steven. Why should we suffer because of him? Let us up!" Yasmin took a fearful glance at the crowd storming into the room and screamed.

"I'll let you up as long as you tell Michael why you rescued him in the first place." Una seemed to be enjoying this.

Eason was mildly annoyed. "Go have fun somewhere else. Are Zion and Michael still down there? Steven, Joel, get the ladder!" As he was blocked by Jimmy, he could only get Joel and Steven to help.

Steven looked at me. He wouldn't move unless I did. Meanwhile, Joel shrugged before hopping over the barricade.

"Are you crazy?" Eason yelled after him.

"Let me get some exercise in." He rolled his neck and joined the fight, swiftly kicking off a guy who was trying to sneak up on Michael and Zion.

Yasmin was trembling, but she refused to say a word. Someone charged directly at her with a knife in hand. Una watched indifferently as she screamed and cried for help. There was nothing but a hint of amusement in her eyes.

I frowned. I had to admit, this woman was much more ruthless than I was.

"Yell all you want. The ladder is with me, and I'm not satisfied. You can all die down there for all I care," she said uncaringly.

It wasn't until the knife broke Yasmin's skin that she started crying out loud. "You're a monster, you're all monsters!"

Upon seeing that she was in danger, Michael came to her rescue without a care for his own personal safety. I leaned against the barricade and stared at him. Then, I took the ladder from Una and lowered it. "Let her up first."

Michael looked at me before swiftly averting his gaze. Despite reminding himself that I wasn't Stephanie, he still couldn't bring himself to make eye contact with me.

Yasmin scrambled up the ladder before crying on the floor out of fear. Instead of coming up with her, Michael stayed downstairs and rushed to help Zion and Joel.

He was actually... somewhat kind. However, his kindness was always reserved for other people. Stephanie never received any of it.

Either that or all his evilness was directed toward her. He assumed that she could withstand everything he threw at her just because she was inherently evil herself.

"Head up first," he told Zion and Joel.

The three of them were hiding on the balcony. Michael was gripping the glass door with all his might so

that they could climb up.

To be frank, everyone knew that the last person wouldn't be able to make it onto the deck. No matter how fast you climbed the ladder, you couldn't possibly be able to make it all the way up before the crowd rushed out.

He probably wasn't planning on coming up. He was injured, as evident from the blood on his shirt.

As Zion and Joel were going up the ladder, Michael lifted his head to look at me. His gaze was laced with an unexplainable sadness.

"If I told you that it was Stephanie who saved you back then and not Yasmin, would you regret dying here today?" I lowered my head to ask him.

He didn't reply until he was struggling with the door.

"Honestly, I found out a while after Stephanie died. It wasn't Yasmin who saved me--it was her. That's why I'm choosing to punish myself via suicide today."

Once the two had gone up the ladder, Michael loosened his grip. The crowd pushed through the glass door and rushed over to the tiny balcony.

"I was wrong, Michael." Yasmin suddenly stood up while crying, "The person you've been trying to find is your mother. Back then, when I was hiding in Peter Jones' lab, your mother was the organization member who was working with him."

Michael's mother was also a member of Genome Society. "She's the person in charge of the other lab!"

"Please help him. It was me who forced him to protect me. I threatened him with that secret to make him comply.

"He really loved Stephanie. He was only willing to continue living to help her discover the truth behind everything," Yasmin begged as she cried.

She was begging me and Steven to save Michael.

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The crowd swarmed onto the balcony, and Michael was no match for so many people. The blood stains on his shirt gradually increased. I couldn't tell if it was from his own blood or the blood of others.

I stood on the deck and averted my gaze. Even though I didn't love him anymore, it seemed like I couldn't just watch him die either.

Steven shot me a glance before turning to the rabid crowd below. "His mother is on one of the rescue ships. If you kill him, there's no way you're getting off this ship even if you do manage to find the president of Crowdstar Group."

After his words, the people immediately stopped what they were doing.

"Don't listen to his bullshit. That guy is definitely the president. I say we kill this one first before we go up and get him. Then, we'll turn him in in exchange for our freedom!"

"Yeah, let's kill him first!"

"If you insist on killing him, you're welcome to try. But then, none of you will be getting off the cruise," Steven replied blankly.

The air was still. The people shot glances at each other, but no one could bring themselves to do anything before the rest did. It was better to be safe than sorry. Hence, none of them wanted to make any rash decisions.

"What now?" someone asked the leader.

The leader in question frowned. He didn't lift his head to look at Steven. "Are you really the president of Crowdstar Group?"

Steven let out a scoff. "Even if I am, why would I tell you?"

The man's expression was sour. "Who cares? We'll just hand him in first so that we can get off this damned cruise."

"I'm aware that everyone wants to get out of here alive. However, at the rate we're killing each other, have you ever thought that we'll all just end up dead? They wouldn't even have to do anything," Steven said again.

Everyone shot each other a glance.

He continued, "I know you all have family waiting for you at home. If you kill him today, you'll end up getting killed by his men tomorrow. This is a vicious cycle. How on earth are you so sure that you'll survive till the end?"

His words left them all at a loss for words.

"What should we do, then? If we don't do as they say and rescue doesn't come soon enough, we'll all die of starvation.

"Even if we don't starve to death on this ship, we'll get killed for our room keys. We have no other choice either we just want to get out of here alive." The leader looked at Steven.

"If you can trust me, I'll give you another choice. Bring him up the deck and try to get the attention of the rescue ships.

"If they don't come for him, you can kill him. But chances are, they'll be in a rush to negotiate with the Rebels." According to Steven's guess, Michael's mother would definitely be on one of the organization's rescue ships that were nearby.

Michael shot Steven a glare. Was he trying to save him or get him killed? In his opinion, Steven was probably trying to use this opportunity to get back at him.

The crowd of people listened to Steven. Some of them approached Michael and put a knife against his neck. "Don't try anything funny. Go up."

Michael kept his eyes behind him cautiously and slowly went up the ladder. Then, Eason and Zion pulled him up.

Just as the people below were about to come up to the deck, Steven withdrew the ladder.

Seething, the people glared at him. "You tricked us?"

He just smiled in response. "All's fair in war. You shouldn't put your trust in anyone in situations like this.

Eason and Zion were equally stunned. They looked at Steven in shock.

"You tricked them? I thought you were telling the truth. I thought we were saved and was so happy about it too. You big liar."

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Joel, on the other hand, was used to Steven's antics at this point.

"Are you two idiots?" He laughed. "Even if Michael's mother was someone from Genome Society, she wouldn't ever reveal her identity, let alone Michael's. Do you think they'll still keep Michael alive if they found out that his mother was involved?"

After the realization dawned on them, Eason and Zion both shot Steven irritated looks. He had fooled everyone yet again, and he managed to rescue Michael with just a few sentences.

The people at the bottom were glaring at him furiously. They wanted to climb up, but it was extremely difficult to do so without a ladder.

"How long do you think you can hide up there? You'll have to come down eventually. Just you wait, I'll make you regret what you did!"

Then, the leader left with the rest of the crowd.

Yasmin was still sobbing. When Michael came up, she rushed to embrace him while crying violently. He promptly pushed her away, causing her to stare at him in mild panic.

Michael drew a deep breath. "We had an agreement, Yasmin. You would tell me what you know, and in return, I'd guarantee your safety.

"Now that you've revealed everything, I'll do my best to keep you safe-just like we agreed on. However, there's nothing else between us."

Her eyes welled up with tears as she shook her head. "Do you really not love me at all, Michael? Was everything really just an act you put on for Stephanie?"

She wasn't willing to give up, but Michael's tone was firm.

He replied, "Yes, I've never loved you. I'll admit that I was interested in you, but that interest stemmed from gratitude. However, that was all a misunderstanding. I thought you were the one who saved me. As it turns out, you lied to me."

Dejected, she slumped onto the floor. She knew that Michael had never loved her.

Una laughed mockingly as she gradually approached Yasmin. "After all that calculation and getting Stephanie killed, you still didn't manage to get what you were after. How pitiful."

Yasmin sat listlessly on the ground like a soulless puppet.

Michael turned around to look at Steven before saying, "Thank you."

I couldn't believe that he had just thanked him.

Steven ignored him. I was aware that he didn't actually want to save him.

"We should think about how to survive from here on out." Zion looked toward the deck and sighed.

"The waves are getting rougher. When the storm hits, we won't be able to spend the night on deck," Eason added nervously.

"At this point, we only have one option. I'll meet with those people as the president of Crowdstar Group," Steven declared.

"No!" I was frantically opposed to it. I was vehemently against it. I clutched his hand, not allowing him to take the risk.

"Are you actually the president?" Jimmy asked with a curious smile.

Steven looked at him. "To be honest, you look more like him than I do. Why don't you go instead? Sacrifice yourself to save everyone else. We'll all remember this heroic act with immense gratitude."

Jimmy wiped the grin off of his face. "Never mind... I'm not a saint."

"Who's the actual president, then? How mysterious." Eason was still curious.

"Based on the current situation, I can only buy all of you time if I go ahead and pose as him." Steven waved his hand at us.

They wouldn't kill him—at least not before his hand had healed.

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"I don't agree with this." Holding Steven's hand, I laid my head on his chest, making my upset clear. "I'm selfish. I don't want you to risk your life."

He rubbed my head and laughed. "Alright, anything you say."

I let out a breath of relief. Fortunately, he still listened to me.

"Mom, they locked the door from both sides." Ashton ran back over.

Then, he reached for our hands before continuing, "That passageway isn't locked, though." He pointed toward the vent in the corner.

Steven and I exchange glances.

So many of us were stuck on the deck right now. Rachel was still recovering from her injuries, and Xandra was just a feeble celebrity. Maverick wasn't really adept in self-defense, and that son of the Sacco family was nothing but a burden.

"We can't stay here for long. By locking the doors from the inside, they're planning to let us die out here. They're making us surrender by depriving us of food and water," Zion said, looking toward the direction of the vent.

"We could send some people through the vent to get food and water downstairs." Zion looked toward everyone.

Who could possibly want to volunteer?

"I'll go," he said unprompted. As a police officer, he was always at the forefront.

I didn't say a word. I just kept holding onto Steven's hand. He was a wanted target at the moment, and I was afraid that he'd get discovered.

"If we hand him over to the Rebels, we could at least gain a chance to leave. What if he's actually the president?" Yasmin suggested emotionally. "Even if we have food, how long can we actually survive on this deck?"

"Shut up!" I shot her a warning glare.

"I'll go. I'll go with you," Michael offered.

"Michael... you're hurt." Yasmin shook her head. "They're the ones who were being hunted. We were doing just fine in our room. If we hadn't saved them in the first place, we wouldn't be in this situation right now."

Michael frowned. "This has nothing to do with what you said."

Her expression soured, and tears continued to well up in her eyes as she lowered her head.

"She's right. What if he's actually the president of Crowdstar Group? He could actually be our ticket to freedom. Think about all the clues provided. The president is a genius and is typically withdrawn. No matter how you look at it, he fits the description," said Uma with a smile.

"There are at least five geniuses on this deck right now. All of them are quite reclusive and atypical too. Don't you also fit the description? How about we hand you over instead?" I stepped in front of Steven protectively.

They were clearly trying to sacrifice Steven.

"Five geniuses? Where?" Joel asked smugly.

"Steven, her, Una, and me?" Eason was rather confident.

"I wasn't referring to you." I shot him an apologetic look.

He grunted and sat to the side without another word.

Joel laughed before teasing him, "You're still quite smart, though."

Eason rolled his eyes at him.

"Among all the people here, he's the only one who didn't go through the safe verification," Una said again, trying to go against me.

She was attempting to provoke everyone.

"Personally, I think we shouldn't be turning on each other. Even if the president is someone among us, we should still work together," Dayton said weakly. However, he was practically invisible, so no one paid him any mind.

"Save it. We're all in the same boat here. Who else is willing to go get food for everyone?" Zion looked at everyone.

"I-I'll go," Dayton said softly.

Zion ignored him.

"Who else?"

Joel raised an eyebrow. "I'll go."

Zion nodded. "The rest can wait on the deck. Try to look for shelter from the storm while we go look for something to eat. Stay safe."

"Only the three of you are going? That's awfully dangerous. There are people camping downstairs," Maverick said in a small voice.

"I'll go as well," said Eason.

Steven shot me a glance. I shook my head. He was being targeted at the moment, so going down there would be dangerous.

After the group of them went down through the vent, we started searching the deck for cover.

"Everyone find a spot and get some rest." Jimmy pointed at the corner. "We'll take turns keeping watch. Notify everyone beforehand if you have any issues."

I gripped Steven's hand tightly. "Don't do anything on your own."

He nodded in response.

"Are you hungry, Stephy? Why haven't any of you had something to eat?" Rachel fished out some bread from under her blanket and handed it to me.

I smiled before asking the two children, "Are you two hungry?"

They both shook their heads.

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"You must be tired. Have some bread and go get some sleep," Steven comforted me.

I nodded and gave him some of the bread. After I was done eating, I leaned against his chest and fell asleep.

Zion and the group still hadn't returned, and everyone was feeling extremely tense. When the sun set, the deck was cold.

Steven held me tightly.

Just then, a light rattling rang out against the violent wind and currents.

Ashton and Xandra cautiously stared into the darkness. Then, they whispered next to my ear, "Mom, Dad, someone is opening the door to the deck."

Their hearing was impressive. I immediately jolted awake and scanned the deck alertly. Everyone was here. "Wait! Maverick. Where's Maverick?" I got to my feet. Me and Steven rushed to stop him, but we were too late.

Maverick had opened the door to the deck. Soon, a hoard of people rushed over.

He looked at us guiltily. "I'm sorry... I need to find the president of Crowdstar Group. I want to go home..." He wanted to live.

Steven stepped in front of me protectively and threw cautious glances at the crowd of people. The leader of the group chuckled as he came over.

"All's fair in war... Here's a taste of your own medicine."

"You approached us with ulterior motives from the very beginning?" I questioned Maverick.

"The men who were killing people in the hallway were one of us." The leader laughed. "Steven Lincoln, I had reason to suspect that the president was you. Hence, I put on a show and got Maverick to approach you guys."

He laughed again. "Do you still remember me, Steven?"

I looked at Steven. His expression was dark, but he was still shielding me from the crowd. "Dr. Nigel Scott from the asylum."

It was a resident doctor who was involved in his treatment at the asylum.

Nigel nodded before looking at Maverick. "Is he the president of Crowdstar Group?"

Maverick shook his head. "We only suspect so. Other people think it's him too, but we're not sure." Nigel looked back at Steven. "He's the prime suspect. I already have everyone else who's somewhat clever under control. If we hand you in along with them, the president is sure to be someone in the mix."

He and his men had been searching for the president from the group of people with injured palms. They had already eliminated most of the ones with the lowest likelihood. Any remaining person who matched the description had been handed over to the Rebels in exchange for freedom.

Now, everyone was waiting for the wounds on their palms to heal. As soon as that happened, they could run the verification on the safe. Then, they'd be able to find the president.

"I'll go with you, but let the rest of them go. If not, I'll make sure you never find the president of Crowdstar Group," Steven said emotionlessly before briefly turning to look at me.

Frowning, I anxiously gripped my hands. With the number of people in the opposition, this was not the time to turn things physical.

"So you are the president, then?" Nigel smiled.

"You'll know when my hand heals," Steven responded confidently.

Nigel already had his suspicions about him. Hence, upon hearing his words, he began nodding with a grin. "Take them all away and lock them in a room."

He instructed his men to lock us in a room. Steven, on the other hand, was going to be brought to the Rebels.



"Take me with you." I stood next to Steven. I didn't want to be separated from him.

"Do as I say. You still need to look after the kids." He shook his head at me.

"Mom doesn't want you to leave, Dad." Ashton ran over and hugged him.

"Take care of your mother," Steven instructed solemnly.

Ashton nodded. Then, he asked, "Are you going because you want to, Dad?"

Steven gave him a nod.

Ashton only released him after that confirmation. It felt as though the people were nothing to be afraid of if Steven was going of his own volition.

"Dad will be okay, Mom. I'll protect you guys." He turned around and patted me to ease my worries. I took a deep breath. For the first time ever, I felt safe because of a child.