

## After Death 571

### Chapter 571

"Stephie? Stephie..." I heard Steven's familiar voice calling my name hoarsely while I was in a trance.

I gradually regained my focus, unveiling a clear image of the person beside me. It was Steven. He was like a shining light, guiding me through dark times. He was like my remedy, infusing me with motivation and hope to carry on.

"Steven..." I whispered, shaking my head. It was only when I fully regained consciousness that I realized our current situation.

I was thrown beside Steven. We were surrounded by "suspects" with wounded hands who might be the president of Crowdstar Group. We were all locked up in an operating room within the medical capsule.

As I counted, there were 13 people in total, including Steven. It was evident that the lunatics had meticulously chosen the most likely 13 from a pool of over 300 passengers. Clearly, they were confident that the president of Crowdstar Group was among these 13 individuals.

"Are you experiencing any discomfort in any part of your body?" Steven nervously glanced at me and proceeded to examine my head.

Being knocked unconscious was painful, but it was not a big deal. "I'm fine."

I embraced him and rested in his arms to reassure him. "Let me rest in your arms for a moment."

Steven dutifully leaned against the wall on the floor, allowing me to find solace in his embrace.

"Steven, you're the president of Crowdstar Group, right?" I asked in a hushed tone.

I was a little worried. Once his hand was healed and the Rebels knew who he was, he would be in a dilemma. Genome Society wouldn't fully trust him, and neither would the Rebels. By then, all of Steven's plans would be disrupted.

Steven still didn't give me a direct answer. Instead, he gently rubbed my head. "Don't be afraid."

"Ewan is a member of the Rebels. You already knew that, didn't you?" I asked again.

Steven was incredibly intelligent. He undoubtedly knew that Ewan was a member of the Rebels. Steven glanced at me, clearly intending to speak but ultimately gestured for us to remain silent. We had to be cautious and not trust anyone because we never knew who might be listening.

Our only reliable source of trust was each other.

"I found the murderer who killed Stephanie," I informed Steven, my voice hoarse with emotion.

Steven's body noticeably stiffened, and his breathing quickened as he looked at me. "Who is it?"

"The creator of this Death Cruise and the mastermind behind the serial killings. She's also the leader of the Rebels. She wears a human-skin mask and has a hoarse voice like someone with vocal cord damage. I didn't see her face, but I saw the birthmark on her arm," I explained softly.

Observing the change in Steven's eyes, it was clear that he was completely unaware of it. Steven's eyes blazed with anger as he struggled to maintain a calm appearance. However, the pulsing veins on his forehead and temples revealed his true emotions.

I remembered Steven's vow to find the person who took Stephanie's life. And now, he had found the murderer.

"I'll kill her," uttered Steven in a hushed tone, indifferent to whether the perpetrator was a man or a woman.

"The law will bring her to justice. She has killed so many people, and the police possess undeniable evidence. She'll surely be punished with a death sentence." I gently closed my eyes, resting in Steven's embrace.

"No... What if she also has a mental illness?" Steven asked me, his head hanging low. His breathing was a little rapid as if he already knew her identity.

## Chapter 572

When I mentioned that the murderer was a woman, Steven was noticeably shocked.

"Do you know who she is?" I asked Steven, my gaze locking on him.

The door opened right as Steven was about to talk. A group of individuals dressed as doctors entered the room, attending to the injured hands of the people present. Almost everyone's wounds had already healed, so there was no issue with proceeding with the safe unlocking test.

However, Steven had a more severe hand injury that looked quite gruesome. The doctor and nurse administered medicine to him. "Make sure to keep the wound dry and avoid scratching it. This will help it heal faster."

But Steven appeared unwilling to let the injury heal quickly.

The masked woman at the door said in a strange voice, "Bleeding again, Steven? Using this method to buy yourself more time?"

She was still in disguise. Steven locked eyes with her, the murderous intent and anger in his gaze intense.

She smiled and turned her gaze toward me. "It appears she has informed you of everything. You must want to kill me now."

Steven moved swiftly, catching everyone off guard as he reached out and strangled her neck. His sheer strength caused her face to immediately flush red as her features contorted in agony.

But she didn't beg for mercy. Instead, she wore a strange smile. "Steven, you're so pathetic... You'll never be with your loved one, just like me..."

Steven's arm muscles were tense, and he continued to tighten his grip around her neck. If he had just done it for one more second, he might have been able to break her neck. However, the other Rebels had already aimed their guns at my head. They threatened him, "Release her, or we'll kill this woman."

Steven turned around and gazed at the Rebels with an icy demeanor. He feared they might genuinely harm me. Hence, he released her. He did not dare to take risks as long as I was involved. He wholeheartedly offered his all for me.

"Steven!" They seized the chance to punch Steven in the stomach and proceeded to beat him relentlessly. Steven remained on the ground without fighting back while they beat him as I was still under their control. "Steven!" I forcefully pushed away the armed man beside me and quickly moved forward to shield Steven. He was always silly. He should know these people wouldn't really shoot me.

The masked woman glanced down at us, a contemptuous smile on her face. "Hah... Steven, stop acting smart and playing tricks. If I don't see your wound fully healed by tomorrow, I'll kill her."

The masked woman pointed at me and said in a low, threatening tone, "If I was able to kill her once, I can do it again. If you don't believe me, go ahead and try it."

Steven clenched his hands tightly, seething with anger like a wild beast ready to tear her apart. I hugged him tightly, knowing this wasn't the moment for a direct confrontation. They were armed. Despite Steven's strength, he was no match for a bullet.

"Enjoy your final moments. If you're the president of Crowdstar Group, you'll die too," said the masked woman in a low voice before turning to leave.

"Steven..." I anxiously examined the wounds on his body.

Steven held my hand and shook his head.

"Dude, are you the president of Crowdstar Group? If so, please confess now and don't involve us in this situation. We were brought here for no reason."

"That's right. We don't know anything."

The others started causing a commotion, demanding that Steven turn himself in. They were afraid that if he wasn't the president of Crowdstar Group, these lunatics would kill them directly.

"He isn't..." I tried to explain furiously.

Steven suddenly shouted toward the door, "I am. I'm the president of Crowdstar Group. I agree to all your requests, but you must release my wife and these people."

## Chapter 573

Outside the door, the masked woman paused and retraced her steps. She scrutinized Steven intently. "Did you claim to be the president of Crowdstar Group?"

Steven frowned and remained silent.

She suddenly laughed. "The more you say that, the less I believe it. Once your hand is healed, we'll conduct the safe test tomorrow. If you're truly the president of Crowdstar Group, I'll release them. If you're not, I'm afraid everything invaluable will be destroyed."

Steven glared at her, his hands tightly clenched.

I tightly grasped Steven's arm. As soon as the masked woman left, I hugged him and whispered, "Steven, regardless of whether you're the president of Crowdstar Group or not, you can't be him, do you understand?"

His identity could not be exposed at this time. I was able to confirm that Steven was the president of Crowdstar Group from the moment his hand was injured.

In addition, Steven must have discreetly arranged for someone to be aboard this cruise. Nevertheless, I was completely unaware of their true identities.

Steven stared at me intently. He understood exactly what I meant.

After years of lurking, Genome Society had remained vigilant. Even though Steven had become a powerful backer, they continued to suspect him. Steven still failed to establish real contact with the organization's top leaders.

The cruise game was not only for the Rebels to find the president of Crowdstar Group but also for Genome Society to test the president's credibility. If Steven was confirmed as the president, Genome Society would abandon the lives of everyone on the cruise. It was because they didn't trust him.

Steven was willing to do anything for Stephanie, no matter how crazy it was. Hence, he simply couldn't afford to fail at this time.

At that moment, Steven eventually calmed down and embraced me. "Stephie..."

He didn't say anything else and simply whispered my name. I rested my head on his shoulder, and in that instant, I no longer had any concern for my own identity. All I desired was to reciprocate his intense emotions.

I loved him unconditionally, whether I was Stephanie or not. And if I were indeed Stephanie, it would be even more wonderful. If I wasn't, then I would shamelessly embrace living as Stephanie.

"Stephie..." he persistently called my name, contemplating the unspoken secrets in his heart. I could see how hard he must have worked all these years, building his business quietly in private. He must have endured a lot of grievances.

"Are you tired?" Steven asked me softly, and I nodded.

"Go to sleep." He held me in his arms.

I fell asleep on him. The room was quiet, and everyone was in a heavy mood, as if there would be no

tomorrow.

I fell asleep in a daze. In my dreams, I saw Ashton and Xandra. The two pure-hearted children were holding my and Steven's hands.

In my dream, I observed everything from my point of view. I watched with pure delight as our family ran and flew kites together in the vast grassland. The children were innocent, their eyes as pure as they should be at that age.

Steven was dressed casually, without scars on his body. His bright smile and handsome face could light up any room. As he held me in his arms, we both basked in the warmth of the sun.

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A happy and simple life was what we yearned for. However, even something so simple felt like a luxury to

us.

I must have cried in my dream because my hair was drenched with tears. Someone tenderly wiped away my tears and kissed my forehead. As I gradually opened my eyes, I saw Steven. And just like that, my dreams ceased to be nightmarish.

## Chapter 574

I stretched and turned over. Nestling in Steven's arms, I drifted back to sleep. He gently patted my back." Did you have a nightmare?"

"No, I had a wonderful dream," I whispered.

The dream was beautiful but even more painful than a nightmare. I didn't know if we could experience such a peaceful moment in our lives.

"Sleep a little longer." As I was about to go back to sleep, a group of people abruptly entered the room. "Today is the public execution. Everyone is welcome. Have fun!"

The riots outside persisted. Class conflicts were instigated between the poor and the rich. People who could not afford food and those who could afford it began to fight and physically attack each other. Many people were seriously injured or trampled to death.

We were escorted out of the medical capsule and led to the central stage of the VIP banquet hall. It was there that the safe was placed. Everyone in the banquet hall had gathered, eagerly waiting to find out who the true president of Crowdstar Group was.

At this moment, everyone fell silent and looked upward.

"Will you let us go if one of these people we sent is the president of Crowdstar Group?" asked Maverick and the others loudly.

The masked woman looked over with an enigmatic smile. "Of course."

She could release them, but she didn't have to guarantee their survival. I frowned, finding Maverick quite pathetic. It was true, as he had stated, that he was simply driven by the desire to stay alive.

"The game is nearing its end. Once we find the president of Crowdstar Group, I assure you, everyone will be able to return to shore," said the masked woman with a chilling smile.

She raised her hand, and the person next to me was brought over. His hands and head were pressed down for palm print and iris comparison.

"Error, error," the alarm of the safe blared.

The first man was not the president. The masked woman aimed at the man and fired without hesitation. At that moment, she was too indifferent. There was no hint of respect for life in her eyes as she effortlessly ended a man's life.

"Mr. President of Crowdstar Group, remember that these people died because of you. If you keep hiding and refuse to come out, more lives will be lost," said the masked woman with a smile, her eyes locked on Steven.

However, she refused to let Steven try first and insisted on pointing to the next person. She behaved like a terrifying demon, capable of effortlessly ending someone's life.

At the sight of the first person's lifeless body, the second person trembled and collapsed to the ground, pleading, "Please spare my life. Please... I'm not the president..."

However, he was still taken for the test.

"Error." It was clear he was not the president. The masked woman fired another shot, and the man fell to the ground.

Everyone there was tense as they watched. People's lives were at stake. Those were all living human beings. I glared at her, feeling angry. She was so cold-blooded and without emotion, and she hated me. I wondered if she was also an experimental subject.

Then, I glanced at Una, who remained indifferent to everything. Only an experimental subject could be so heartless.

"I'll do it!" Steven said seriously and took the initiative to step forward.

I gazed at Steven nervously. Could it be that after dedicating himself for so many years, he was going to end up being discovered?

## Chapter 575

The masked woman grinned and gestured to Steven to step forward. "If you're not the one, I'll kill you directly."

She appeared to be waiting for Steven to fail at unlocking the safe so that she could kill him. I clenched my hands tightly as I stared at the masked woman. At that moment, I struggled to figure out how to ensure Steven's survival.

Down below, Zion, Eason, Joel, and the others were also nervously watching the scene.

"Now, if the real president of Crowdstar Group steps forward, all these lives can still be saved. Otherwise, everyone here will die," the masked woman declared, her eyes sweeping across the entire crowd.

The president of Crowdstar Group must have been aboard the cruise ship. If he wasn't among the people on stage, then he had to be down below. All eyes were fixed on the stage. Everyone was scared. The large banquet hall that was full of people suddenly became very quiet.

"Okay. Go ahead," the masked woman gestured toward the safe and instructed Steven to unlock it.

I glanced anxiously at Steven as I took a deep breath. He placed his palm on the safe, and the alarm was not triggered. Everyone watched Steven with anticipation, hoping that he was the one they were searching for.

Sacrificing Steven alone might be the solution to save everyone. After all, humans were often filled with negativity and darkness.

"Iris." The Rebels wouldn't dare to directly attack Steven. His presence was overpowering and terrifying. Steven then glanced toward the iris verification.

"Beep... Error! Error!" The safe emitted a loud buzzing alarm.

It wasn't a match. I gazed at Steven in disbelief. Wasn't he the president of Crowdstar Group? Now, even I wasn't sure.

The masked woman and the Rebels were visibly astonished as well. They glanced around, attempting to identify the president of Crowdstar Group. In stark contrast to the others, Steven remained unfazed, standing confidently and unruffled.

"You're playing tricks on us." The masked woman was angry and pointed her gun at Steven.

Steven regarded her with a frigid stare, his eyes brimming with desolation. He assumed that she would not dare to pull the trigger.

I tried to move forward in a panic, but the Rebels stopped me. I looked at Steven in fear, worried that the madwoman would actually shoot him. Thankfully, she didn't. She looked at Steven, her arms shaking for some reason. Then, she lowered the gun. She didn't kill Steven, but it wasn't because she was afraid.

Ewan stepped forward and grabbed the masked woman's wrist to stop her from shooting wildly. "It appears that Steven isn't the president of Crowdstar Group. I suggest you don't go too far."

The masked woman glared angrily at Ewan, appearing out of control. She seemed conflicted, as if she hoped that Steven would be the president of Crowdstar Group but at the same time dreaded the possibility.

"Keep going, everyone else!" The masked woman shrugged off Ewan's hand and gestured toward the remaining people.

Those people were all sitting on the ground in fear, their faces pale. Ewan frowned, realizing that the masked woman was losing her mind. As expected, she continuously killed another two people.

"That's enough," Ewan warned sternly.

I grabbed Steven's arm and cast a wary glance at the madwoman. Her behavior was truly unhinged. Steven furrowed his brows and turned to Ewan. However, he didn't look at Steven and just stood in front of the

woman.

The woman gazed down with a look of madness in her eyes. "I know you're on the cruise. If you refuse to come out now, I'll continue to kill the passengers."

After saying that, she pointed the gun at me. I knew she truly wanted to kill me, but she had some reservations. Steven looked at her angrily and stood in front of me to protect me.

"Is she really that important to you?" the masked woman asked, her voice filled with madness.

Steven didn't answer her. His actions had already revealed everything to her.

"In that case, I'll let you die for her!" the masked woman yelled at Steven as she prepared to shoot.

I was utterly terrified, my heart racing.

"Stop the killing!" A sharp, trembling voice came from the crowd at this moment.

Everyone turned to look. Amidst the crowd, Dayton was visibly shaking, his eyes filled with tears. "Stop the killing. I'm the president of Crowdstar Group. I built the business from the ground up without my family's knowledge and founded Crowdstar."

## Chapter 576

Dayton's voice trembled as he spoke. All eyes turned toward him, but only a few truly believed his words. Dayton had previously taken a stand for that woman and claimed that he was the president. However, he had already taken the test and failed.

"You're way too kind." The masked woman snorted coldly before redirecting her gaze toward Steven, intending to resume shooting.

"It's really me!" Dayton pushed everyone aside and walked forward.

We all observed as he went up the stage. He peeled off a film from his palm and proceeded to remove contact lenses that resembled cosmetic ones from his eyes. Positioning his hand on the safe, he then aligned his eyes.

"The match is successful, unlocking..."

Everyone was in shock as they looked at Dayton. I was also taken aback. He seemed like a frail scion, incapable of looking after himself. It was unbelievable that he could hide so effectively. He even knew how to protect himself and blend in among the crowd.

"Crowdstar is my property, but I didn't want anyone to know that. I sensed there might be danger today. My initial intention was to protect my property and keep my existence a secret," Dayton lowered his head and said in a hushed tone.

I was surprised as I glanced at Dayton. I then turned to Steven. Steven remained silent, simply holding my hand. If it was Dayton, that would be the best result.

The Sacco family indeed held influential power in Huma. It was quite plausible that they covertly backed Dayton to become the president of Crowdstar Group.

"I've had autism since I was a child. I was born with it. It's not very severe, but I don't like to communicate with people and prefer to hide. My father and grandfather found it embarrassing and wanted to keep it a secret.

"They pushed me to socialize like a normal person, but I just wanted to hide. It would be best if no one knew me," Dayton murmured, looking down at the ground.

Indeed, he seemed quite autistic. Below the stage, the wealthy people were astonished. Dayton, the seemingly unassuming scion, was the president of Crowdstar Group. It was a true testament to the fact that one should not judge a person by one's appearance.

"He's so uninteresting and too kind. I can't believe that he's actually a genius."

"The president of Crowdstar Group is a young genius."

"Then it's a match. But what's the point of being a genius? You also need to have an influential father. The Sacco family is undoubtedly one of the most exceptional in Huma. They gave their son



the chance to start a business with several hundred million, which gives him a much better chance of success than us."

Many people were already discussing the situation beneath the stage. Genome Society's ship had already approached the cruise ship from the moment the safe was opened, and their people had already boarded the ship. They had been eagerly awaiting this moment.

"They're on board," Ewan said, his voice filled with caution as his gaze turned toward the outside.

The masked woman was intent on killing more people, but Ewan stopped her. "You've already set the wolfhounds loose from the underground lab cabin. We can't remain on this cruise. We need to leave as soon as possible!"

The masked woman glared at me and Steven, her reluctance palpable. She must've thought that it was a pity Steven wasn't revealed as the president of Crowdstar Group.

"What happened?" I inquired Steven gently.

Steven shook his head. "I'll explain it to you after we leave."

I agreed. "We have to protect Dayton no matter what."

However, Ewan and the masked woman brought Dayton along when they left. After all, he was the president of Crowdstar Group, a person coveted by both Genome Society and the Rebels.

"Someone is on board to save us!" the crowd erupted in cheers.

Little did they know, these people were not here to rescue them. Their intentions only revolved around saving Dayton, the president of Crowdstar Group and their primary financial sponsor.

As the excitement grew and the Rebels prepared to retreat, a biting sound could be heard coming from outside the door of the banquet hall.

"Wolfhounds! They eat people! They're monsters created on this cruise!"

"Help!"

There was chaos on the scene again, with people screaming and fleeing. The Rebels planned to reveal all the scandals on the cruise. Members of Genome Society had come to kill them, but the Rebels had taken Dayton away. This wasn't the end.

These passengers would not receive any rescue because Genome Society wanted them to die at sea more than the Rebels.

I had a bad feeling as I anxiously glanced at Steven. It was clear that these people came on board to kill everyone while pinning the blame on others. Their ultimate goal was to ensure that no one would escape alive.

## Chapter 577

Outside the banquet hall, there were screams and sounds of wild beasts biting.

"Where are you taking me?" Dayton was dragged out.

I quickly pulled Steven aside and signaled the others to find cover. "Hide! Quickly!"

After I finished speaking, members of Genome Society on the cruise started shooting. They killed people without discrimination, shooting anyone they saw. Everyone screamed in fear and fled in different directions. Shortly after, the banquet hall was filled with blood.

Everyone ran out crying because there were wild animals outside and mercenaries inside. They were here to completely wipe out everything.

Zion protected Rachel as they sought refuge under the table. Rachel held Ashton and Xandra close while using her hand to cover Yara's mouth. She was afraid that Yara would scream again.

On the other hand, Eason and Joel shielded Xandra Zander and took cover under the long table. The palpable scent of blood in the banquet hall heightened everyone's anxiety.

"They took Dayton away," I whispered.

Steven gestured for me to stay quiet. Now, Genome Society would eradicate all those insignificant people. The person they deemed valuable was none other than Dayton.

Several rich people were not convinced and still thought that they were valuable to Genome Society." Where's your leader? I demand to see him. Tell him we're all from Zadiff Group, and I'm Yaniel Zabel."

"That's right. We're all members of Genome Society." Those people truly believed that they would be included on the rescue list. But this cruise contained too many secrets of Genome Society. They would never allow the people on the cruise to leave alive.

"Capture them alive and eliminate the others." The leader held a tablet and compared them with the photos displayed on it.

I glanced at the corner and spotted the clever ones in hiding while the foolish ones were eager to negotiate with them. Michael shielded Una and took cover behind the air conditioner. Meanwhile, Jimmy did not attempt to hide, displaying remarkable confidence.

"They're not on the list," stated the leader as he checked his tablet. Without hesitation, he opened fire on them. The victims lay in a pool of blood, horrified.

"Dispose of their bodies in the sea to eliminate all evidence. Let's locate the people we're searching for before the arrival of the rescue ship. Then, we'll detonate and sink the ship," the leader commanded in a resolute tone.

The leader looked back at Jimmy and compared him to the photo. "Mr. Lincoln, you may board the rescue ship now."

"I want to bring someone along," Jimmy said firmly.

The leader fell silent and stepped to the side to seek guidance. After a brief moment, he returned and asked, "Who is it?"

Jimmy gazed at Una. "Come here. Don't be afraid."

Una came out from under the table. Jimmy had directly revealed Michael's hiding spot. Michael frowned and looked at the mercenaries warily.

The leader compared Una to the photo on his tablet and nodded in approval. "You can bring her on board. Madam is waiting for you."

The woman known as "Madam" was the leader of Genome Society who oversaw this operation. Una frowned as he glanced at the leader's tablet. Then, she felt relieved and made her way out with Jimmy. Meanwhile, Michael simply stopped hiding and walked out.

"Mr. Ford, you may board first. Madam is waiting for you," the leader spoke again.

Michael was momentarily taken aback, slightly startled to find himself on the list. In a curious tone, he inquired, "Who's on the list?"

The leader showed Michael the photos, and Michael took a deep breath. Upon seeing that there were three more people on the list, he asked, "Can I take them with me, then?"

After the leader nodded, Michael called out in a low voice, "Steven and Stephany..."

Genome Society would not allow Steven and me to die. Steven was one of the participants in the soul reincarnation experiment proposed by Genome Society, and I was the most valuable experimental subject at the moment.

Steven and I exchanged glances. There were only two of us. What about Zion, Eason, and the others?

"And Joel," Michael called out the third name. Joel was also a valuable experimental subject in the soul reincarnation experiment.

## Chapter 578

Unfortunately, apart from the three of us, everyone else would be eliminated.

"Captain, the bomb has been planted." A mercenary walked in.

I furrowed my brows and cast a wary glance at those mercenaries. Ashton and Xandra were still on the cruise, and Steven and I wouldn't leave Zion and the others behind.

"Find the people we're searching for," the leader ordered.

The mercenaries commenced their search. Steven shielded me and exchanged a knowing look with Ashton. In an instant, Ashton understood Steven's message and whistled at the banquet hall's door. The wolfhounds all rushed in, baring their teeth at the mercenaries with guns. Following Ashton's command, the wolfhounds rushed toward the mercenaries. We used this chance to escape.

"The cruise is going to sink soon, and they plan to blow it up. What should we do?" asked Eason.

"Aren't you a genius? Why are you asking us?" Joel exclaimed. The two were about to fight again.

I furrowed my brows and stopped them. "This isn't the right time to argue. Let's go back to our room first.

I gazed meaningfully at Yara, who lowered her head guiltily and sought refuge behind Rachel.

"Let's return to the room first. I'll use satellite communication to send our location and guide the rescue ship to us." Zion assured our safety as we expedited our departure.

We found Maverick injured in the corridor when we reached our room. He seemed seriously hurt after being bitten. His "allies" seemed to have abandoned him. Just as we were going to enter the room, he reached out and stopped us. "Don't go in."

He mustered the last of his strength to speak, "They've entered your room."

We peered down the corridor with vigilance, knowing that the mercenaries were closing in on us. There were no other options. The satellite communication equipment was still in the room.

Zion had no choice but to take the risk. He opened the door and rushed into the room. When he entered, he found Stan being beaten by those people. He was covered in blood. It was likely they were unaware that Stan was a lunatic. They assumed Stan was associated with us.

Who would have thought that Stan was a lunatic? The more he was beaten, the crazier he laughed. As we entered the door, the group turned around and looked at us.

At this moment, Stan rushed toward the leader and stabbed him in the neck, specifically targeting the carotid artery. Stan laughed maniacally while still covered in blood.

The leader placed his hands on his neck in shock. But before he could react to Stan, he fell to the ground and died. Stan continued to laugh uncontrollably.

"They left. The small boat left." Stan pointed out the window. The masked woman managed to escape with Ewan and Dayton, and the members of Genome Society were chasing them.

"If you all want to live, you'd better behave!" Zion warned the remaining people. Then, he pressed Stan to the ground, tied him up, and threw him to Eason.

He pried open the gap in the wall and retrieved the satellite communication equipment, fully prepared to contact the rescuers. The sound of gunshots grew increasingly nearer, as did the barking of dogs. It was evident that the mercenaries were approaching.

With a loud bang, the door was suddenly kicked open. The mercenaries entered with guns, killing without mercy.

"Take the people we look for and leave no one else alive!" Just as the leader was about to take action, the cruise ship suddenly jolted violently, and the bomb detonated prematurely.

The deafening sound was followed by another series of explosions, causing the massive cruise ship to begin to tilt. In that intense moment, Steven instinctively shielded me in his arms and protected Ashton and Xandra. He used his own body as a cushion as the cruise ship slid down.

"Dad..."

"The cruise is sinking! It's filling up with water!"

"Leave!"

"Hurry up!"

## Chapter 579

"Dad!" A sharp object on the wall pierced Steven's back. The entire cabin tilted 90 degrees and became very bumpy.

"Steven..." I gripped Xandra firmly as the cabin tilted. I was enveloped by Steven's embrace and unable to see anything. The scent of briny seawater mingled with the metallic aroma of blood filled my senses.

"Mom, Dad..." Xandra had an injury to her forehead too. She choked up as she attempted to assess my condition.

Steven and I both sustained injuries of different severity. Steven's injuries were the most severe, with blood on his back and his clothes drenched in blood.

"I'm fine. Don't worry," Steven assured us with a comforting embrace.

I was terrified and held them tightly. Fear spread in the darkness. The cabin tilted, and the power was completely cut off. The sea seemed like a giant beast that could devour everything. Everyone was waiting to be rescued.

"Steven! Stephie!"

"Stephany?"

In the darkness, we heard the voices of Zion, Joel, and others, as well as Michael's voice. I was shocked that Michael didn't board Genome Society's rescue ship in advance.

I moved and realized that my leg was trapped under the bed, which had slipped down along with us earlier. The pain was so intense that I nearly lost consciousness. This was my first experience of such severe pain.

"Stephie." Steven desperately tried to move the bed in panic. But despite his efforts, gravity made him feel helpless. After all, he was just a human being.

The waves were getting bigger, and the seawater surged back with increasing force. This moment vividly illustrated the insignificance of human beings in the face of nature.

The sea was freezing, and I was scared. In my memory, I used to be emotionless and unaffected by fear. Yet now, I found myself truly terrified. I was utterly terrified of facing death.

I started valuing life because I had finally grasped the meaning of love. Respect was built upon love. How could one show respect if one didn't even comprehend what love was?

"Don't worry, Stephie." Steven held my face. The chill in the air had left my complexion pale.

Michael shouted from the balcony above. He found a rope and threw it down. "Stephany, Zion, Eason! Come up quickly,"

Zion fumbled with the rope, sending Rachel up first while Michael pulled her from above. "The cruise is about to sink! Hurry, come up!"

"Steven..." After Zion had sent Xandra Zander up the rope, he came to find us.

"It's too late." I choked, shaking my head.

There were too many objects on the bed. It was simply too heavy. The weight pushed me down, and I couldn't escape. Eventually, I would drown when the seawater started to flow back.

"Nonsense!" Joel cursed. In the dim light, they tried their best to lift the bed.

Just as they were about to lift it, the cabin shook violently. The bed pressed down once more, causing me a second injury.

Despite the pain, I endured in silence, my hands clenched tightly. I nearly passed out due to the immense agony. However, at that moment, I was unusually clearheaded.

I embraced Steven, my voice trembling. "Steven, please leave with the children."

I begged him to go first. If he brought the children up there, they might still have a chance to survive. Otherwise, we would all die in this place.

"Leave, please," I cried and pleaded with him.

"Stephie!" Steven kissed my forehead as if he had come to a decision.

He picked up the children and handed them to Joel, asking him to pass them on to Michael. Ashton and Xandra were crying. Despite being experimental subjects, they were still children.

"Dad, Mom!" I heard their cries and felt a sharp pain in my heart. They were our children, Steven's and mine. I loved them dearly.

## Chapter 580

I was willing to sacrifice my life for Ashton and Xandra's growth.

"Joel, Zion, Eason, thank you for your help. Let's give it another try," Steven whispered after Michael picked up the children.

"The water's pouring in, and the pressure keeps increasing. If we try again, what if..." Zion was worried that I would be in pain.

"Let's wait until the room is flooded with seawater and test if we can use buoyancy to make it work," suggested Eason.

"It's too late. Once the room is flooded, the exit will be blocked. We'll all die in this room. You must go first," I urgently shouted at them.

Steven remained calm and said once more, "Let's give it another shot."

Zion and the others acknowledged and lifted the bed that pinned me down. "Three, two, one. Lift!"

They screamed and struggled to lift the bed, but the shaking of the cruise ship made them lose their grip once more. However, the heavy objects did not fall on my leg this time.

I looked at Steven in astonishment. He endured the pain, held me close, and slowly pulled my leg out. It was him...

As they lifted, he stretched his leg inside, like a lever to support the heavy objects. I even heard the sound of bones breaking at that moment.

"Steven..." My voice trembled as I ignored the pain. I burst out crying, holding him tightly.

"Take her away." Steven was shaking all over.

Zion tried to pull me, but I pushed him away. "Hurry up and leave, all of you!"

Zion glanced at me, and I motioned for him to listen. "Help me take care of the kids. We'll take a risk. Once it's flooded here, hopefully, we can count on the buoyancy to escape."

Zion took a deep breath and embraced me tightly. It was an emotional expression of our friendship and camaraderie, a bond forged through both good times and bad.

He replied hoarsely, "We'll be waiting for you up there. I'll contact the rescue ship as soon as possible. Our people will be here soon. Just hang on."

Eason choked up, his voice full of emotions. "Steven, don't die. We should return to our country. We can be happy there, even though I dislike you."

Joel appeared remarkably composed in comparison to the others. He said firmly, "He's Steven. He won't die. Let's go first."

Amidst the violent shaking, I held Steven tightly, determined to shield him from further harm.

"Why are you so silly?" he asked me.

"I don't want to seem smart around you," I replied, crying like a needy child.

What was the true purpose of living if a person was required to display their intelligence in front of the person they loved?

"Stephie, I'm so happy now." Steven was very weak at that moment.

The seawater had already reached our shoulders and was about to cover our heads. We had to wait until the room was completely filled with seawater.

"Are you afraid?" I inhaled deeply, urging Steven to do the same. Considering the present rate of backflow, we needed to hold our breath underwater for a minimum of two minutes.

"Everything I do, I do it for my wife and my children... I'm not afraid at all," Steven replied, smiling and shaking his head.

I smiled with tears in my eyes. "You're the silly one."

"Hmm. Stephie, I'm so stupid. All of them bully me, so you have to protect me." Steven's voice had a hint of coquettishness. However, these words hurt me deeply.

In my fragmented memory, Steven seemed like a loner at the orphanage when he was a child. The other children would mock him, insult him, and even throw things at him.

Later, he enjoyed hiding behind Stephanie and would always quietly complain to her. "Stephie, they all bully me. You have to protect me."

In fact, he had actually found different ways to deal with those who bullied him. However, he would pretend to be weak and helpless whenever he encountered "Stephanie".

As the seawater cascaded around us, I drew in a deep breath and dove into the cold seawater alongside Steven. Our eardrums were pressured. We held each other's hands tightly, enduring the challenging wait.

We were not afraid to take risks; we were willing to risk our lives. If we couldn't escape, we were prepared to die together.

If there was an afterlife, I wished to be born into a normal family and have a simple and happy life. I hoped that Steven would be the boy next door so that we could be childhood sweethearts and grow up together.

I wanted to protect him from harm and shield him from any negativity. All I wanted was for him to grow up healthy. I longed to see his smile, full of joy and brightness, in both good times and bad.