

## **Master of Time 71**

### Chapter 71

There is no way out. There is no way out!

The hallway loops back around, somehow.

I had thought that if we keep on walking straight ahead, we would be able to find a way out eventually, but we are now back to where we have started from.

This can't be the same room as ours from before. But the green door with the scratches marks outside tells me that it is.

Becky and Daisy have even found their ways back here after running ahead in fright.

How can this be?

I don't understand.

I don't understand anything anymore.

Mummy! Daddy! Where are you?

Please come and get me.

Please. Please!

Mr. Maxwell!

I'm scared, I'm so scared.

My hands are shaking.

You have said to think clearly and calmly even when I am scared and alone, but I can't.

I just can't.

The howling sounds appear again, groaning, whispering, echoing and haunting me and the other girls.

I cover my ears tightly.

I want to block the sounds out.

I want to block everything out.

The other girls are crying again.

They don't know what to do either.

We are all alone here, in this place, wherever this scary place is. Even without our arms and legs being tied up, I feel like we are still locked up in the room, blindfolded and unable to call for help again.

Why didn't they cover our ears as well?

Is it because they want us to hear these ghostly sounds?

Are there really ghosts?

"Stephanie..."

It sounds like someone has just called my name, very faintly.

How am I still hearing it when I have covered my ears?

"Stephanie..."

No. I'm not listening. I'm not listening!

Leave me alone! Please.

"Stephanie..."

I'm hearing thing. I'm hearing thing!

The ghosts are talking to me!

There are ghosts here! Mummy! Daddy!

"Stephanie..."

But the ghost sounds familiar, very familiar...?

"Mr. Maxwell?"

I utter and uncover my ears slowly.

"Stephanie... where are you...?"

I look towards the darkness to my right, trying to hear his voice over the crying and whimpering of the other girls.

They don't seem to hear his voice like I do.

"Stephanie... where are you? Call out if you hear us!"

"Stephanie! Stephanie! Are you here, somewhere!?"

"Call out if you can hear us!"

I blink rapidly. It isn't just Mr. Maxwell who is calling for me.

There are plenty of other people calling for me, but they are not familiar as Mr. Maxwell's.

His voice is very clear and crispy, like he is very close to me. I follow his voice, walking into the darkness.

His voice becomes louder and louder. I can hear more people. A lot more people!

They are looking for me! They are! They are!

"Susan! Where are you? Are you here? Call out!"

"Anna! If you can hear us! Shout!"

"Becky! Dad's is here! Where are you, little princess!?"

"Daisy! Please! Oh God Please! Daisy!"

No. They are looking for us! Everyone is looking for us!

Where are they? Where are they!?

I look around, trying to figure out where their voices coming from. It feels like they are everywhere.

No, it sounds like they are in the ceiling, but that couldn't be.

Are they upstairs!?

I can see tree roots hanging off the ceiling. Why didn't I notice it before?

Are we underground!?

"I'm here! Someone! Help! Help us! We are in here!"

I shout at the top of my lungs, again and again. My shouting brings the other girls back.

They all look at me while sniffing and rubbing their eyes.

"Stephanie... why are you..."

Susan utters.

"Hey! I can hear something! Wait a second. It is coming from the ground. Oh My God! Are they buried! Someone hurry! Call the diggers! Hurry! Hurry!"

A voice interrupts Susan.

Her eyes widen, and she gets off the ground immediately. She knows who it belongs to.

"Dad!? I'm here, daddy! Daddy! Where are you!?"

Susan calls out as she runs towards me. Her dad shouts back, much clearer and louder.

"I'm here, daddy! Daddy! We're are here!"

Soon the other girls also shout as well.

Our voices echo in the empty hallway, amplifying greatly.

The people in the ceiling also shout back at us, loudly and rapidly. They are asking if we are all okay amongst many other things. We are unable to answer them all since they won't let us.

After a few minutes, the whole ceiling rumbles, causing dirt and gravel to rain on us.

We all scream and hug each other in fear.

Several rocks land on my shoulders.

It hurts!

"Stop that goddamn excavator! You are going to cause a carve in, you idiot!"

"Everyone shut up! Let them speak!"

"I don't think they are buried in a small tomb or something of sort. Girls! Can you hear us. Tell us what you see down there!?"

We shout back, describing the hallway.

No, it is called a tunnel now. We are underground. No wonder the air is stuffy and cold. And the walls and grounds are made of cobblestones.

"Hey, there is a chain here! Why is there a fucking chain here? It must open the tunnel. Hey, you three there, get over here and help me pull it."

A lot of people are shouting above ground.

I think they are pulling the chain from the clattering sounds I could hear.

We scream when a loud creaking is heard.

The ceiling collapses just a few meters from us, forming a staircase.

Countless blinding light purge the darkness, radiating on us. We couldn't see the people behind those lights, but we could make out their voices.

"They are here! We found them!"

Someone shouts. Dozens of people jump down the staircase, rushing towards us.

I couldn't make out anyone, but from their uniforms, they are policemen and firemen and paramedics.

"Five! We found them!"

"Is that blood? Are they bleeding?"

"Susan!"

"No, that's not blood. It's paint...?"

"Annabeth! My God! You're bleeding!"

"Becky!"

"Paints? What the hell is this place?"

"Daddy!"

"Daisy! Daisy! Where are you!?"

"Stephanie, are you hurt?"

A very familiar voice asks me. I look up to see who it is, but the blinding lights make it very hard.

But I think I know who it is.

Mr. Maxwell crouches down to get to the same eye level as me, allowing me to see his face.

Tears burst out of my eyes as I hug him tightly.

"Mr. Maxwell. I'm scared. I'm really, really scared."



I call out, crying onto his big shoulder. He wraps his hand around me, hugging me and patting my back, gently.

"I know. I know. I'm here now. You are safe. There is nothing to be scared about. Please tell me if you are hurt. Are you hurt, Stephanie?"

I shake my head as an answer. I could see the tunnel clearly behind him now thanks to the light.

The tunnel is not straight like I have thought when I had navigated in the darkness. It is slightly curve to the left, and the path it leads would form a perfect circle, making us walk around in loop endlessly.

That is why Becky trips over Anna. Poor Anna.

Becky is really mean, yelling at Anna instead of apologizing.

"Come, let's us go up. You parents are worried sick about you, Stephanie."

Mr. Maxwell speaks up before lifting me up with one arm and carrying me out of the tunnel. This must be what Antigone feels when he carries her around with one arm.

He is really, really strong.

"Stephanie! Oh My God. You're safe! I'm worried sick!"

My mum and dad call out when I emerge from the tunnel with Mr. Maxwell. The other four girls have also emerged from the tunnel.

All around me are vehicles and excavators along with countless people.

It seems like the whole town is looking for us.

Mr. Maxwell lets me down so my parents and my step-siblings can look me over.

Mummy and daddy are very concerned of the bloodstains coating my clothes, but they are told that it is just red paint. The bodies I saw in the room are dismembered mannequins covered in red paint.

"Yes, little miss. It is all paints, red paints. Someone is trying to scare you and your friends."

A policeman tells me and shake one of the mannequins' arm to demonstrate.

His voice is very familiar.

I think I have heard it somewhere before, recently. But I am unable to remember where.

My mum is with me while my dad is talking to Mr. Maxwell.

It is thanks to Mr. Maxwell that so many people have come to search for us.

He has friends in the local police as well as the local media.

I didn't know he knows so many people. He must be someone very important.

Actually, I don't know what Mr. Maxwell do for his job. He always leaves me and Antigone to play with each other while he goes to his room to do work.

"I heard that it is thanks to you that the other girls are saved. You manage to break out of your bindings first and then freeing them. You also call out for help when you heard our shouting. You have a very brave little girl here Mrs. Connors. I think I will make sure the whole school knows."

The second police man speaks up, talking to me and my mum.

His voice is also very familiar.

Maybe I am mistaken because I know that I haven't seen him or the other policeman before.

"Did you find the camera? I heard those bad men said that there are cameras. They also shot someone to the moon because of a blind spot. What is a blind spot?"

The policemen laugh and shake their head.

"There is no camera, little miss. And I think it is quite impossible to shoot someone to the moon with a cannon. There is only one way to go to the moon. You have to be an astronaut for that. If you study very hard, you can be one, one day."

"Oh. I know that."

I response.

Maybe those bad men are just making things up. It sounds like they did. I have checked whether there are cameras in the tunnel, but it is dark to see what on the ceiling.

"Do you know what a loli sex doll is?"

I question the policemen. I am very curious.

I have thought about what it is for a little while now. I think loli is short for lollipop like my nickname, Step, which is short for Stephanie.

Does that mean there is lollipop that shaped like a doll, which you can bring into a room together with and have sex with?

That sounds cool! I want one!

"Stephanie!"

My mum shouts while the policemen just laugh.

She hastily apologizes to the policemen before she drags me away.

I look back to see the policemen patting each other, chuckling. After that, those policemen go to talk to the other four girls.

Three girls now.

Becky is already gone home with her dad, but Susan, Anna and Daisy are still here.

Anna is still crying in her parents' arm. She is really, really scared.

Daisy is being told off by her parents while Susan explaining stuffs to the adults. There are people with big cameras on their shoulder. There are some smaller cameras like the ones in the bank, but I couldn't find any of them in the tunnel.

Susan also points to me every now and then before describing what happened. She also waves at me when she notices me staring.

I wave back at her.

"Looks like you have made a friend, Stephanie."

Mr. Maxwell speaks up. He smiles at me and pats my head.

"You will find that those you share hardship with have a much stronger bond than friends. I think you won't be bullied at school anymore. Now, let's go home with your parents and brother and sister. It is very late."

Mr. Maxwell is right.

I didn't get bullied anymore when I am able to attend school again. I couldn't go to school for a week since the policemen wants to know exactly what happened.

The policemen promise my parents that they will find the who are responsible.

They also tell me the reason they are able to find where we were because someone had saw the bad men and wrote down the plate. The black van is found parked near where the tunnel is.

Our backpacks were in the car, so they begin to search the area and surrounding woods.

The few nice ladies from the local news station also want to know. They say that they will pay me for telling them everything that happened. But my mummy takes my money again.

"Hey, Stephanie. Wants to go to school together?"

Susan asks me when she drops by my house in the morning. Daisy and Anna are with her. Becky is also with them, but she didn't say anything.

"Sure, Susan. I would love to. Let's me tell my mum first."

Susan and I become best friends after that. She drops by my place often, and she even went to babysit Antigone with me.

Mr. Maxwell makes snack for all of us, and Susan also likes his cooking like me.

Anna and Daisy join us sometimes. Even Becky did as well.

I am still unsure why Becky hates me, but it didn't matter anymore.

I have friends now!

And school doesn't seem so bad anymore.