After Death 171

Chapter 171

Ewan cautiously glanced at the end of the alley. “Who’s there?”

Panicking, I quickly turned around to hide. But suddenly, someone covered my mouth and dragged me into a store next to the alley.

“Told you you’d regret marrying Steven,” Michael’s voice came from behind me.

I was slightly startled. Then, I frowned and stared at him warily, anything better to do, Mr. Ford?”

“Don’t you have

“I’m just passing by,” Michael said in a playful tone as he took a mango–flavored lollipop from the shelf and handed it to me.

He probably mistook me for Stephanie again. He knew that Stephanie had a low blood sugar issue, so he thought that I’d need a lollipop like Stephanie too.

But ironically, he wasn’t aware that Stephanie was allergic to mangoes.

“Are you mistaking me for someone else, Mr. Ford?” I asked in a low tone.

Michael remained silent.

“Don’t you know that Stephanie Carlson was allergic to mangoes, Mr. Ford?” I sneered.

Then, I walked past him without taking the lollipop.

Meanwhile, Michael stood frozen for quite some time. But suddenly, he walked toward me and grabbed my wrist. “I’m asking you to divorce Steven for your own good,” he said.

Then, he quickly dragged me to his car and shoved me inside.

Soon, Ewan came out of the alley and got into a car.

Michael then started following Ewan’s car.

“The Lincolns have been cleaning up Steven’s mess over the years. And whenever Steven got into trouble, Ewan was the one who settled it for him. That’s why he met Howard today.” Michael solemnly said.

Then, he continued, “Since Stephie gave you the keys to her house and confided in you so much… she must have seen you as her closest friend. That’s why I can’t let anything happen to you.‘

I couldn’t help but chuckle. Michael was putting up the nice guy act again.

Chatter 171

“You can’t let anything happen to me? I don’t think we’re that close, Mr. Ford.” I said skeptically, “Stephanie grew up with you, and you failed to protect her. But now you’re trying to protect me?”

Thanks, but no thanks.

Michael’s grip on the steering wheel tightened, and the back of his hand turned pale as his veins bulged, betraying his hidden tension.

“Actually, Michael, I’m quite curious. Stephanie was head over heels in love with you. So, how could you be so cruel to her? Didn’t it even hurt you a bit? Would you be so cruel to a dog that you’ve raised for many years?” I was asking from a bystander’s perspective.

After all, my heart had gradually found peace, so I was no longer affected by the past.

However, Michael simply remained silent as we continued to follow Ewan’s car.

“I…” After a long silence, Michael said in a low voice, “I loved her.”

What did he say?

I didn’t catch it.

“I loved her so much.” Michael’s voice was quivering. “But… I wasn’t the one she loved. She stayed with me out of obligation. Someone else had her heart.”

I was stunned as I glared at Michael, fuming with rage.

Stephanie was already dead, yet here he was trying to shift the blame onto her!

Was he even human?

He continued, “She was someone who felt obligated to repay her debts. I wanted to set her free, but I couldn’t bear to let her go. And I knew that she would leave one day… but I never expected her to die so soon.”

“Ha…” I found Michael rather pathetic. How could he make up such a ridiculous lie at a

time like this?

“Your love was such a joke. Stephanie loved you for ten years because you told her that you liked her.” I sneered.

Michael’s expression grew complex. He then cast a sidelong glance at me and asked, “Did Stephanie tell you she was in love with me for ten years?”

I frowned and ignored him.

Michael seemed like he had something to say, but he hesitated, and his gaze simply lingered on me.

We stayed silent until Ewan’s car halted in an old alley.

Michael then parked his car and accompanied me out before we discreetly followed behind Ewan.

Chapter 172

Ewan bad bought some food and was headed toward an old house.

Then, as he knocked on the door of the house, Michael and I hid in the shadows, waiting to see who he was meeting.

Soon, the door cracked open a little, and a hand reached out through the gap.

That hand… had burn marks on it.

1 gasped and warily stared at the person behind the gap–it was the murderer I saw at my house! The person who killed me!

If I could only catch a glimpse of his inner arm to see if there was a red birthmark, then I would know for sure whether or not he was the one who killed me!

But why was Ewan delivering food to him?

“Mr. Lincoln, I’ve reminded him and sent him the things he requested.” Ewan walked into an alley and made a call to Steven.

Meanwhile, Michael and I hid behind a trash can as we watched Ewan leave.

“After Stephie died, I never stopped investigating the murder case. I don’t believe that Steven had nothing to do with it. He’s been using his history of mental illness to get away with his crime. I’ve always been keeping an eye on him,” Michael whispered.

My fingers were shaking as I instinctively pulled out my phone to call the police.

“Divorce Steven, Stephany. You’re only after the financial support for the Larsons, which I can help you with. But by staying with Steven, you’re only putting your safety at risk.” Michael tried to persuade me to divorce Steven.

However, I wasn’t paying attention to him. Instead, I dialed Zion’s number.

“Hello?” Zion’s hoarse voice came from the other end of the line. It seemed he had fallen sick due to his busy work schedule.

“Zion, I saw the suspect who stayed at Stephanie’s house… He was the one who knocked Rachel out…” I spoke in a low voice.

That day when Rachel entered my house, the surveillance camera had captured someone following her, but the person’s features were too blurry to make out.

“What’s the address?” Zion asked.

“The courtyard at 163, Civil West Road,” I whispered.

“Stay there and don’t move. I’ll be right there.” Zion quickly hung up the phone.

I knew he would come. And if Zion was willing to look into it, I would get my answer soon.

Even if I risked alerting that man in the house, I had to find out whether or not he was the person who killed me.

“Stephany, Steven isn’t who you think he is. If the person hiding in this house is one of the murderers, Steven is definitely their accomplice.” Michael continued to persuade me to leave

Steven, “He’s a psycho. Don’t you know he killed someone in the asylum?”

I glanced back at Michael. “Mr. Ford, do you make your judgments solely based on guesswork? Before we get the whole story, do you think I’d believe in you, an

untrustworthy man who indirectly contributed to Stephanie’s death, or my husband?”

I gripped my phone tightly.

If I had to choose to trust either one of them, I’d rather believe in Steven.

But what if Steven really was hiding something?

“Stephany, one thing you and Stephanie have in common is your stubbornness. Both of you insist on your own beliefs and never listen to other people’s advice.”

Michael frowned and continued, “Steven is extremely dangerous. He’s aggressive and impulsive, and many people at the asylum know that he went berserk and killed someone there! Besides, the case is basically as plain as day.”

But Michael could see that I was unmoved, so he said, “Yasmin said that Steve was the only person with a motive to kill!

“The fire at the orphanage was actually a prank by the people there. They locked Steven and Simeon in a room and set it on fire. And though Steven survived the fire, his best friend Simeon still died in it. That’s why Steven holds a grudge against those people!”

I tensed up and turned to Michael again. “So, you’re saying… those people at the orphanage intentionally trapped them in that fire?”

I was losing control of my emotions now. “Have you been to the scene of the fire, Michael? Those people should all go to hell!”

How could they do that to Steven?

The fire, the screaming, the cries for help, the struggle….

Every night, I would have nightmares and would be haunted by the images of the handprints and scratch marks left inside the burned room at the orphanage.

Those marks were left by Steven and Simeon’s desperate cries as they begged for help and struggled to save themselves…

Those people were devils.

“But that doesn’t mean that he should turn to murder! What about Stephanie then?” Michael exclaimed, gripping my chin tightly.

His eyes were bloodshot as he said, “She was carrying my child!”

Chapter 173

Michael’s bloodshot eyes made it seem as if he wanted to kill someone.

I shoved him hard and snarled at him as my breath quickened. “You have no right to say that! Didn’t she die because of you? Weren’t you the one who asked her to lure away the killer? And if she hadn’t died, would you have let her give birth to that baby?”

“I would’ve!” Michael’s fist crashed into the trash can behind me.

The trash can toppled with a clatter, and we both fell silent.

Then, we glanced nervously toward the courtyard, fearing that the man might have heard the commotion.

But when a scavenger approached to collect the trash, we both sighed in relief.

“I would have married her,” Michael said in a hoarse voice after a long silence.

It sounded like he was telling me this, or perhaps he was just mumbling it to himself.

“Do you believe in ghosts?” Michael asked with a self–mocking tone.

I didn’t answer.

“I think I saw her the other day…” he said.

I had no idea which day he was referring to, but it wasn’t like I cared anyway.

Shortly after, Zion arrived with Phil and a handful of plainclothes officers to avoid

drawing unwanted attention.

They climbed over the fence into the yard and quietly opened the door from the inside before storming in..

Then, Michael and I dashed in too.

There, in the room, a tall and slender man who was munching on fast food was now pressed up against the couch by Zion.

He lounged against the couch and seemed relaxed, as if he had been expecting us. “What do you want?” he asked.

Zion furrowed his brows. “You’re under arrest as a suspect in a murder case. Please come with us to the station.”

The man silently smiled.

He was a tall man, but half of his face was burned, which made his features unrecognizable.

His stare was cold and dark too.

Before leaving with Zion, the man looked at me with a murderous gaze.

I felt a chill run down my spine, so I quickly stepped back.

Michael frowned and pulled me behind him, shielding me with his body. However, I

shook off his hand.

After the man left with Zion, I said in a low voice, “I guess that’s it. Bye, Mr. Ford.”

“Stephany, I’m serious. Leave Steven, divorce him,” Michael said as he firmly gripped my

wrist.

Disgusted, I tried to shake off his hand again. Yet, it seemed that he had made up his mind to force me to leave Steven.

“Are you out of

mind, Michael?” I cursed. Then, I suddenly laughed. “You just can’t seem to stop seeing me as Stephanie Carlson, can you? Do you think that you can absolve your guilt toward Stephanie by projecting it onto me? You pathetic egoist!”

Michael lowered his head in silence.

“Let go of me!” I struggled as hard as I could, but I was no match for his strength.

Micahel then forcefully dragged me out of the courtyard, refusing to let go despite my struggle.

“Michael!” I shouted.

But at the next moment, I was thrown into his car and locked from the inside.

I started to panic. It felt like I was reliving the nightmares of my previous life where

Michael would coldly and heartlessly torture me all over again.

“Where are you taking me?” I slapped Michael in the face and tried to get out of the car.

However, Michael grabbed my hands and pressed them against the seat. He then removed his necktie and used it to tie my hands to the passenger seat.

“What are you doing?” I frowned as I stared at him.

He wasn’t usually like this. Something must have triggered his sudden odd behavior.

Where was he taking me? What was his purpose?

Did it have something to do with Steven?

“Steven is the murderer. He hurt Stephanie, and I won’t let him get away with it,” Michael said in a low voice.

I was right…

My heart tightened as I struggled to free my hands from the tie. “Michael, you What are you going to do to him?”

But Michael didn’t answer me and simply started the car to drive.

asshole!

“What are you going to do to him? You asshole... What are you going to do?” I stared at Michael in panic and lifted my leg, trying to kick him.

But Michael pressed my leg down and gave me a warning look as he glared at me. “You all want some proof, right? I want him dead…”

Chapter 174

Michael was convinced that Steven was the murderer.

“I’ll show you. He’ll confess that he was the murderer,” he said in a hoarse voice as he

drove.

Meanwhile, I sat quietly in the passenger seat, feeling powerless and exhausted. “What… are you going to do?”

“Since he’s a lunatic, I’ll make sure he stays like that forever.” Michael was driving toward the abandoned asylum.

Suddenly, I realized what Michael was planning to do–he was going to push Steven and force him to tell the truth. He was going to make Steven admit that he had killed Stephanie.

When we arrived at the asylum, Michael dragged me to a small room and made me watch the surveillance monitor.

“You don’t believe that he killed someone, do you? You don’t think he’s a lunatic, right? Well, sit and watch then.”

“Everything’s ready, Mr. Ford,” the assistant said to Michael.

I watched in horror as the monitor flickered to life.

Michael’s intentions were clear–he was going to use the past events to provoke Steven and rub salt on his wound.

“Mentally ill patients are incapable of distinguishing reality from dreams. They might perceive the world as unreal and, consequently, express his innermost thoughts,” a doctor in a white coat solemnly stated.

I turned to him, clasping my hands tightly. “You’re Quentin Long, the doctor who exposed the scandal of the asylum, right?”

Quentin nodded.

“Since you rescued Steven, you should know that he’s not a bad person… So, why are you helping Michael with this? You’re adding insult to his injury,” I questioned him.

Quentin was silent for a while before saying, “He killed innocent people, including Mr. Ford’s pregnant wife…”

“That’s bullshit! Stephanie wasn’t his wife. In fact, he’s the reason she’s dead!” 1 angrily glared at Michael.

That shameless asshole.

However, Michael didn’t say a word. Instead, he grabbed my chin from behind and forced me to watch the monitor.

“Stephie… “A man suddenly burst into the room on the monitor.

It was Steven, and it seemed like he’d come in a hurry.

“Stephie…” Steven repeatedly called my name.

“You used me to lure him here?” I asked through gritted teeth.

So, that was the reason Michael had shown up in the alley. He was there to abduct me so

he could use me to threaten Steven.

“He seems to care about you a lot,” Michael said in a low tone as he forced me to look at

the monitor.

I tightly clenched my hands as I watched Steven standing alone in the empty room.

It made my heart ache.

The moment Steven had burst into the room, the metal door behind him was immediately locked. Yet, he still kept calling my name.

Then, the light suddenly dimmed, and Steven’s cold eyes stared into the camera with a horrifying and dark glare.

“I will kill you…” Steven fixed his eyes on the camera and spoke in a hoarse and low voice.

However, Michael merely gave a cold smile before gesturing for Quentin to begin his

work.

Quentin sat silently for a while. Then, he stood up and pressed the play button on the

computer.

Then, the light dimmed before a video was projected onto the screen in the room.

It showed Steven’s past experiences in the asylum.

I tightly gripped my hands as I watched the video on the screen.

Steven was desperately pounding on the mental door as he repeatedly shouted, “Let me

out. She’s waiting for me. I need to get out…

But the people in the video didn’t let him out.

Instead, they pulled him to a chair and strapped him into it. Then, they gave him

injections and fed him some drugs.

Steven lost his mind when he saw the video and pounded at the metal door with all his strength.

The fear of confinement alone was enough to drive him crazy.

Not to mention, the way they were forcing Steven to relive these unbearable moments was so inhumane.

The video on the screen was so brutal that I couldn’t help but close my eyes to avoid watching it.

Nevertheless, Michael forced me to watch.

Now, the video was showing the doctor torturing

Steven for fun…

Steven went berserk and broke free from the restraining rope. Then, he seized a pair of surgical forceps from a nearby table and repeatedly struck it against the doctor’s head.

“See–he killed a person,” Michael wanted me to witness with my own eyes that Steven had killed someone.

Meanwhile on the monitor, Steven was curled up in a corner, trembling uncontrollably as he was triggered by the images of his past.

“You killed someone. You killed Dr. Carter.” Quentin opened the metal door and walked into the room, offering comfort to Steven. “You killed someone, didn’t you?”

Steven pulled at his own hair and kept murmuring, “Stephie… I need to find Stephie…” “You also killed Stephanie Carlson, didn’t you?” Quentin was trying to lead Steven to admit that he had killed Stephanie. “Tell me, how did you kill Stephanie Carlson? What did you do to her?”

Chapter 175

I sat in the room and stared at Steven through the monitor.

I was aware that he might go berserk and harm himself after being triggered. After all, that was his way of punishing himself.

Steven was reluctant to answer Quentin’s questions and simply kept banging his head against the wall, perhaps trying to calm himself down.

“You killed Stephanie, didn’t you? You put her in the glass display. I remember when you were at the asylum, you had a habit of collecting small animal bodies.

“You said you were worried that the kitty would leave you, so you killed it and stuffed it. Then, you hid it somewhere that you felt was safe. And that bird…” Quentin persisted in questioning Steven, determined to extract the truth from him.

“You liked Stephanie, but she didn’t belong to you. She was in love with Michael, so you had no choice but to kill her. Only then would she be yours forever.

“That’s why you put her in the glass display, right?” Quentin asked in a loud voice.

Steven’s quivering body momentarily stiffened.

Then, he looked up at Quentin.

His forehead was stained with blood from the impact of banging his head against the

wall.

I knew Steven couldn’t take it any longer.

Quentin kept pressing him for answers while the screen on the wall continued displaying his past nightmares

“Let go of me, Michael.” I stared at Michael with reddened eyes filled with hatred.

“He’s a lunatic, for crying out loud! What do you see in him?” Michael seemed to lose control as he pointed at the screen. “He’ll kill anything or anyone that he likes. If you don’t leave him… this might be your end.”

I furiously glared at Quentin who continued to mercilessly provoke and force Steven to admit he was the murderer.

These people were all lunatics.

20

“Michael, you’re the reason Stephanie’s dead…” I said in a low tone, trying to shift his attention.

At this, Michael turned away from me and glanced at the monitor instead.

He still insisted on hearing Steven confess to killing Stephanie….

While Michael was distracted, I used my teeth to untie the knot around my wrists. Then, I grabbed a nearby stick and swung it at Michael’s head.

It was the first time I had ever hit someone, so I was somewhat scared. And perhaps because I didn’t hit him hard enough, Michael wasn’t knocked out.

However, he did fall to the ground.

Then, he touched the blood on his forehead and fumed in anger.

After taking one step back, I turned around and ran.

Meanwhile in the room, Quentin continued to press Steven for answers.

“You liked Stephanie for so many years. During your days at the asylum, you kept calling her name too. You’d always planned to kill her, right?”

Suddenly, Quentin noticed Steven’s gaze turning solemn.

Scared, he took a step back.

Then, Steven suddenly grabbed Quentin’s collar and pulled him close.

“No…” His whisper was hoarse, and his voice was barely audible to anyone but the two of

them.

Then, with sudden ferocity, he slammed Quentin’s head against the wall and knocked

him out.

After that, he wiped away the blood stains trickling from the corner of his eye

1. up.

and stood

Then, he smashed the projector hanging on the wall before shifting his cold and dark gaze toward the surveillance camera.

At that moment, I burst through the door and met his icy glare.

Yet, upon seeing me, the frostiness in Steven’s eyes melted away and was replaced by a

sense of grievance.

He stood there, visibly aggrieved as his shoulders slightly trembled.

“Stephie…” Steven lowered his head as tears cascaded down his cheeks, dampening his gray hoodie.

But as I stood in the doorway, I was stunned.

I looked at the chaotic scene in the room and saw Quentin lying unconscious on the ground.

Chapter 176

“Stephie… I didn’t kill anyone.”

That was the first thing Steven said to me when he raised his head.

“Let’s go home.” I felt a complicated mix of emotions as I rushed to his side and took his

hand.

Steven hung his head as he followed me, sniffling as he did.

I was a bit worried, so I brushed his hair aside to look at the bruises on his forehead. ”

Does it hurt?”

Steven nodded with reddened eyes as tears streamed down his cheek.

Somehow, my chest abruptly tightened at this.

His eyes were so innocent. I could never imagine these innocent eyes

murderer.

“Please don’t hurt yourself again.” I carefully wiped away Steven’s blood and led him out.

Meanwhile, outside the door, Michael’s bodyguards were already waiting for us.

Steven was immediately on guard and shielded me with his body. He glared at them like a beast ready to tear its prey apart.

“You’d rather believe a psycho over me?” Michael approached us as he painfully wiped off the blood stains on his forehead. “Stephany, you’re becoming more and more like Stephanie Carlson.”

I warily stared at Michael. “What do you want from us?”

“Steven, you killed Stephanie Carlson because you hated her, didn’t you? You were angry

that she’d forgotten about you,” Michael questioned in a low voice.

Steven glared at Michael. “You lied to her… You should be dead, not her.”

“Looks like you don’t know when to call it quits.” Michael smiled coldly. Then, he

stepped away to allow his bodyguards to come forward.

“What are you doing?” My heart tightened.

What madness was Michael up to?

I stepped forward to protect Steven, but there were simply too many of them.

And while Steven may have been skilled, he was still caught off guard by them and took at

hard blow to his back.

At the next moment, I was cornered by Michael’s men.

My eyes reddened as I anxiously shouted, “Stop it, Michael!”

“He’s a lunatic. When he’s triggered, he might smash things, hurt people, kill people, or even kill himself,” Michael said in a low and gloomy tone as he glanced at Steven pressed against the ground.

“Does it even matter if a lunatic dies?” he asked.

“Michael, let go of him!” I sensed Michael’s determination and began struggling in my panic. I had a sinking feeling about what he intended to do.

He was going to throw Steven off the floors of the building.

“Michael… What can I do to change your mind?” I asked in a hoarse voice.

But Michael wasn’t seeking vengeance for Stephanie. Rather, he was driven by his own pathetic pride and was running away from the fact that he was the reason Stephanie was

dead.

Michael nonchalantly glanced at me and said in a deep voice, “Unless Stephanie is brought back to life… Otherwise, he must die.”

I gasped and stared at Michael in disbelief. “You’re the one who should die…”

“Police!” As Michael’s men were dragging Steven away, the police burst in.

Michael frowned and glanced at Steven.

However, Steven returned his gaze with a mocking glare.

“What’s going on?” Zion entered with his men, his brows furrowed as he observed

Michael and Steven.

Steven looked utterly aggrieved. “He abducted my wife and had his men beat me up.”

Zion was taken aback. He had never seen Steven looking so aggrieved before.

What kind of nonsense was this?

Michael turned pale. And before he could say anything, Ewan came in with a lawyer.

30

“Officer Landon, Mr. Lincoln suffers from a mental illness, rendering him incapable of controlling his actions during such episodes. As such, he cannot be held legally responsible for his behavior.

“However, Mr. Ford, being of sound mind, had committed abduction… and assault, which are serious crimes,” Ewan said.

Zion glanced at me, signaling for an explanation of what had happened. At the same time, Michael also turned to me.

Everyone seemed to be waiting for me to provide an explanation.

Now, it was up to me to decide whether or not Michael had abducted me.

Chapter 177

“Michael abducted me, threatened my husband, and assaulted him…” I told the truth in a

low voice.

Michael’s gaze deepened as he stared at me and sneered. “I abducted you? Where’s your proof? Officer, I’m willing to cooperate with your investigation.”

Then, before he left with the cops, Michael took another glance at me.

“You’ll regret this, Stephany,” he said.

Michael was certain that Steven would kill me one day. And when the time came, I would regret not having believed him.

“Stephie…” Steven came to me with a pale expression. He leaned on me and rested his chin on my shoulder, as if he was drained of all strength. “It hurts.”

My body tensed up slightly as I softly asked, “Did you inform the police before you came?

“Uh huh,” Steven admitted that he had asked someone to call the cops.

Apparently, Steven wasn’t stupid at all.

Michael had met his match this time.

“Mr. Lincoln was worried about you,” Ewan respectfully said.

I stared at Ewan with a complicated expression.

I wondered what connections he, Howard, and the murderer shared.

Were they working for Steven?

Suddenly, Steven pulled my hand, trying to leave.

However, I stood there motionless.

Steven turned to me with a bewildered look, seeming somewhat afraid.

“Who was that guy at the courtyard?” I stared at Steven and asked in a hoarse voice.

Instead of harboring suspicions, I’d rather lay all the cards on the table.

Steven stared back at me for a long while before saying, “He’s Simmie. He’s also from

the orphanage. 15 years old. Survivor of that fire. From Dorm 403.”

Dorm 403 was the dormitory room adjacent to the room where Steven and Simeon had been trapped in.

In that fire, many children had died. But Simmie was one of the lucky survivors.

However, due to his severe burns, I couldn’t make out his features or tell his age. All knew was that he was tall and slender–just like the killer in my memory.

“He’s not the murderer…” Steven explained in a soft voice.

I turned around and looked at Zion, puzzled.

Zion nodded and said to me, “He’s right. That guy’s only 15 and underage. He rarely gues out of the house because his body’s in bad shape from the burns. He lives with his elder sister. She’s the only family he has. I also checked his arms no red birthmark.”

I rubbed my temple, feeling a headache coming on.

Did I remember it wrong?

No, he was definitely the person who had spoken to me at my house that day.

Simmie?

But I was certain that the man who murdered me had a red birthmark on his arm.

“He’s been to Stephanie’s house, right?” I asked Zion.

Zion nodded. “That kid often sneaks into houses to steal because he has no income. He’s just a thief.”

“Which means that he’s the one who knocked Rachel out, right? Then the body found at Stephanie’s house was…” I anxiously asked.

Zion shook his head. “It wasn’t him. He has an alibi–every month, he goes to the hospital to get his prescription. The doctors, nurses, and even the surveillance camera. can prove that he was at the hospital the entire time. So, he didn’t hurt Rachel or kill anyone that night.”

But I still couldn’t buy it. My instinct was telling me that something was definitely off about that guy.

“Why did you send him food?” I turned to Steven, hoping that he would tell me the truth. “He has no income, and no one wants to hire him.” Steven approached me and tried to

hold my hand, but I dodged.

“How about Ewan then? Why did you meet up with Howard?” I wanted to hear everyone’s side of the story, I didn’t want any more secrets.

“Mr. Lincoln doesn’t want you to further get involved. He’s concerned about your safety, “Ewan explained indifferently. But he didn’t seem to be lying either.

However, I wouldn’t dare to trust them entirely.

“Let’s go,” I said in a low, suppressed tone and led the way.

“Simmy… Simmie,” I murmured to myself.

Their names sounded alike, but their ages didn’t match.

“Stephie… Let’s go home,” Steven cautiously took my hand and spoke softly. I glanced at him. “Do not lie to me, ever. Even if it’s just a white lie.”

Chapter 178

Steven’s fingers stiffened as he looked at me. “Steve doesn’t lie. Stephie lies.”

My heart skipped a beat, and I shifted my glance elsewhere, feeling somewhat guilty.

Was he implying that he’d never lied, whereas I was the one who lied a lot?

When did I ever lie to him?

When we stepped out of the abandoned asylum, we saw a flood of reporters and onlookers gathered at the entrance.

The crowd surrounded Michael and were asking him why he, the president of the Ford Group, was involved in an abduction and illegal activities.

But Michael merely got into the car with a solemn face. “No comment,” he said.

Obviously, the reporters were here for Michael. If the media reported this, it would definitely have an impact on the Ford Group.

Then, Michael gave me a cold stare and silently left with the police.

“The president of the Ford Group was involved in an abduction!”

“Why did he do that?”

The reporters murmured among themselves while the onlookers commented that Michael had gone mad.

The Ford Group’s stock price would be severely impacted if this news got out.

Did Michael offend someone?

I suspiciously looked at Steven. “Did you do this?”

Steven remained silent, tacitly admitting his involvement.

It seemed as if he was a bad liar, so he chose to stay silent instead.

“The Ford family is in for a ride now.” Zion sighed and gave me a glance before getting

into his car. “If Michael is charged with abduction, the Fords might want to settle this with you in private. It’s your call.”

I was startled.

If someone from the Ford family wanted to meet me to discuss Michael’s matter, it would definitely be Aunty Lois

I might show no mercy to Michael, but I might not be able to do the same to Aunty Lols.

I got into Ewan's car. Then, after a moment of hesitation, I decided to ask Steven, "Are you trying to ruin Michael's life?"

How could he possibly do that?

"No." Steven shook his head. "I want him dead."

Steven's eyes glinted with murderous intent when he said this.

The news of Michael being taken away by the police spread like wildfire and soon reached. the ears of the Ford family.

When Aunty Lois came to the Lincoln residence to see me, I noticed that she had significantly aged.

I'd heard that after my death, Aunty Lois was so grief–stricken that she fell ill and had been recuperating at the Georgeke.

This time, however, she specifically came back for Michael.

The Fords' legal team was formidable. Although the abduction charge might not hold, Michael's unlawful restriction of my freedom still constituted a crime.

I knew Aunty Lois had come to have me sign a release form to salvage Michael's

reputation and mitigate the impact on the company.

"Mrs. Lincoln, Mrs. Ford is here." The nanny led Aunty Lois to the living room.

My fingers tightened as I calmly remained seated.

When Aunty Lois saw me, she couldn't help but cover her mouth in disbelief as her eyes.

reddened.

As much as I wanted to comfort her, I couldn't.

I was not Stephanie Carlson anymore. I was just a stranger with no connection to her.

"Please excuse me... Ms. Larson. You look very much like my daughter." Aunty Lols was

choked with emotion.

She always told me and everyone else that I was her daughter.

I knew Aunty Lois truly and dearly loved me, but… I didn't want to let Michael off the hook again.

"Ms. Larson, I know what Michael did was rather rude and inappropriate. Please... let us know what we can do to compensate you," Aunty Lois pleaded softly.

"You're responsible for his poor upbringing. Just how long do you think you can clean up his messes for him?" I said firmly.

This time, I wouldn't let Michael off so easily.

I wanted him punished. Even if his legal team could get him a 15–day detention, so be it.

Aunty Lois was silent for a while before speaking, “After my daughter, Stephie, passed away, Mike has been somewhat unhinged. But this is his karma… for lying to Stephie and himself for so many years. He told me that you were a close friend of Stephie’s and that Stephie confided everything in you?”

I frowned as I looked at Aunty Lois. “You mentioned Michael lied to Stephanie. What did he lie about?”

“In that car accident involving the Carlsons… The person who saved Stephanie and her parents wasn’t Mike,” Aunty Lois said.

Spin to Claim Your Surprise Reward!

Chapter 179

The air fell quiet for a moment.

I sat on the couch, my fingers tensed up. “What?”

I thought I heard it wrong.

Or, could it be possible that my memory was wrong?

I recalled that I was in 12th grade that year. I was exhausted after all my studies, so I fell

asleep as soon as I got into the car.

In my memory, Dad drove for a long way. I couldn’t remember where we were headed, but I remembered lying on Mom’s lap, sleeping soundly.

“Turn down the music. Stephie’s sleeping.” I vaguely heard Mom softly scolding Dad.

“Andy asked me to meet at the Hymn Bridge. Let’s head over there.”

I couldn’t quite recall Dad’s exact words, but I remembered feeling excited to meet

someone.

“Isn’t that Andy’s car?” Mom asked.

“The orphanage has fostered two geniuses, and the superiors have high expectations for them. This is a good opportunity to promote our cause and inspire more people to join the public welfare movement. We have to raise awareness about orphaned and neglected.

children…

Bang!

The moment Dad stopped the car, a loud bang echoed, and a powerful impact nearly

threw me out of the car.

“Stephie…”

My final memory froze as Mom held me tightly, sheltering me in her arms.

Her blood mingled with mine.

“Stephie…”

“Stay alive…”

“Stephie… Stephie!”

But I couldn’t recall anything beyond the crash. I was stunned the moment it happened.

I couldn’t tell when it occurred, or how much time passed. It just felt as though time had

frozen.

All I remembered was that when I regained consciousness, Michael was there beside me and was repeatedly calling my name.

I also vaguely remembered a figure rushing into the flames, risking his life to get Mom

and Dad out of the car…

And then, the figure gradually merged with Michael’s.

Could it be that my memory was distorted?

Aunty Lois continued, “It was the day of the award ceremony and the children’s graduation ceremony at Double Stars Welfare Home. Stephie’s parents and I had agreed to meet there. Then, when I saw the car accident on the bridge, I realized that Stephie’s parents and Andy Lincoln were involved in it.

“It was a terrible accident. The Carlsons and the Lincolns were caught between a dump truck that was traveling in the wrong direction and an overloaded semi–truck. The Lincolns were instantly killed.”

Aunty Lois sobbed and continued her story.

“According to witnesses, a teenage boy had bravely rushed into the flames to save Stephie. But when Stephie woke up, she couldn’t recall who had saved her, so she

assumed it was Mike.

“But before I could tell Stephie the truth, Mike had already taken the credit… I was surprised, but I didn’t want to meddle, so I

I never imagined that it would bring harm to Stephie!”

I sat on the couch, bewildered.

I stiffly stared at Aunty Lois, feeling as if my head were about to explode.

Apparently, your own memory could deceive you, especially in times of immense trauma

and shock.

The brain would fabricate false memories of the moments preceding unconsciousness.

I always thought that Michael was the one who saved me, and I'd never once doubted it.

And whenever I asked Michael about it, he would quietly concede too.

"Michael's father and I were on bad terms, so Mike never received the love he deserved from a young age. He knows how to possess, but not to love."

Aunty Lois wiped her tears before continuing, "I was close friends with Stephie's mom, so we arranged Mike and Stephie's marriage carly on. We hoped to be in–laws someday.

"Mike was a rebellious kid with opinions of his own. And if he didn't like Stephie, he would never accept the arrangement. Yet, he'd quietly accepted it. So, I knew Mike liked Stephie. He really did! Though he never admitted it."

Chapter 180

"Sorry, Mrs. Ford. The Michael that you just described seems to be different from the man Stephanie described to me," I interrupted Aunty Lois's story because I refused to believe that Michael had loved me.

I shook my head and added, "Love isn't about possessing or hurting someone. Yet, Michael had brought Stephanie nothing but pain. No matter what his reasons were, it doesn't change the fact that Michael had lied to Stephanie and caused her significant

harm."

Aunty Lois lowered her eyes and said, "Ms. Larson, Stephie loved Mike. She loved him deeply… Can't you give Mike another chance, for Stephie's sake? Mike's the president of the Ford Group, and his reputation carries weight on the fate of the entire corporation. He cannot afford any tarnish on his record."

Aunty Lois was trying to convince me that Michael had also loved Stephie. And so, I should give him another chance for Stephie's sake.

"Why didn't you tell Stephie the truth? You had so many chances…" I asked in a hoarse.

voice.

Was I blaming Aunty Lois? Perhaps a little….

"Because I loved Stephie dearly as if she were my own daughter. Since Stephie was in love with Mike, I was looking forward to the day Mike would marry her. Then, we could finally

be a real family.

"I prayed that Mike would one day recognize his true feelings and treat Stephie with care. I knew Mike loved Stephie too…"

veves

I laughed with my head down as welled up with tears.

Suddenly, I realized how selfish people could be at times.

During my days in the Ford family, did Aunty Lois not notice the harm and emotional abuse Michael had inflicted upon me?

Was she not aware that I constantly felt like I was walking on eggshells living under someone else's roof?

All she needed to do was tell me that Michael wasn't the one who rescued me, and I wouldn't have had to tolerate Michael out of my sense of indebtedness toward him.

M

I too, had my own dignity and pride.

If I had known that I wasn't indebted to Michael, I wouldn't have let him hurt me. I

would have had the freedom to choose whether or not to love himm

I shouldn't have been bound by him. I could have called the police when Michael forced me to do things against my will and let him get the punishment he deserved.

However, because I had believed I owed him for rescuing me and my parents' bodies. from that fire, I tolerated his emotional abuse and torture for so

w years

All of this could have been avoided if Aunty Lois had just told me the truth.

Yet, she and her son held me captive in the name of love. One was afraid of me leaving

while the other had claimed it to be love.

"So, do you know who rescued Stephie, Mrs. Ford?" I took a deep breath, tightened my hands, and looked up at Aunty Lois.

Since Micahel wasn't the one who saved me, I had no reason to show mercy to him

anymore.

He was the reason me and my unborn child had died! He and Yasmin had to pay for what they did!

Aunty Lois shook her head. "The person left when we arrived. There were no surveillance cameras on the bridge too, so no one knew who saved you.

"But according to the witnesses, it was a teenage boy. I placed ads to find him, but no one came forward. I've never stopped asking around since."

I silently lowered my head.

Ms. Larson, could you please give Mike another chance? I hope we can settle this in private…" Aunty Lois said with a gentle voice.

I was aware that she wouldn't sound so gentle anymore if I turned her down again this

time.

Before Michael took over the company, Aunty Lois had been running the company alone. She was a strong and decisive woman.

“Sorry.” I shook my head.

I would not compromise again, Michael Ford.

“Mike’s abduction charge won’t hold, so that leaves only the assault accusation that

It

you’ve made against him. However, it appears that you haven’t suffered any harm, Ms.

Larson.

“There are better ways to handle this, ways that won’t lead to a feud between our families,” Aunty Lois’s voice turned cold.

“What he’s done to me goes beyond physical injury. He abducted me, threatened my husband, and even mentally abused him. I will not tolerate any of this,” I stated solemnly

and firmly.

After a moment of silence, Aunty Lois placed her phone in front of me.

On the screen were images of Steven, still homeless at the time, holding an abused

animal.

He was covered in blood and was cradling a kitten that had been severely abused and mutilated.

“Since the Lincoln family wants to wage a public relations battle, the Ford family will see it through to the end,” Aunty Lois declared.

With that, she stood up and left.