

Chapter 11 - Death by Smothering

Once they landed and transferred to an eight-door black limousine, Solene had not had the chance to speak with the Lord anymore. The moment he entered the vehicle, the constant ringing of his mobile phone regarding business matters didn't give Solene an opening to broach the earlier subject. Sure this disappointed her, but expecting she'll be spending time with him more and more, she decided to bury her inquiry temporarily. Instead, she rerouted her attention to the view past her side of the window, allowing herself to acquaint with the new country she was in.

But even with the fresh touristy look of the streets, shops, and the scenic spots they passed by, she couldn't peel her focus away from the man beside her. His voice reverberated all over the small space, confining her ears to his manly sound. Adding to her dilemma was his scent: a mixture of cologne and something delightfully masculine, teasing her nose to take a deep breath. She certainly hadn't noticed such aroma in the many times they had met, and she thought maybe it was potent now because of the confined space.

In the twenty minutes drive, she tried hard to keep her attention away from her husband-to-be. When in those moments that she really did have an enjoyable time watching the forests and beaches along the way, she couldn't help but make a delighted sound within her throat. This time, it was Henri who stopped mid-talking and listened to the wondrous sound. A ghost of a smile would appear then, satisfaction crossing his face at Solene's happiness.

By the time they arrived in the Rantzen Estate, it was already past seven in the evening. Female servants scurried to fetch Solene's luggage while she and the Lord disembarked the car.

A long line of servants in two rows stood waiting at the entrance of the massive mansion. Solene saw a tall, less muscular middle-aged man in a butler outfit bow down before them when they both climb up the steps. The other servants wearing white and maroon uniforms followed his lead. One short, chubby Mexican woman, however, stepped out of the line and beamed a smile.

"Oh my goodness! Is that her?!" she cried out giddily, her expression throwing a question towards the Lord.

"Try to tone it down, Mrs. Su. She's not used to your ways," Henri answered whilst he continued entering the colossal foyer of the building. He left Solene in a hurry without even as a parting glance or a heads up.

"Well I for one know she'll be happy with a motherly hug," the woman named Mrs. Su muttered to herself. "Come here, mi hija," she continued as her arms spread wide.

Solene, although feeling awkward, threw in a smile and let herself get smothered by the warm greeting of the woman. Her eyes cast a cool look at Henri's back though, finding the quickness of his leaving her a rude action. He was followed by the butler earlier like a puppy on a leash.

"I'm Mrs. Maribeth Su, Head Governess of the Rantzen Household. You may call me Mrs. Su or Beth for short," the woman stated once she withdrew.

Solene smiled at her and nodded. "A pleasure to meet you, Mrs. Su."

"Come, I know you are famished. I whipped up some delights for you to devour."

Mrs. Su guided her inside the foyer by the shoulder. Once they were inside, Solene didn't have the time to gape at the grandness of the place as the Head Governess directed her

attention to another line of servants standing near the base of the grand stairs bowing towards her.

"This is Cassandra, my assistant head, Chef Monroe the Head Chef of the family, and this is Patricia, your personal attendant," Mrs. Su informed, stretching her arm to each person mentioned.

Solene lowered her head briefly and smiled at each of them. "A pleasure to meet you all."

She noticed one servant though who seemed to look at her with suspicion and dislike. It was the assistant head, Cassandra as she was named.

Solene ignored this though, thinking such a greeting was expected for her who still was a stranger to the house.

"Come now, mi hija, let me take you to the dining room."

Patricia, the personal attendant of Solene followed them as they walked past the grand staircase and into a double door room in the far left of the foyer. This room was lit with enough lights Solene could easily notice the overly prepared feast on the table.

"Isn't Henri going to eat?" was the first question that popped out of her head. She couldn't eat such food alone. The selections were just too much.

"No mi hija, he usually prefers to dine in his office," answered Mrs. Su with honesty. She pulled a chair with a textured black finish situated at the center of the rectangular table and gestured at Solene. "Don't take it personally. He is a busy man after all. Now, come and take a seat."

Solene waved her hand in the air and scoffed. "No, it's not a problem at all, Mrs. Su."

She claimed the chair and sat on it with her overall bearing

prim and poised.

"You'll be introduced to the rest of the Rantzen Family later tonight," Mrs. Su stated next to her with kind eyes. "There is a gathering in your honor so you better eat now and rest, and later, Patricia will prep you up for the party."

From a few feet away, Patricia nodded in the most refined manner she could make. Her black hair was done in a bun and she wore a black pencil skirt and a gray embroidered blouse. She was petite, with a button nose and shy pale lips.

Solene however quickly shook her head. "A party is really unnecessary, Madame."

Mrs. Su tsked and placed a gentle hand on her shoulder.

"The Master doesn't think so. He has planned everything himself down to the bedroom slipper to make your stay here as smooth as possible."

With this, Solene was caught off-guard.

"Oh, he did, did he? That's thoughtful of him," she stated, but at the back of her mind, she questioned why he would go through such great lengths when he could have just hired someone to do it all.

"Well, you are his bride after all," exclaimed the Head Governess with a proud grin.

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"Milady Solene, this is your room," Patricia informed as they both stood in front of a large door sometime after Solene finished dining. They were on the third floor of the mansion, west wing, where all important family members were to reside.

Solene nodded her understanding as she admired the intricately carved ferns and flowers of the door. The maidservant twisted the doorknob and in they went when the heavy wood was pushed back.

The first thing Solene noticed as they entered the room was the space. The receiving room was definitely larger than her bedroom back at Germaine. The space could easily become a dance floor with a hundred people inside. Next that caught her attention was the modern fireplace already lit with fresh logs and the geometric light fixtures in the center of the ceiling. They spoke of sophistication, of good taste. It spoke of her.

The floor to ceiling windows was covered with black and white damask curtains, much to her eyes' pleasure, and this color scheme was continued inside the bedroom when Solene checked the area. The beddings were white and red and the pillows of the same color. Their Lord really had done a good job in choosing her favorite colors to tie up with the room. Mrs. Su was right. He really did plan everything to the smallest of details with her in mind.

But a question was nagging at the back of her mind once she retreated to the receiving room.

"Uhm, may I ask you something, Patricia?"

"Of course, Milady, what is it?" answered the servant with a curious gaze.

"Where is Henri's chamber?" Solene stated.

Patricia arched her brows and mouthed an 'oh.'

"Down the hall, at the west wing, Milady," she rushed to inform.

"Do you want to transfer there?"

Solene was taken aback. "Oh, no. No. No," she shook her head quickly, but then cleared her throat when she realized her

silliness. "I mean...at least not yet. I was just...curious. Anyway, I reckon my belongings are already placed inside the cabinets?" she smartly changed the subject with a tight-lipped smile.

Patricia nodded. "Yes, Milady, you are correct. And you'll find that we have added more selections of clothes and jewelry for you. You may peruse them inside the walk-in closet of your bathroom."

Solene wasn't surprised by her statement. With a big gulp, she just bobbed her head up and down, showing her understanding.

"Is there anything else you want of me, Milady?" Patricia eyed her with anticipation.

"None, for now, Patricia, but thank you," Solene replied.

"Then, I'll go ahead. I'll return later for the preparations."

The maidservant waltzed out of the room after a careful bow. Solene, now alone, took a deep sigh and bit her bottom lip.

"I guess it's time to report to my mom," she muttered to herself as she fished out her mobile phone from her sling bag.

'Luckily, the plane didn't go down. I'm already at the Rantzen Estate, Mom. It's a hundred times bigger than our house. I hope you guys are okay there.'

Was her text message.

'P.S. Is there something you need to tell me about our family? Because my groom seems to be dropping some hints that I'm supposed to know something.'

A little while later, her phone sounded with a funky beep. Solene opened it while she grazed the short hallway towards the bathroom.

'Oh, I'm glad you've arrived there safe and sound, Sweetie. I'll tell you everything you need to know when we get there. For now,

enjoy the place, relax, and get to know the Family deeper.'

Solene huffed out a disappointed breath once she finished reading.

'You're awfully too accepting of this, Mom. Any other mother wouldn't have given off their daughters at this young age. Anyway, I'll see what I can do.'

'I know you'll be fine, Sweetie. Be safe always. I love you!'

'I love you too, mom. :).'

Solene placed her phone down the black granite sink and turned around to further view the bathroom. Such a place could be compared to a five-star hotel. Every detail of the room was so good and so expensive-looking. There was a glass shower box that could fit at least eight people inside, a large bathtub opposite it that was made of rose quartz, and light fixtures that were custom-made and embellished with crystals.

As she checked, all toiletries were freshly stocked and not a single trash was found in the trash bin.

"Mhhh," Solene hummed, impressed by the grandeur and sterility of the place. "Not bad at all."

With her welcome party in mind, she decided to take a quick bath and dress up in the least revealing cocktail dress she could find in her wardrobe.

Thirty minutes later, a knock on Solene's bedroom door sounded. Patricia, who returned to help her prepare, opened the door. She immediately did a low bow as the Master of the House stepped in.

"Mind if I come in?" he stated, aiming his question to Solene who was sitting in front of the vanity mirror.

"I don't see why not," she stated, looking at him through the mirror.

The maidservant didn't think twice on leaving the room, giving the couple a private time.

"Is the room to your liking?" Henri asked once he was a short distance away from her. He wore a tuxedo, the black jacket unbuttoned to reveal another black shirt beneath. He matched it with black slacks and black boots.

Solene couldn't help but note how he was very strict with the color scheme. And she definitely couldn't keep herself from mentally agreeing how handsome he looked in it. He looked too good in it even that she wondered if the color black was created for him.

"A bit bigger than what I'm usually accustomed to but I like it. Thank you Henri," she stood up and met his gaze—his gaze that certainly was piercing her core. It at first made a bold move on perusing her form from head to foot, clearly liking how she looked in her form-fitting beige and red cocktail dress that was knee-length high. It then flicked to the object nestled on the bed, directing his attention to it and arching his brow.

"I see that you haven't opened the box," he stated, nearing it.

Solene just watched him as he picked up the small box that obviously housed a ring.

"I...I didn't have the time," she said, trying to be honest, but in truth, she had wanted to open it when she first caught sight of it earlier.

She had wondered what the ring would look like. Coming from a wealthy family and a Lord no less, she expected such object to be diamond encrusted. But, if she was being honest with herself, she wanted the ring to be simple, unassuming and not eye-catching. She wanted it like her. She wanted it to speak for

her, that she wasn't here to be married for their wealth or popularity.

When Henri opened the box, Solene couldn't hold back a grin.

She couldn't be sure if the man could hear her inner voice, but the ring held a look that exactly fitted what she wanted. It was the color black, with two gold lines on each side and three particularly small ruby stones.

"To officially make you my fiancée," Henri stated, taking her right hand and slipping the ring on her finger.

"I didn't bring anything to officially make you my fiancé too," Solene witty spoke, choosing not to swoon over the grand gesture. The man still had a long way to go to truly make her knees melt.

Henri smirked at her. "Hmm, a kiss would suffice," he said nonchalantly.

She didn't think much of it. He was just asking for a kiss and a kiss, he will have. She leaned forward and tiptoed, planting a kiss on his left cheek.

"How devout," the latter muttered softly once she withdrew.

"Excuse me?" she arched a brow. That certain word indeed hit a bit on her pride. Was he testing her?

Henri's mouth tipped upward and then shrugged his shoulders.

"Let's head to the dining room. We are expected by now."