

Chapter 14 - Death by First Kiss

Inside a wedding boutique, Solene was sitting with two of the said wedding team Norman was talking about. Joyce, a tall, middle-aged brunette, was the agent heading the table set-up during the reception while Armand, an Italian designer in his thirties, was the person leading the church decoration.

They had shared their visions on the wedding all of which included exuberant trinkets and ribbons, but none of it grabbed Solene's fancy. She instead made a bold move on changing the whole look of the church and the reception and went with the white tulips and candles combo.

This simple set-up was met with confused stares on both Joyce and Armand, but nevertheless accepted Solene's decision. In the end, they decided to go to a nearby town's wedding shop to look for the perfect size and shape of the candle holder and a few other things to include in the giveaways.

Once there, the owner of the boutique, Mrs. Florence, attended them. She was all smiles when she neared her guests, wearing a frilly blouse and a knitted pencil skirt.

"These are what you requested, Miss St. Fair. All samples we have, according to what you like," she stated whilst putting down two trays of candles and candle holders on the rectangular table.

Solene and the other two studied the samples.

"This one is perfect," Joyce voiced out with giddiness, pulling out a candle holder made of silver and embellished with transparent rhinestones.

Solene nodded at her and smiled. "Yes, you're right. I think this is the one."

"Great!" cried the shop owner. "We have enough on-hand stocks of that, Miss St. Fair. You won't need to worry about your wedding anymore."

"Thank you, Mrs. Florence," Solene muttered.

Suddenly, there was a commotion at the back of the boutique. Two male voices were arguing and then a gunshot was heard.

Solene and the rest jerked up, stunned by the closeness of the deadly sound.

"Don't move!" a man appeared from the back door then, aiming at them an imposing glock.

Mrs. Florence cried out as well as Joyce and Armand, quickly raising their hands in surrender. Solene followed; her eyes as wide as saucers.

Because she was the nearest to the intruder, he pulled her from the group and secured her in place, wrapping an arm around her and pressing the mouth of the gun against her forehead.

Solene gasped at the suddenness of the situation. She still remained silent, but the fear in her eyes couldn't be ignored.

"Don't you dare move or else I'll blow her head off!" the man shouted again.

"Rico, please don't do this!" Mrs. Florence cried out, her hands in supplication. She recognized the intruder despite the hooded jacket he was wearing.

"I want my last pay, Florence. I want my God-damned money!" the man named Rico announced.

"I'll give it to you! Just please don't include our customer with our issues! She's a very important person!" Mrs. Florence replied in horror.

"Oh really?" Rico snickered as he looked at Solene's profile.

"Then I'll take advantage of her. Forget about my last pay. I want fifty million as her ransom money."

"No, Rico!" Mrs. Florence quickly shook her head, more fear growing in her eyes. "You don't want to do that. You don't mess with the Rantzen Family!"

"Oh?" Rico's head cocked up in amusement, "She's the bitch who will enjoy the Rantzen's riches then? Huh! What pure luck I have! You must have one hell of a pussy to snag a Rantzen family member. I definitely like to taste that cunt of yours."

His hand that had tightly secured Solene's shoulder now traveled lewdly down her bust.

Solene, sensing the maniacal intent of his words and actions, gritted her teeth and warned, "I dare you to do it if you want to burn in Hell."

"Oh baby, Hell is my kind of place," he replied proudly.

Then, the atmosphere of the room turned cold as if an iceberg had just entered the building. Not one of them noticed a sudden presence in the room. Not the man or Solene herself.

"You must have been misinformed if you think Hell is a paradise," Henri's voice resounded inside, catching everyone's attention but most especially Solene who was well-accustomed to his sound of voice. Relief washed all over her knowing she'd be rescued very soon, but at the same time, she worried for him. The man had a gun for crying out loud, and she'd bet her ass Henri wasn't immune to a bullet.

Rico, on the other hand, immediately turned to the source of the voice. He looked at Henri with tightened brows, feeling confused. He had already made it sure the front and back doors were locked; made sure that no one other than his ex-boss and three customers were inside the store. Now, how did it come to be that a man appeared out of nowhere without him noticing?

"What the—who are you?!" Rico asked, pointing the gun quickly at Henri.

The latter stepped forward past the display shelf and openly made himself vulnerable, his face a picture of calm and controlled anger, not at all worried with the gun pointed at him.

"Scum like you are not worthy to know my name," he said, then briefly looked at Solene, clenching his jaw when he noticed the man's palm splayed across her chest. "For touching my woman, I'll guarantee you'll exactly end up in Hell."

"Huh! What are you?" Rico boldly lashed, "Some priest who thinks he could pray me to Hell?"

A slow grin formed on the corner of Henri's lips then. "Oh no, human, I'm much worse."

Rico's eyes glazed over for a moment and then he was in a different plane of reality entirely. He saw two red eyes glowing gold, like a predator under the cover of darkness, and then what he saw around him made him shriek to the bone.

Solene saw the exchange but she couldn't exactly tell what had truly happened. At first, her captor was tightly holding her in place, but the next second, he released her and out-of-the-blue scampered away, tripping in the process and crawling on the ground like a rat ready to be disemboweled.

"No, no! Get away from me!" Rico cried out with intense fear visible on his face. The gun he was holding dropped to the floor just as the front door of the store swung open.

"Anklet, you know what to do," Henri addressed the newcomer of the room. She was garbed in a leather-made suit that could perfectly pass as a cosplay character for Assassin's Creed. Her hair was colored iridescent mahogany, but some wisps of brown complemented her heart-shaped face. She had an intense look on her, but such expression was expected of a

Rantzen bodyguard.

"Yes, My Lord," Anklet lowered her head briefly and then picked up the man who was still cowering on the ground. One of her colleagues, a man of good built wearing black shades and a uniformed suit, entered the store and motioned the wedding team, Joyce and Armand, and the store owner, Mrs. Florence, to head outside.

The three of them didn't hesitate to leave.

Solene just stood by and watched them go, still very cognizant of her groom's mysterious presence in the room. Just like last night, he suddenly appeared without a heads up, like a ghost or a thief in the night. She mentally noted it.

"You look calm for a woman who was just taken hostage," Henri commented as he neared her. He placed a hand on her jaw and carefully examined her for any bruises.

Solene allowed him to do it, not finding it awkward.

"I've had my share of troubles since a child, Henri. Nothing surprises me anymore."

The corner of Henri's mouth tipped up. "Hmmm, you're an interesting woman indeed."

"I'll take that as a compliment," she replied and cast her eyes on the floor, wondering what exactly just happened seconds ago with Rico. "Tell me, is the Lord of the Rantzen Family really this powerful? Are you really feared by the people of this town?"

"I may look imposing but using fear to rule over my subjects is not my cup of tea, Solene," he replied.

"Then, if not fear, what did you do earlier to make the man act like that?"

Henri paused, trying to consider something. Then, he stared back at her and answered smoothly, "I just made him realize he

was making a big mistake taking you hostage.”

It was a safe answer and a reasonable one. She accepted it, but wasn't satisfied and so she asked again, “How did you know I was in trouble?”

“I instructed someone to watch over you, Solene. Your bodyguard, Anklet, informed me you were in trouble,” was his easy response, as if he knew he'd be interrogated by her.

“And you came here all the way from the mansion with just the snap of your fingers?” It was supposed to be a joke, a sarcastic statement that didn't need serious attention, but judging from the displeased look on Henri's face, it seemed he didn't take it lightly.

She unconsciously cleared her throat.

“Solene, from now on, until we are wed, you will not go out of the estate,” he ordered, putting her on the hot spot.

She would have thought of him as a manipulative, possessive man if not for a greater reason. Though it may not be the same word for word, her grandmother and grandfather advised her to stay inside the estate until she was wed. Because of this, she realized an important tidbit about her fiancé.

“I'm assuming you know about my uncanny ability on attracting accidents right?” she asked.

Henri tipped his head down and probed her soul through his mesmerizing eyes. “Not just accidents, my bride, bad elements too.”

Solene took a deep breath. “Hmm, it looks like you are well informed by my family. It kind of makes me wonder why you still pursue marrying me when I'm this flawed. It's a risk to your family.”

“Nothing is a risk when you're concerned,” he replied straight to

the point. "And you are not flawed. You are beautiful, Solene," he lifted a handful of her delicate hair and kissed the tips whilst still holding her gaze, "You have a precious soul. And certainly, you are indispensable."

She didn't intend to swoon over such words, but unfortunately, she did. Her breath was caught in her throat and her cheeks warmed up. Nobody has ever told her that. Not her mother or father, and certainly not her grandparents. Once upon a time, she certainly felt like bad karma with all the accidents happening in her life, but with his words now, she was given an affirmation that she wasn't that at all.

Damn him for making her feel this way.

"Am I expected to give you a 'thank you kiss' for saving my life back there?" she rushed to say, keeping her composure intact so that her emotions wouldn't pour out.

Henri straightened and released her hair. "Solene, if I expected you to kiss me just for that reason alone then you'd be kissing me not just once but a thousand times more."

"What's that supposed to mean?" her brows furrowed.

A chuckle formed past his lips just as he started walking out of the store. "All in due time, my bride, you'll know," he stated as a parting word.

"Then, I take it you don't want a thank-you kiss?" she still pressed on, putting a hand on her chest as if to cover the wild thumping of her heart against her rib cage.

Henri turned around to look at her. His eyes dialed a tone darker, a little bit sensual with a little hint of tease.

"If you really want to give me one in an act of good faith, then be my guest. But, a word of caution Solene, I don't settle for just a peck on the cheeks alone."

Her body froze. Quite a direct way for him to say he wanted her lips. Was he testing her again just like before? Or was he just teasing her? It wouldn't matter which was which for the big question now was, would she actually take his bait?

Henri neared her, still waiting for her reply. He snaked an arm around her waist and brought her close to him. "Not here though," he whispered close to her ear. "I'll wait until we get back in the mansion." After that, he pulled away. What came next was unexpected. He grabbed her left hand faster than she could comment and guided her out of the boutique.

In a matter of seconds, Solene found herself being directed inside a six-door limousine. She watched as Henri followed her inside, signaling the driver to immediately start the car.

"To the mansion," he said.

The driver nodded before he pressed the button of the partition wall to a close. This effectively gave the two some privacy.

Solene, seeing this, entertained the wildest idea she could ever make. Damn modesty. Damn her inexperience. She just wants to get through with this and get through it she would.

"Henri," she called, her body turned towards him.

The one addressed was busy looking at another black Rantzen car driving past them, but still, he answered, "Hm?"

"Thank you."

Swiftly, Solene reached to touch his jaw. She leaned closer too and tipped her head up for one purpose alone and it was to capture his mouth.

Henri's eyes enlarged when their lips touched. He was completely surprised. Briefly, his body stiffened, but instinct kicked in and soon he was threading his fingers through her hair.

Solene thought a brief kiss would be enough. A simple brush of her lips along with his, a little bit of pressure, and a little bit of moistness would surely be acceptable. Right? That's what she expected, but Henri had another idea.

He secured her head in place, angled his body towards her, and then placed more pressure on their kiss. His lips parted, captured her bottom lip, and sucked on it until she whimpered. He continued on, giving her the most reverent, passionate kiss he could give for their first.

Solene was beyond words. His mouth—his tongue!—exploring her own caused the wiring of her brain to go haywire. She couldn't rationally think, but heck, thinking rationally wasn't what she wanted to do at the moment at all. One word alone lingered in her head and she was aching to speak it.

"Hen...ri," she managed to say when she got the chance. Her eyes were half-lidded, looking at him. Her face was flushed. Her breathing was controlled and deep.

The one addressed cupped her face in reply and then, he slowly withdrew. It was a painstaking thing to do, especially that he still wanted to taste more of her mouth.

"You're welcome," he whispered, relishing the drunk expression on her face as he stared down at her.

Their eyes met; each silently speaking words of pleasure and satisfaction.

Once Solene realized she was still in his arms, she quickly straightened, placed her hands on her lap, and went back to her side of the car.

She swallowed hard, clearing a nonexistent lump in her throat. She struggled to keep herself from biting her lips, wanting to taste any residue left of his kiss. She actually more than enjoyed their first kiss.

"You...you really know what you want," she muttered, remembering his word of caution earlier. She chose to pin her sights on the passing cars outside, feeling nervous to look at him in the eye. Her heart drummed a wild beat waiting for his reply, and when he did, she thought she almost had a heart attack.

"I am, Solene. And you'll find, where you're concerned, I always will be. Expect more kisses like that from me in the near future."