

Chapter 17- Death by a Ghost

Grabbing the back of Solene's head, Henri placed more pressure on their kiss. He gently brushed his tongue along her lower lip and then followed it with a slight suck. This opened up Solene's mouth more, allowing him easier entry. His tongue invaded her again, tasting her, coaxing her own out from its comfort zone.

When their first kiss was short and hot, this kiss here was ten times more. It was smoldering and continuous, and judging from the way Henri held her, it wasn't ending anytime soon.

Solene, brought by her nerves, stilled for a moment, but with Henri's encouraging movements, she gradually submitted to the heat of their kiss. She angled her head to the side and stuck out her tongue, sparring with his in a passionate duel. Despite technically inexperienced, she didn't feel awkward at all. He was perfect with guiding her.

Trying to acquaint herself with his person, she reached up and threaded her fingers along with his thick locks. They were neatly brushed up earlier, but now it was sexily messy. Her other hand remained touching the bed, but it soon joined the party, testing the feel of his naked chest, and oh God, just as expected, it was as hard as she thought it would. A short grin appeared on her lips then.

She could well get accustomed to this every day for the rest of her life.

She reveled on his scent again, taking all of it in as much as her lungs could take. For a woman who reserved herself for her future husband, namely him, she should have been acting shy, this was their first experience of intimacy after all, but she was feeling all kinds of giddy now, and truth be told, she liked it and

was further willing to receive more of his advances.

As if he heard her thoughts, Henri's free hand touched the underside of her breast near the wing tattoo. A soft moan escaped from her throat then. She was super ticklish there.

His approving groan emerged in reply and thereafter, that same hand wandered lower, sneaking under her gown so he could fully touch her tattoo without hindrance.

He palmed it first. The contact of which brought Solene gasping for air. His hand was wonderfully warm and large, and bold. The good kind of bold. Then, with his fingertips, he traced the lines and the curves of the wings. Each touch elicited an electrifying sensation under her skin. It felt wondrous. Out of this world.

As Henri withdrew from their heady kiss, Solene unconsciously moaned louder. He chuckled upon hearing it. It was definitely an encouragement to go further.

His hand that had held her head earlier now traveled down her shoulder. He planted brief kisses starting from the corner of her mouth continuing to her jaw until he reached the plane of her neck. Without hesitation, he licked her skin there and sucked gently that sweet spot near her carotid.

Solene's mouth opened into a soundless cry of delight. With her fingers still threading his hair, she closed her eyes as the tingling sensation flooded inside her.

Wasn't this kind of intimate session with him happening way too soon? A small voice asked at the back of her head.

Solene answered her own query with a silent 'no.' Nothing was too soon for a man and a woman about to wed. Nothing was too soon when they were supposed to catch up on lost time.

Henri continued his advances. He gently arranged her on the mattress with her arms lying limp on each side and her legs

still spread apart. With a grin, he joined her there but instead of attacking her lips again, his mouth settled on her leg, mere inches away from the ankh tattoo she had.

"Hen...ri," Solene watched him with eyes half-lidded. Her breath came out in small pants, feeling worked up with his zealous attention.

"What...are you...doing?" she asked as he began to trace his mouth up to her inner thigh. Immediately, a new batch of sensations filled her whole body. She arched her back and slightly shifted on the mattress, unable to bear the tickling sensation he was creating. But Henri, quick with his reflex, grabbed her waist and managed to keep her steady.

"I'm only blessing your tattoo, my bride," he looked at her full of desire and continued, "just giving it a reward for doing a good job protecting you these past few years while I'm away."

He darted out his tongue, licked her tattoo, and traced the edges too sensually that it sent Solene whimpering against her breath.

They weren't even having sex, yet she felt they were doing it already.

She tossed her head back and gasped out loud.

"Henri! Ahhhh!" For the first time ever, an erotic tone left her voice. Feeling conscious with it, she quickly covered her mouth with her right hand and tossed an embarrassed look at the ceiling.

She heard a pleased groan from deep within Henri's chest before he withdrew and gazed at her with full force.

"Solene, as much as I want to hear that angelic sound, please reserve it for our wedding night."

He grinned just as her cheeks heat up.

"Then let's stop, Henri. Let's take it slow," she advised.

"Hm, that I can't do," he replied; his dark eyes scanning her inviting form. "I've waited for you too much, Solene. You don't know how much I desire you."

She swallowed hard. How could such words fill her with excitement and fear at the same time?

"You...you're rather blunt with your words," she remarked, diverting her eyes away from his before she'd melt under his burning gaze.

Henri nodded silently. "When it concerns what I want, yes I am."

Somehow his words sounded like he still wanted to go on, pick up where they left off, and continue with their kisses. Well, she couldn't blame him if he wanted to. Truth be told she also wanted to feel more of him, taste more of him, discover that other side of a relationship filled with moans and groans and sweat and pressed bodies.

"But worry not, we'll stop for now," Henri clarified with a grin.

"I've done what I came here to do anyway so I will leave you to your rest."

"What did you come here to do?" Solene arched a brow, feeling curious.

Henri stooped low to meet her gaze and then placed a chaste kiss on her forehead.

"To kiss you good night."

In response, Solene was left speechless. She watched as he climbed down the mattress and stood up to his full lordly height in front of her.

Glancing down, she caught sight of an unmistakable bulge under his yoga pants. He was large and well-packed. He didn't even try to hide it. Wasn't worried even that she'd see.

For the second time tonight, she gulped hard.

"Good night, my bride," Henri stated, successfully redirecting her attention to his face.

Blushing furiously, Solene avoided his gaze while she greeted back, "Good night, Henri."

She didn't move at all until she heard her bedroom door gently close. Now that she was alone, she stared at both of her tattoos with renewed respect and adoration.

She was wrong, she admitted that now. Yes, physically, her groom may not have shown himself to her since their betrothal, but he made do by way of the tattoo. It seemed he had always cared for her since the very beginning and for that, it made her heart swell.

She arranged herself properly in bed, pulling out the sheet so that half of her body would be covered. With all that had happened minutes ago and with the residue of heat still emitting inside her body, she expected she'd get good sleep, but unfortunately, the night didn't permit it.

It was in the middle of the night when an echoing sound of a woman reached Solene's ears. At first, she dismissed it as just the breeze, but when the female voice got closer, speaking clearly her name, she sat up, perked up her ears, and blinked away her drowsiness.

Switching the lampshade on, she scanned the room, expecting it to be her maid oddly trying to wake her up in an ungodly hour, but she found there was no one inside other than her. A chill crept down her spine then. Surely, it was just her imagination? But the voice sounded so real to her...

"Sohhh...leeneee..." Suddenly, the female voice called out again

in a breathy tone.

Solene sharply inhaled. There it was again, her mind stressed. This time she was sure she wasn't imagining it.

"Who are you?" she asked, putting as much courage on her voice as possible. "Show yourself!" Her fingers slightly trembled and her heart drummed against her rib cage in wild beats. She wasn't a woman easily scared, but knowing she was in a new place, she clearly had a legit reason to be afraid.

"Co...me here..." the female voice ordered.

Despite feeling apprehensive, Solene stood up and left the bed. "Where is 'here'?" she asked whilst placing a hand over her chest.

"In...the cen...ter of the gar...den ma...ze..." the disembodied voice answered.

Then, in a flash, Solene found herself standing in the said area. She gasped as realization hit her. How did she end up here? Her mind voiced out.

She had been in this place before together with Henri, but the sun was high up in the sky at that time. Nothing to be afraid of really. But now, darkness had covered the grounds, effectively creating a mysterious and frightening aura to the maze. Only the small light of the moon helped her eyes to adjust to the surroundings.

Looking ahead, she caught sight of a moving body behind the theta fountain. It was humanoid in shape, with long, spindly fingers gripping the marble for support. It's long black hair allowed Solene to assume it was a woman and indeed, she was right when the woman stuck out her head on the side of the fountain.

"So...sohh...sohhh...lene..." the woman slurred. She grinned

wickedly, flashing yellowish teeth as she effortlessly climbed up the top of the fountain.

Solene's heartbeat skipped many times. Her breath was caught in her throat when she noticed the woman's noticeable features. Blood was all over her; from her white cocktail dress to her face. She looked like a victim of a car crash or a prom night gone wrong.

"A ghost. You're a ghost are you?" Solene asked, suddenly pitying her soul. Because of her family's influence, she believed in such entities too despite not really witnessing one.

The woman crouched and started chuckling as her response.

"What do you need me for?" Solene asked again. Thanks to her studies in Thanatology, she learned that dead people, especially those ones who met a sudden death, mostly ask for help from the living. Not that she was willing to offer help. She was just curious about how the ghost knew her name and why she bothered to call specifically for her.

"I want...you..." the ghost voiced out in echoes.

This time, Solene felt the danger in the air. The hair on her arms quickly stood up.

"I can only offer you prayers, lady," she stated, stepping backward slowly.

The ghost chuckled again.

"You...are...special, Sohhlene... You can...save me...from death."

A disturbing cackle consequently left her mouth. Then, her head turned a hundred and eighty degrees. Her elbows and legs flexed up into a weird position before she jumped towards Solene with claw-like fingers.

Solene, unable to process the ghost's words, hastily stepped

back and guarded herself. Her studies of the dead never taught her how to fight a ghost. Maybe, if she knew this would happen, she would have visited a nearby church and procure holy water; at least that liquid could do some damage on a malevolent soul.

The only thing she could do now was use whatever self-defense she learned from her grandfather. He had always been a man who believed a woman should learn martial arts to defend herself. Way back when Solene was a teenager, he had taught her how to jab, kick and seriously break a bone or two.

However, thinking about it now, her opponent was a ghost; obviously without a solid form. She highly doubted the self-defense lessons would work now.

So, in the end, she hoped and prayed this was all just a dream or more like a nightmare. That she would wake up still in her cozy bed and not outside the maze garden.

Unfortunately, her prayer wasn't answered. The ghost was able to do some damage on her left arm, bestowing a deep laceration using her claws.

Solene shouted in pain as she knelt on the ground. Her affected arm bled immediately and she saw drops of it color the cobblestone.

"Come now...Sohhhhlene. Submit...yourself willingly..." the woman stated as she crouched low again some distance away.

Solene hissed and gave the woman a sharp glare. "You're a crazy ghost!"

As fast as lightning, the woman sprinted towards her, leaving an ominous chuckle in her wake.

Solene stood up and faced the exit of the maze, intending to run away and seek refuge inside the mansion. Surely, somebody

would find her; Anklet perhaps—her bodyguard, or maybe one of the servants of the mansion. But considering it was in the middle of the night, she knew help was unlikely to arrive, but she would have to take her chances.

She ran as fast as she could to the exit, hitting the ground forcefully with her heavy feet. By the time she reached it, a shadowy figure materialized in front of her. To her surprise, it was Henri.

With a gasp, she paused midrun and stared at him with the biggest confused and surprised eyes she could make.

“Henr—!”

Before she could finish his name though, Henri raised a hand in the air and instantly she lost consciousness. He caught her just in time before she fell on the floor, wrapping an arm around her waist and securing her close to him.

In just a millisecond, a great scythe appeared on his other hand and a blinding light flashed from the blade.

The ghost couldn’t process what had happened before her tainted soul was sucked inside the scythe. Nothing was left thereafter. Not even a strand of hair or a drop of blood from her wounded head.

“Insolent soul. Unfortunate of you to be brainwashed by a demon,” he muttered through clenched teeth.

Sighing, he glanced down at his bride’s face. She looked serenely sleeping, no trace of fear or worry on her face. Good. He preferred it to stay that way when she wakes up in the morning.

“Shall I wake Anklet, Sire, and have her guard Lady Solene?” Norman asked with his head lowered. He stood right beside a hedge close to the exit path.

Henri's jaw tightened.

"No," was his curt reply. "I'll take her to my chamber. I'll guard her myself."