

Chapter 18 - Death by Staring

Solene stirred as the first light of day kissed her face. She softly mumbled and rubbed her cheeks more against her pillow finding it downier and smoother than she remembered it to be.

She heard the sweet chirping of birds somewhere outside the room. The lovely tune earned a small smile on her lips. It was a welcomed alarm clock for her.

Opening her eyes, she expected to be greeted by Patricia, standing in a corner with her ready-made breakfast, but that didn't happen.

Instead, the serene face of Henri welcomed her line of sight.

Her jaw dropped whilst a silent gasp escaped her lips. Her eyelids fluttered and her head reflexively moved backward to create a bit of distance between their faces. As it turned out, their noses had almost touched. If she were any inches nearer...

Oh boy.

Heat immediately rose on her cheeks. They had shared kisses already yesterday, even more than that, but to be so close to his face while asleep was something intimately different too.

Why was he here anyway? She asked herself.

Slightly shifting on the bed, she scanned the room and found out the answer right away...or more like the correct question.

Why was she here in this room and moreover, to whose room did it belong to?

Glancing back at Henri with still a flushed face, she didn't wonder any further. For certain, this was his room and she was lying on his bed. The damn thing was king size and full of black and white pillows and even boasted a thick headboard that was covered with gray cushioned cloth.

The question now was, how did she end up here?

His room was twice the size as hers. It had a carpet that looked like marbled flooring of gray and white. The walls and ceiling were painted with the same color motif, but the middle of the ceiling where an enormous waterfall-inspired modern chandelier hang was painted with white and accented with soft lights behind the moldings.

There was little furniture inside; just the bed, a coffee table in the corner, and two wingback chairs beside it. A few paintings were hung. One was a painting of some forest trees casting a shadow on a lake, the second was an abstract painting of a spherical shape, and the third was a painting of the moon with colors strikingly similar to the colors of her eyes: pale violet and blue.

Thought she would have wanted to, Solene didn't linger on checking out his room. She bit her lip and furrowed her brows, trying to remember what happened last night.

There was a visitor, Lady Ursula, yes, and she checked the tattoos on her left flank and inner thigh. Then, her groom came, Lady Ursula left and once they were alone, they shared a passionate kiss and from there, they...

Speedily, Solene grabbed her bed cover and checked herself. She was still in her sleeping gown, thank God, and her betrothed was decently dressed too despite half-naked from the waist up.

She sighed and calmed her racing mind. They didn't do it all the way, that—she was certain, but still she wondered how she ended up in his chamber.

She could clearly remember them exchanging 'good nights' last night, but what happened after that was fuzzy for her.

Tossing a suspicious look at her betrothed, there was only one

way to find out and that was to ask him the moment he wakes up.

Her left elbow supported most of her weight as she went back to her side-lying position earlier. This would be the first time for her to get a closer look at Henri's face without feeling conscious. Taking advantage of this, she examined the well-sculpted jawline of the man, the finely-shaped brows and nose, and the thick, long lashes that complemented his eyes. Of course, she couldn't avoid looking at his lips. The plump duo demanded her attention too and as she stared at it, she unconsciously bit her bottom lip.

Gosh.

She felt like an infatuated high school girl and this somehow made her stop staring.

Rolling on her back, she rerouted her gaze to the ceiling and sighed. Don't forget, this man had secrets, she reminded herself. Secrets that she still had to discover.

Still, that didn't mean she couldn't enjoy the moment. A grin formed on her lips.

Deciding to continue ogling him, she went back to position, but once her eyes rested on him, she gasped in shock. Henri was now staring darkly at her; his terrifyingly beautiful grayish-green eyes were smoldering.

In a heartbeat, he pushed himself up, tossed his bed cover away, secured both of her wrists over her head, and straddled her; the whole time of which Solene was dumbfounded.

"Henri!" she shouted; her eyes shaped like saucers.

"Good morning my bride," he greeted with a faint grin on his lips. He lowered his head to give her a kiss, but Solene shifted to the side.

"No, don't. I haven't gone to the bathroom yet," she stated worriedly.

Henri arched a brow, studied her, and then chuckled. "You're my fiance, Solene. Everything about you, I accept without question, even your morning breath."

This warmed the pit of her stomach.

"Still..." she trailed off, but then Henri released her left wrist in order to cup her face.

"Still, you shouldn't worry. Let me kiss you."

Their eyes met. Solene gave him a silent yes through this and without delay, Henri captured her mouth to bestow the most wondrous morning kiss she could receive.

It was at first shy and sweet, a little pressure here and there of their lips, until it blew into a hot and heavy exchange. Solene moaned from under her throat, relishing every bit of his taste and the way he moved his tongue inside her. He was really a good kisser, she could see that now, and she admitted to herself this will be one of the perks of marrying him.

Lost on the sensations, Solene grabbed a hold of his hair and boldly maneuvered him down to her neck. Her skin was aching for his wondrous treatment too and it all started since last night.

Henri didn't complain when their kiss stopped. He was more than happy to indulge her by caressing her neck. Using his tongue, he licked and sucked again, but unlike last night, he decided to place a hickey and a very noticeable one at that.

Solene angled her head even more to give him better access. She could feel the slight sucking and biting pain of his teeth but didn't really know what it meant.

Once this was done, Henri kissed her back on the lips and then

pulled away.

"There. Flaunt it however you like," he stated with a proud grin.

Solene blinked, clueless with his words. "Flaunt what?"

"You'll see," he replied; his eyes filled with mirth.

She still felt hot and turned on, but she obviously couldn't tell him to continue. Instead, she just watched him as he climbed down the bed sporting a noticeable bulge under his pants.

"Henri, why am I in your chamber?" she asked trying to divert her attention away from his package whilst pushing herself up to sit on the mattress. She studied the muscles on his back and oh God, they were indeed sculpted to perfection. The morning light that passed through his floor-to-ceiling windows created a better view of the cuts and grooves and the smoothness of his skin. It was like the light was adoring him.

It was unfair.

Henri paused from walking and glanced at her over his shoulder. He noticed her gaping at him and in response, a light chuckle passed through his lips. "To see you stare at me like that."

Solene blinked fast and recollected herself. "I'm not joking! Why did you bring me here? I expected to share your bed only after the wedding day and not now."

Henri tried to keep his expression neutral and answered, his tone firm. "Be it before or after the wedding day, it wouldn't matter. Starting today, you sleep in my chamber. You may still conduct your day activities in your room, Solene, but come nighttime, you return here. It is a must. I will not accept any objections."

"I don't object, Henri, but at least you tell me why?" she retaliated.

Henri gave out a long sigh. He examined her feminine form in his bed and the way she looked at him expectantly. He was suffering inside. Damn it, he wanted so much to tell her everything, the whole truth if a must, just so he could move on and simply claim her, make love to her, but he couldn't. At least not yet.

Damn her family for keeping secrets from her. If they would have told her everything right from the start, he wouldn't have been suffering. But with all these considered, he couldn't really complain. He enjoyed her purity too.

"I value your innocence, Solene, really, and as much as possible I'd like to protect it, but unfortunately, I can't," he answered, his voice tight. "Your innocence wouldn't last long. When that time comes, you'll know why I'm doing this."

"My family will arrive tomorrow," Solene voiced out knowing already what it meant for the both of them.

"Then tomorrow is the day you open up your mind. You'll surely see me in a different light by then."

"Don't assume things," she shook her head slightly. "Let me be the judge of it, Henri."

Such strong determination was visible in her eyes and Henri admired it so.

"Of course. My apologies, Solene," he answered and lowered his head.

When he looked at her again, the tension in his eyes had disappeared.

"I know you'll be inside the estate, but I want Anklet to accompany you always. She's waiting for you in your room with Patricia as we speak," he informed.

Solene stood up beside the bed, not bothered by the light

clothing she wore. "Then, I'll see myself out," she stated and started walking towards the bedroom door.

"Solene?" Henri called, his eyes taking all of her appearance with delight.

She paused and turned slightly to look at him. "What?"

"Let's have dinner tonight. Just you and me. Let's make it our first of the many dates," Henri invited, complete with a small yet charming smile.

Solene managed to keep her heart steady. God knows how much she was slowly falling from her well-built protective barrier.

"Of course," she answered just before opening the door.

"Good morning, Lady Solene."

"Good morning, Miss."

Both Anklet and Patricia greeted once Solene entered her chamber. She nodded at them and greeted too whilst taking note of their expressions. It seemed they weren't bothered by the fact that she had just been to their Master's room and wearing just her sleeping gown even.

"What's the activity for today?" she asked, knowing Patricia would be ecstatic to enumerate them.

"The wedding team will be here in an hour to review everything Miss," the maid informed just as expected, "And come afternoon, you'll be in the south wing of the mansion."

"The south wing?" Solene's brow arched up. "What's in that place?"

"There's a training facility there, Miss, complete with a gym and all kinds of martial arts weapons," Patricia explained, giving her

companion, Anklet, a shifty glance.

"Why would I need to go there?" Solene pressed on, frowning her brows in confusion.

"To train you to fight, Lady Solene," Anklet filled in. "It's Master Henri's orders."