

## Chapter 17 - Sweet Addiction

Although Tara was a spoiled daddy's girl all the way, she didn't abhor hard work. On the contrary, she believed in earning her own money, and usually worked her ass off during her free time as a sales assistant in a rather known jewelery shop. But she had asked that she be relieved of her duties for the weekend seeing as it was her birthday. Naturally, she was given said permission.

And thus, although her dad never failed to send a grand to her account which was to cover her food and transportation expenses, she had her own money to rely on, refusing to be any more dependent on her parents than she already was.

Celebrating her birthday with them was, however, like a tradition - one she didn't wish to break.

When it was time to decide what to wear for the evening, she ended up opting for short shorts and an over-sized t-shirt. She didn't usually care for make-up much, but a glance at her bathroom's mirror and she quickly changed her mind. She looked like a mess. Therefore, she applied foundation, concealer, mascara, and a beautiful red lipstick.

"Where to, miss Scott?" A tall man in a black suit asked the moment she stepped out of her building door.

"Do I know you?" She drawled, eyes narrowed in suspicion.

The man in question was bulky, wore stylish - probably brand - sunglasses, and spoke in an ear-piece - holding his forefinger above the device, "Yes, sir. I'll be accompanying her."

"Did my father send you?"

The question sounded silly even to her own ears. Her dad had money, sure, but not the kind of money where he could hire a muscle - at the drop of a hat - to accompany her where she went.

"Antonio?" She then mused out loud. "Oh, it's Antonio alright! It has his stalker-ish signature on it." She spat out rather angrily as she glared at the suddenly stiff hired muscle. "How can you hire me a driver-slash-bodyguard without my consent? Are you out of your damned mind?"

She yelled at the innocent man who was nearly one foot taller than her, wishing his boss would hear her through that ear-piece.

"It's useless," he told her flatly. "Mr. De La Cruz ended the call."

“Did he now?” Her glare possessed so much heat to it, she was surprised the man didn’t wither away or at least cower back or something.

“Well, I’m going to my parents’ home,” she announced, and he nodded at her. “But don’t get your hopes up, you’re not accompanying me.”

“Miss Scott,” he began almost timidly.

“Don’t miss Scott me,” she cried out in a rather exasperated tone. “My name’s Tara. If you really need to talk to me, call me Tara.”

“I couldn’t possibly dare,” he let out in a firm tone.

She started walking but he intercepted her, coming to stand in front of her.

“Please, miss S...” at the glare he received, he rectified, “miss Tara. Please, be reasonable. I have a family.”

“You have a family?” She squeaked out weakly. “Then, what are you doing, working for the... likes of Antonio?”

She had almost said the mafia, and then thought better of it. Maybe he didn’t know about Antonio’s ties to the mafia after all.

Needless to say she would be scared for her family too, if she were given a job by the mafia and failed to deliver.

“Yes, I have a family that needs me, that relies on me,” he said with a small smile. “I’m the only one who’s currently working. I need the job, miss Tara. Failing is not an option. And disappointing Mr. De La Cruz is out of the question. Surely, you can understand that.”

She couldn’t see his eyes thanks to the shades that were hiding them, but something told her he wasn’t lying about his family needing him. Men rarely lied about such things. These were honor matters. And honor in the mafia world meant something.

Yes... she had looked up the mafia. Although she mostly found stories about the Sicilian mafia, she knew from the countless movies she had watched in her youth, that honor meant everything to these families - as twisted as that was. Stealing from the boss for instance was like dishonoring the family... and so on.

“Tara is fine,” she said on a sigh as she turned on her heel and made a beeline to the car that awaited her.

“Thank you, miss Tara.”

Came the grateful answer.

Tara didn't choose reason - if this could be called as such - because she was afraid of what Antonio might do to her, rather because of what would happen to this poor man who was hired to protect her if she were to refuse getting in the car with him...

Yes, Tara was a spoiled little daddy's girl, but that didn't mean she had no heart.

The man had a family who depended on him and on his earnings. She couldn't be as cruel as to make him lose his job - or worse, god forbid!

"So, what's your name?" She asked once the man started the car.

"Jared, miss Scott," he informed her kindly.

"I thought we already agreed on you calling me Tara," she pouted.

"Sorry, miss Tara. And yes, calling you miss Tara is as good as it's going to get," he added the last sentence in teasing.

Tara had to admit that she liked this hired muscle.

Nevertheless, the situation was ridiculous and thus she called Antonio.

"Yes, Kitten?" He greeted upon taking the call.

"Care to explain?" She asked in the sweetest tone she could muster.

"Explain what exactly, kitten?" He asked.

"You freaking hired someone to accompany me wherever I go..."

"Yes. Your point being?" He retorted flatly.

"Is that really necessary?" She asked, rolling her eyes at him even though he couldn't see her.

"Do you really need to ask, kitten? You're brighter than that."

"Don't patronize me, Antonio," she hissed angrily at him, and the car swerved a little.

Could it be that even merely hearing her speak to Antonio had that effect on the muscle that was Jared?

"I'm not, cariña," he said softly. "I just want what's best for you."

"Oh, really now? Maybe what's best for me is never seeing your face again?" She retorted bitterly. "This is called stalking."

“Are you trying to provoke me, kitten?” He iced out.

His tone sent chills running down her spine, not exactly pleasurable ones but not entirely unpleasant either.

“Antonio, you should have at least warned me,” she said in reprimand.

“I didn’t think of that, I’ll have to say, seeing as I didn’t see the harm in hiring a bodyguard to keep you safe,” he admitted.

“Next time, think before taking action,” she sighed.

“Yes, madam.”

His tone was somewhere between amused and serious. And she’d be lying if she said she didn’t like it.

“Goodbye, Antonio.”

“Ciao, kitten,” was his response before he hung up.