

Chapter 18 - Sweet Addiction

The dinner at her parents' was spent in a sweet atmosphere. Tara's dad didn't breach the subject of Antonio, and she didn't either, unsure as she was whether her mom knew or not.

When she decided to go back home, Jared was waiting for her outside her parents' house. Her mom, who stood at the door, couldn't help but ask in an incredulous tone, "Who is it and whose car is that?"

Tara couldn't blame her mom. The car screamed luxury and the Jared's posture screamed bodyguard - especially since he didn't have an open or friendly face on.

"I'll tell you all about it another time, mom," she said in an apologetic voice.

Her mom pouted, not liking her answer it would seem, before saying, "You better make that other time soon."

Tara just waved at her before getting inside the car.

"Why didn't you wait for me three houses down as I told you?" She whined at Jared once she was settled in and he had started the car.

"I cannot just leave you behind, miss Tara. What if something were to happen to you on your walk to the car?" He shook his head, almost as if he wanted to get rid of the images that flooded his mind. "I wouldn't forgive myself and Mr. De La Cruz wouldn't either."

She heaved a sigh at that and rolled her eyes in dismay.

When had her life gotten so complicated?

When they reached her building, she couldn't help but tell the man, "Well, it was nice meeting you and all, but tomorrow I'll be heading to college, alone."

"You won't even notice I'm there, miss Tara," he pleaded. "I'm not sure whether Mr. De La Cruz will allow me to just walk you there instead of driving you, but maybe if you asked him..." Jared trailed off but she got the picture very well.

"You can't be serious," she spat out angrily. "You're really planning on following me like a lost puppy all day long?"

"I'm sorry for the inconvenience it causes you, miss Tara, but that is my job," he told her with a rueful smile.

“You know what? Take me to the oh so awesome Mr. De La Cruz. I have a few words to tell the bastard,” she said in an annoyed tone.

“Are you sure, miss Tara?” He asked in a seemingly genuinely intrigued tone.

“Do you or your boss have a problem with that?” She glared at him through the rear-view mirror.

“I don’t have a problem at all, miss Tara,” he answered immediately. “Accompanying you anywhere you wish is my job.”

“Good.”

She called the handsome devil that had come in her life, and turned it upside down, and asked as soon as he picked up, “Are you punishing me for not giving in to you?”

“What are you on about, kitten?” Came the immediate chiding in the form of a question.

“You hired a bodyguard for me without asking for my permission, and you want me to be okay with that, with him following me around like a lost puppy...”

“I didn’t ask for your opinion, as I was sure of your reaction. I just need to know you’ll be safe,” he said on a sigh.

“Whatever,” she rolled her eyes at him even though he couldn’t see her - and maybe because he couldn’t see her. “Are you home?”

“No, I’m at the club,” he said simply.

It was too simple an answer.

“What club?” She spat out the word at him, feeling angrier than she probably should.

“Kitten...” he said simply.

“Don’t start with your kitten bullshit,” she hissed at him.

“The club’s name is Kitten, cariña,” he informed her, sounding rather amused.

“We’ll be there in... whatever amount of time it’ll take us to get there,” she said through gritted teeth.

“I can’t wait,” came his breathless answer.

“You can’t wait to be savagely beaten,” she tutted at him. “And here I thought you were more of a dom.”

His throaty chuckle reached her before his words did, “You’re playing with fire, kitten. Be careful. Or else, you’ll get burned.”

“Ooh, scary,” she said in a mock horrified tone.

And then, she hung up before he had the chance to say anything more.

“Change of plans, Jared,” she told her bodyguard. “Let’s head to Kitten.”

“Yes, miss Tara,” he agreed readily.

** **

The car finally came to a stop and Tara was brought out of her reverie by Jared’s voice, “We’re here, miss Tara.”

Kitten was a fancy looking club from the outside but, strangely enough, it wasn’t open when Tara got out of the car.

She saw a doorbell and decide to press on it.

Soon enough a man appeared at the door’s oculus which Tara had failed to notice as it was very dark already. He pulled it open and said simply, while eying her suspiciously, “The code?”

“What code?” She retorted.

Jared appeared next to her and said in his gruff voice, “There’s no damned code, Alex. She’s here to see the boss.”

“Oh,” the man behind the door paled visibly, “you must be Ms Scott,” he said as he hastily opened the door for her. “I’m deeply sorry to have kept you waiting. I meant no offense really.”

“None taken,” she eyed him levelly, suspicious of this man’s behavior.

He was almost shaking in his boots, all because he had made her wait...

Just what had Antonio told them about her? Or rather, just how dangerous was he?

She intended to find out.

“Lead the way,” she commanded in a strong voice despite all the doubts gnawing at her insides.

“Yes, Ms Scott,” the man whose name was Alex said immediately.

The interior was all in black, and Tara could only guess it was to suit a certain clientele, but also because of Antonio’s taste no doubt.

She had to go through some deserted hallways, and immediately understood, she was being brought to the office, not to the dance floor... which was a good sign. Maybe Antonio wasn't indulging, rather overseeing the business.

What do you care? The reasonable side of her screeched at her.

Even though it sounded silly, all kinds of stupid, maybe even unfair and absurdly possessive - seeing as she had yet to agree to be his woman - she didn't want to see Antonio with another woman.

Yes, stupid indeed...

She rolled her eyes at her inner musings, and tried to keep a clear head about the situation.

When she reached a black leathered door, and Alex stepped to the side, almost as if he was inviting her to go in, she didn't hesitate for one second.

One could only imagine her surprise when she found Antonio sitting at the desk, like the boss he was, while a woman was giving head to a man who sat opposite him. And while the woman knelt and pleased the thirty something looking man, both men discussed business, like it was the most natural thing in the world.

"What the hell?" She exclaimed as she remained frozen at the threshold.

"Hello, kitten," Antonio greeted her as he rose to his feet.

He approached her like a predator stalking his prey, and she had to remind herself to breathe.

He was about to embrace her and place a kiss on her cheek but she evaded it.

She just glared at him. "Care to explain?" She asked through gritted teeth.

He cocked an eyebrow at her in question and said flatly, "It's not me she's going down on. What is there for me to explain?"

"Unbelievable!" She scoffed at him. "So you'd rather it be you perhaps?"

"Don't put words in my mouth, if you please," he rolled his eyes at her. "I can't even see her from where I'm sitting. Be reasonable, kitten."

"Stop kitten'ing me," she hissed at him.

Did she just use the word - the noun - kitten as if it was a verb that she could transform at will? Well, it looked like she did.

“Did you just invent a word?” Although Antonio’s tone of voice was flat, she could see his lips twitching, and her glare intensified at that.

“I see that you’re kind of busy with your woman, Mr. De La Cruz,” the man who just finished in the woman’s mouth - if his earlier grunts were any indication - said calmly, “Maybe we ought to discuss business later in the evening?”

“I’m not his woman,” Tara cried out in an exasperated tone, at the exact same moment Antonio said, “I think that would be best, Mr. Vega.”

“Don’t look, kitten,” Antonio instructed just as the man prepared to rise to his feet so that he could rearrange himself.

“Really now?” She rolled her eyes but averted her gaze nevertheless once that was done.

It would be in Antonio’s best interests if he had a good explanation to what was going on in this fancy but shady club where one needed a code to enter.

Tara crossed her arms over her chest and looked him in the eyes defiantly. “Still waiting for an explanation, Mr. De La Cruz, my dear stalker.”