

“Oh, EW!”

I look up from the plastic heart container between the two of us in time to catch Tara making a disgusted expression as she stares at a half-eaten chocolate in her hand.

“That bad?”

She nods and chucks the remaining abomination into the nearby trash can. After taking a long drink of water, she gasps and looks back up at me.

“It was so bad. Like, banana bad. Was there a banana one in there?”

“I don’t think so,” I reply, looking around to see if the box came with a tiny flavor manual. “But if you wanted something more certain, then why did you get us the Mystery Box?”

Tara grins at me and laughs. “Because it’s a *mystery!* And that’s kind of-”

“Kind of our thing?” I smile back.

“Yeah! Like...” she waves her arms in what I think is supposed to represent a floating ghost. I wonder how Abigail would feel about that one. “A myyyyyyysssssttterrriyyyyyy. You get it.”

“I get it.”

“And maybe you’ll end up finding a new favorite because of all the trying new things and stuff! It’s an adventure. And a mystery. And, y’know, delicious.”

I reach out and run my fingers through her long red hair, smirking slightly when her face turns almost as red to match. There’s something comforting about how obvious the effect I have on her is even after all these years. A persistent reminder that I’m still special in her mind. Not that she’d ever given me any reason to doubt that, of course, but unlearning old fears has taken a lot longer to do than I’d thought.

But I don’t mind. We’ve got plenty of time to make peace with them together. And we’ve already come a long way since we first met.

“Babe...” she says quietly, rubbing the back of her neck. “You, uh...it’s your turn...the chocolate...”

Cute.

I lean forward and kiss her, running my fingers through her hair one more time before pulling away with a smile. She smiles back, her face still red but a bit more composed. Now she’s in her element.

“Hmmm...” I murmur, looking down at the assorted morsels. “I’m not sure. You pick one.”

“But you gotta guess! It’s a mystery!”

“Point to one and I’ll guess the flavor. Sound fair?”

Tara nods. "I get it. Collaborative. Romantic and all that jazz. That's cool."

She stares at the box with all the intensity of a technician attempting to defuse a bomb. No matter how minor or how silly it is, she always gives 110% when it comes to making choices like this. Yet another endearing trait from the love of my life. I'll never get tired of it. Just like I'll never get tired of her.

"Thhhhhis one," she finally decides, pointing at a chocolate on the left side of the box. "The one that's like a perfect circle."

"Strawberry."

Tara cocks her head to the side and looks at me. "You're not even gonna think it over. Just 'strawberry?' Just like that?"

"I think it's going to be strawberry."

"That's very committed. I respect that."

"You know I like commitment," I reply, kissing her cheek. "Four years should have been enough time for you to get a feel for that much."

"Heh heh, yeah..." she smiles, kissing my cheek in return. "I think I managed to put that one together."

Tara picks up the chocolate and holds it out to my mouth, offering to feed it to me. Naturally, I accept. I lean forward and take a bite. As soon as I do, my lips curl up in a smile.

"It's strawberry."

"No way."

"Try it."

She takes a small bite before staring at me with wide eyes.

"Okay. What the hell. How did you...huh?"

"It was just instinct."

Tara laughs. "I swear, you and your instincts...how do you do it? Figure out stuff like that?"

"Maybe I'm a fortune teller," I grin. "Or a mind reader."

"A mind reader, huh? Hmmm...It's possible! I've got evidence that they exist!"

"Sounds like a good idea for our next episode."

Tara nods enthusiastically, excited at the prospect. Then she stares at me with a mischievous grin.

“So if you’re a mind reader...can you tell what I’m thinking right now?”

“Of course I can.”

I wrap my arms around her and kiss her deeply. She leans into me, and hugs me back with her free arm, making sure not to drop the chocolate. I pull away after a moment so I can whisper my answer in her ear.

“I love you too.”