
Chapter 1

Cora Barton looked up from the huge oak desk in her home office and sighed. Since she'd opened her own small publishing company a few years ago, she had been working from home, splitting her time between her two small children, the house, her gorgeous lawyer husband/Dom, and work. But now the company was growing by leaps and bounds, and she knew she needed to think about finding office space soon. Thank goodness her good friend Audrey was coming out for a visit. Audrey had been her assistant when she worked for a New York publishing company as the acquisitions editor before moving back to Texas and marrying the love of her life, Dale Barton.

Not only was she looking forward to spending time with her old friend, but she was hoping Audrey would be able to offer some input when choosing a location for her company, Texas Flame Publishing.

Audrey was still working for Cora's old boss, Camille, in New York City. She had been promoted from assistant to editor when Cora made the decision to leave. Kayla, one of the other editors, now held Cora's old position. Audrey had indicated to Cora that

she was in need of a long vacation and planned to stay in Texas for two weeks. She had sounded restless on the phone, but Cora couldn't quite pinpoint exactly what the problem was. Could it be the job was too much for her, or was it something of a more personal nature? Hopefully, she would find out next week when she picked up her friend at the airport. She had arranged for her mother to watch the children while she enjoyed the day with Audrey. It would be good to catch up. She wondered if Audrey still frequented the BDSM clubs. Since she and Dale had gotten back together, Audrey and Kayla had been very helpful in enlightening Cora as she and Dale pursued a D/s marriage. The lifestyle had been new to Cora, even though she was aware that both Kayla and Audrey were submissives. Dale, when they had reconnected, had finally revealed to her that he was now a Dom. Instead of being turned off by that information, she wanted to explore it with him on a private level. No clubs for her, but she was quite willing to be his submissive in the privacy of their own home.

Cora kept in touch with everyone back in New York. In fact, more than once, Camille had come to her aid when a problem arose in her new company. Her old boss had been the one who had encouraged her to move back home with Dale and start her own small press. Of course, the offer had been open for her to continue with the bigger company and work from home, but once the children had arrived, it seemed to make more sense to follow her dream. But now, Texas Flame Publishing was taking off, and she was going to have to think about hiring some help once she got moved into a real office. Beau Birch was her cover artist. He was a cowboy on a local ranch, but his hobby had always been art and graphics. He helped her on the side and did some of the technical work, too. But a part-time cover artist wasn't going to be enough to meet the demands of the growing company.

Dale, her husband, handled all the legal work from his law

office. He had been extremely supportive of her venture and offered his help on numerous occasions when she had a deadline to meet. The book they'd co-written about their own love affair had made the New York Times bestseller list, and since then, he'd become more and more interested in the publishing world.

Her thoughts were interrupted by the shrill ringing of the telephone. Grabbing the portable on her desk, she answered professionally, "Texas Flame Publishing, this is Cora."

"Hi, baby," the deep, sexy voice of her handsome husband replied.

"Hey, are you about ready to head home? I guess I need to start dinner, don't I?" she asked.

"Actually, that's why I'm calling. I've got a client appointment before I can leave. I thought we could go out for a late supper if you can get one of our moms to watch the kiddos."

"I'm sure one of them will be more than happy to come over. I'll make some calls and get finished up here. After I feed the munchkins and get them ready for bed, I'll meet you. You should be finished by then."

"Where are they now? It's awfully quiet."

"Both of them are on the couch in my office, watching TV. They've been absolute angels all afternoon."

"Of course, they take after their beautiful mama," he said with a chuckle.

"All these years, and you still know how to get to me," she teased. "Seriously, little Dale was tuckered out from kindergarten, and Beth Anne was tired from preschool, so it wasn't hard to convince them to have some quiet time."

"I've got to go. My client just walked in. Let me know if there's a problem with a sitter, and I'll bring dinner home."

"Okay, I will. Later, sweetie," she said as she hung up.

She dialed her mother's number, and after she had agreed to watch the children for the evening, Cora told her what time she needed her.

"You and Dale deserve some time alone. You've both been so busy lately."

"Thanks, Mom. You're right; the business is keeping me hopping."

"I'll be glad when Audrey gets here. Maybe she can get you to slow down for a few weeks."

"We'll see," she said with a giggle. "I've got to feed the babies; see you soon."

As she looked over at the two cherubs giggling at something on the television, she asked, "How would you like it if Nana came over for a while tonight?"

"Really?" her bright-eyed son asked. "Will she read me a story?"

"I'm sure she will. Let's go to the kitchen and find some supper for you guys. Then it's bath time. After that, Nana will be here. Mommy is going to meet Daddy in town at a restaurant."

"Can we have mac and cheese?" he asked as he stood up and ran toward the kitchen.

Cora picked up her daughter and followed him. Looking through the cupboards, she found his favorite and proceeded to heat the water.

"Beth Anne, would you like some macaroni and cheese?" she asked.

"Hot dog," the little girl said.

"A hot *dog*, I think I can do that," Cora said as she hugged her daughter.

When she had filled their plates with macaroni and cheese, a hot dog, and a scoop of applesauce, she sat down with a glass of iced tea and supervised their dinner. Beth Anne was still using a sippy cup for her milk, but little Dale had grown into a big boy cup. Still, he had to be watched as he occasionally got a little excited and spilled his drink. Cora smiled as she watched them. It wasn't long ago she'd thought she would never be a mother. When Dale had come back into her life after twelve years, it had

taken a while, but it had all eventually fallen into place. She'd realized that more than anything in the world, she wanted to give up her life as a single thirty-year-old in New York City and settle down in her hometown of Fredericksburg, Texas with the love of her life, her high school sweetheart, Dale Barton. In fact, that's how she'd come up with the name of her publishing company. She specialized in publishing romance novels, and since she'd married her old flame from Texas and had her happy ending, she wanted to publish books about other couples that did the same. Corny as it may sound, it had paid off. Her small press was thriving, with new authors coming on board every week.

Once the children had finished their dinner, she quickly put the dishes into the dishwasher and ushered them to the bathroom. Little Dale took his bath first, while she and Beth Anne got out their jammies and readied their beds. When the little boy, who thought he was much too old to have help in the bathtub, was finished, he put his nightclothes on and went to the front window to watch for his nana to arrive.

Cora cleaned out the tub and refilled it for Beth Anne. As she popped the little girl into the lukewarm water, she hugged her close to her breast. Her baby was growing up much too fast, having just started preschool a few weeks before. Cora bathed her, washed her curls, and then dried her and wrapped her in a fluffy towel as she carried her to the nursery. She put her into a flowered nightgown, combed her curls and took her back to the bathroom to brush her teeth. When she'd finished, she called for little Dale to come and brush his teeth too.

"Do I have to?" the little boy fussed.

"Yes, you do, now, come on, before Nana gets here."

She kissed the top of his head as she handed him his toothbrush. He reluctantly brushed, rinsed and spit. When the doorbell rang, he jumped down from the step stool and ran to answer it. Cora sighed and cleaned up after him before picking Beth Anne up and going to meet her mother.

"Hi, Mom, just in time," she said in greeting. "They've been fed, bathed, and teeth brushed. Now I've got to finish up something in the office and grab a quick shower before I meet Dale. Are you good here?"

"You go on. We'll be just fine, won't we, kids?" Mrs. Watson took Beth Anne's hand and followed little Dale into the living room. "Let's play a game while Mommy is getting ready to leave."

Cora smiled and went back into the office. Hurriedly, she dashed off some emails to some of her authors before shutting down the computer and turning out the lights. She closed the door to the office and ran to the master bedroom. She started stripping off her clothes as soon as she'd shut the door and headed for the shower. When she'd dried herself, she wrapped the towel around her luscious body and went to the walk-in closet to find the perfect outfit. It was early autumn in Texas, still warm outside, so she chose a russet-colored skirt and topped it with a short-sleeved beige sweater. Next, she found russet jewelry and a pair of brown flats. She brushed her long blonde hair until it shone, put on the lightest of makeup and grabbed her purse, running back to tell her babies goodnight before leaving for her date with her hubby.

As she drove into town to meet him at the restaurant, their favorite, she allowed herself to relax and let the tensions of the day slowly ebb away.

By the time she pulled into the parking lot, he was there waiting for her next to his car. When he saw her pull in, he waited until she turned the car off and opened her door. As he took her hand, he pulled her from the car, embraced and kissed her.

"Hi, pretty lady, would you have dinner with me?" he asked when he released her.

"I don't know. Are you a gentleman, sir?" she teased.

"Not on your life," he replied with a wicked grin.

"In that case, by all means, I'd love to have dinner with you." She laughed as she took his arm and walked into the restaurant with him. He'd called ahead for reservations, and the hostess seated them immediately.

Once they'd placed their order and were relaxing over a glass of wine, he asked, "How was your day? Anything spectacular come across your desk?"

"It was a pretty routine day. I worked around the house this morning while the kids were in school, then after I picked them up and we had lunch, they napped. I emailed my authors about my plans for the company, and that was pretty much it. They watched TV after they woke up, so I could finish my work."

"I like that you limit their time in front of the TV. You always seem to know the right times to let them watch it. And they were fed and ready for bed by the time the sitter got there, I'm sure. Which of our moms got to be the lucky one this time?"

"Yes, they were. My mom is watching them. I called her first, and she was available. And as for the television, I try to make sure they pursue other interests."

"You're such a good mother. I always knew you would be."

"Just like I knew you'd make the best daddy."

"Are you looking forward to Audrey's visit?" he asked as the waiter brought their salads.

"I really am. I need her input on some things. And I get the feeling something is off with her. I can't decide if it's work-related or personal."

"I'm sure you'll pry it out of her before the vacation is over," he teased. "Maybe she's having man trouble."

She shrugged. "So, tell me about your late client. Someone new?" she asked, knowing he couldn't tell her much.

"Yes, a new client. Run-of-the-mill case. Nothing earth-shattering," he replied.

"I've got to remember to give Beau a call. I need some work from him."

"Is he going to be able to keep up with the growing demand for book covers, with his other job?" Dale asked as he buttered a roll.

"I hope so. I really need to sit down and talk with him about it."

"At least, he doesn't have a social life at the moment to keep him occupied," Dale said with a grin.

"For now, but you know Beau and the women," she said with a giggle.

"Oh, yes, I do."

"I've got to figure out some fun things for Audrey to do while she's here. The first day, I'll pick her up and we'll have lunch in Austin and catch up. I want her to help me find a location for the press, and, other than that, I don't know what we'll do."

"She may be content to relax. But I do think we need to take her out on the town, at least one night."

"She's used to the big city. I'm afraid our small town doesn't have much to offer a big city girl."

"Hmm, I seem to recall one big-city gal who decided there was something here for her," he teased.

"That was different. This is my home. And you were here."

"And it took a while for you to come to grips with that, didn't it?"

"But once I did, I never looked back. This is definitely where I belong. We've made a beautiful life together, Dale. The way it always should have been."

"Seven years married and still on our honeymoon. I'd say we've definitely made a perfect life."

They lingered over dinner as long as they could, talking about the children, their work and their lives. He reached across the table several times to caress her hand. Once, he raised her hand to his lips and placed a tender kiss on her palm.

"Mmm," she said dreamily. "Take me home, Mr. Barton."

"With pleasure, Mrs. Barton," he said as he paid the tab and got up to pull out her chair for her.

Arm in arm, they walked out of the restaurant together and drove home. When they entered the house, her mother informed them that both babies were fast asleep in their beds.

"I'll be going now; have a nice evening, you two," Mrs. Watson said as she let herself out.

Dale scooped his wife up into his arms and carried her to the bedroom where he lay her gently on the king-sized bed. He loosened his tie and unbuttoned his shirt.

"I'm going to grab a quick shower, and I'll be back," he said as he headed for the bathroom.

"I'll be waiting," Cora replied with a smile.

And when he returned, he playfully paddled her bottom before flipping her over and lifting her up so that she straddled him.

"Now, show me again how much you love your Texas Dom, CB," he said, using his nickname for her as she moved to take him inside her already-wet entrance.

She moaned as she began to ride her Texan. He groaned and took hold of her generous breasts, rubbing her nipples now pert with desire. His hands then moved to her bottom, still slightly throbbing from the paddle. He rubbed the sting out as she continued to move with him rock-hard inside of her.

Her head thrown back and her blonde hair disheveled, she let out a cry of ecstasy as the first waves began to rock her body. Fast vanilla sex or slow with some kink thrown in, it didn't matter. They were so in tune with each other's bodies that their mutual release was always satisfying, and it wasn't long before her husband/Dom allowed himself to join her in the delights found in their marriage bed.