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## Chapter 1

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**K**ayla Fletcher looked at the huge pile of work on her new desk. Since taking over as the vice president of the publishing company she worked for, her workload had doubled. Not that she was complaining. Her former boss Camille Robertson had recently gotten married and had decided to step down to a part-time editor's position. Camille's new husband had four children by a previous marriage, and Camille wanted to devote her time to her new family. Kayla had been next in line, and with Camille's glowing recommendation she had been the obvious choice.

Kayla herself was also a newlywed, though. And she and her new husband Zane had gotten off on the wrong foot when she had kept some important information about her past from him, only telling him days before their wedding.

Kayla was a submissive, or at least she was, before she met and started dating handsome swag salesman Zane Fletcher. She and one of her coworkers, Audrey Carter, had been members of a few of New York's private, exclusive BDSM clubs for a few years.

Kayla was still recovering from the breakup with her latest

boyfriend, a man she'd met at one of the clubs who had told her he was divorced with no children, when she met Zane. As it turned out, she found out from a friend at the club, he was still married, with a child. He and his wife were separated but thinking of reconciling. Kayla had hit the ceiling, confronting him, and immediately breaking things off with the lying cheat.

Then, one day, out of the blue, Zane had walked into the office, requesting to speak to Camille. He was a swag salesman, hoping to sell some new items to the publishing company. As it happened, Camille was out that day, so Kayla met with him. They had been instantly attracted to each other. He'd asked her out for coffee, then for dinner, and before long, they were somewhat of an item, although neither wanted anything serious at first. Of course, over time that changed, and they became exclusive, finally setting a wedding date.

After meeting Zane, Kayla stopped frequenting the clubs. As a matter of fact, so did Audrey. It wasn't too long after that, Audrey took a trip to Texas to visit another of their friends, Cora Barton and she met a hot cowboy while she was out there. After several months of life events keeping those two apart, they married, Audrey moved to Texas, and she and her husband, Beau Birch, were now expecting their first child.

Cora had married her old high-school sweetheart, Audrey had found Beau, and Camille had recently married her old flame too. All of her friends were settled and happy. For the most part, Kayla and Zane were all right. For the most part—there was still that issue hanging over their heads that neither of them had had the nerve to bring up again since Zane had decided to go ahead with the wedding.

And that had been touch-and-go for about a day, the week of the wedding. She had finally gotten up the nerve to tell him about her past. Zane had been shocked, of course. He'd stormed out of her apartment, and she didn't hear from him until the next day. Luckily, Camille had taken her under her wing and

spent the day with her, treating her to a massage at her favorite spa and lunch, to get her mind off the fact that her wedding might not take place after all.

Zane had phoned during their lunch, informing Kayla that they needed to talk and he'd be over after work. Kayla had no idea what he would say when he got there, but she had promised Camille she'd let her know. Then, she had gone home to wait for him.

He told her later that night that he'd been surprised and hurt more than angry. He'd gone home and researched BDSM on his computer, and even though he really didn't see the appeal and was satisfied that she hadn't gone to a club or been with a Dom, or any other man, since she had met him, he told her he didn't want to lose her.

The wedding was still on with the promise that once they were settled, they would talk about it again.

Well, that had been six months ago, and the subject still hadn't come up. They had been busy, it was true. But she still wished he would bring it up. She didn't want to rock the boat, so to speak, so she had left it alone. While she was busy with her new position, Zane was traveling with his job quite a bit. What little time they had together was very precious.

He had moved out of his small apartment into her larger, two-bedroom place, with her. They had looked at houses, but time wasn't on their side, and they hadn't had much time to find what they really wanted. They were just about to renew her lease for another year when Camille got married and asked if they'd be interested in her spacious loft in Manhattan.

Of course, they jumped on it quickly, before Camille put it on the market. Kayla had been there many times, and when she took Zane to check it out, he fell in love with the place too. Camille had kept the place when she and her first husband, Joe, divorced. Since her new husband, architect Cody Larkin, had a nice home in Long Island, Camille no longer needed it.

They had spent every weekend decorating and deciding which furniture to keep, what to get rid of, and shopping for new items.

Now that they were settled into the new place and she was getting used to her new position, Kayla was ready to set things right with her new spouse. It wasn't that he seemed off to her or anything like that. They were enjoying a vanilla marriage, working hard, and spending their off time together. But it still seemed as if they were in limbo. Did he think she had forgotten that he had said they would talk again?

Even a domestic discipline marriage would be a start, in her opinion. She didn't have any desire to visit a club. If Zane tried just that, she thought he might actually begin to like parts of a Dom/sub relationship. But getting him to try it was not going to happen as long as the subject lay dormant between them.

She might have to just take the bull by the horns and broach the subject herself—something she really wasn't looking forward to doing. She didn't want a repeat performance of Zane walking out on her as he had the last time the subject had come up.

She tried to go back to focusing on her work and was successful for a little while until her assistant called her.

"What is it, Jen?" she asked, only half paying attention.

"Your delicious hubby is on line two."

"Thanks," she replied, wondering why he hadn't called her cell.

When she picked up her desk phone, he said, "Have you checked your phone lately, busy lady?"

"Uh, no, why?"

"I know really get into the zone, as you say, when you are deep into work, but you might want to glance at the cell every once in a while. You're the boss now; you can do that."

"I'm sorry; it's in my purse. I never took it back out after lunch. Have you been calling?"

"I texted and called. Are you sure it's even charged?"

"Who knows?" she said with a giggle. "I really am sorry. What did you need?"

"I wanted to know if you'd like to have dinner out tonight. I got back in town about an hour ago."

"Sure, sounds good. What time is it now?" she asked as she frantically pulled her purse out of her bottom desk drawer and dug for her cell phone.

"It's four o'clock," he supplied before she found the device.

"Okay, I can leave in about an hour, just tell me where to meet you."

"How about Forlini's at six?"

"Great, love that place. I'll see you then. I love you."

He laughed. "You may not after I blister your ass for not checking your phone, later."

Before she could pick her jaw up off the floor and end the call, he was gone.

*What the hell just happened here? Did I hear him right? Well, I will find out later,* she thought as she tried once again to focus on her work. She had to get emails finished before she left. She absolutely had to! And that wasn't going to happen if she was daydreaming about getting spanked.

Damn, it had been a long time since she had felt the smack of a hard male hand on her rear end. Even longer since a paddle or a flogger or a belt had striped her backside, leaving her with red, sizzling marks as a reminder. How she had missed that! She hadn't missed the clubs at all, though. She only wanted Zane, but she wanted to experience those things with him in the privacy of their own home. And maybe, just maybe, tonight would be the night.

At five minutes after five, she was walking out the door of her office and toward the elevator that would take her to the parking garage.

As she pulled her black Nissan Altima into traffic and began driving toward the restaurant, her mind started to wander

again. She was feeling apprehensive after the way Zane had ended their call. Had he only been joking with her? She hoped not, but this was so out of character for him, she had to wonder.

She was still playing his words over and over in her mind like a recording when she arrived at her destination and parked her car. He was waiting for her and grabbed her for a quick kiss before they went inside. Since he had called ahead, the hostess seated them soon after they walked in.

She mentioned wine to him, but he said, "No, I don't think you should have any tonight. You drove here on your own, and you have to get your car home."

Another surprise statement from his lips. He had never told her she couldn't have a drink with dinner before.

"I hardly think one glass of wine will impair me that much," she argued softly.

"You are really on a roll today, baby," he answered with raised eyebrows.

More innuendos? Would he really follow through?

She settled for iced tea and began to look over the menu. After she'd chosen a chicken marsala dish and he opted for veal, they were finally alone to talk.

"So, tell me about your day, workload easing up any?" he began.

"Slowly, but yes, I really think it is."

He took a drink of his own iced tea and then told her that he'd run into Cody earlier, when he had first gotten back from his work trip.

"Cody Larkin? Really?" she asked. "Where in the world did you see him?"

Zane gave her an odd look before he said, "Oh, in a store. I had stopped to pick something up, and he just happened to be in the same shop. We talked for a few minutes, then he had to go. One of the kids had something going on tonight."

"I think that's about every night for them these days," she said. "And Camille loves it."

"After seeing how much work you have, I can understand why she wanted to step down, then. There is no way she could have worked the hours you do and handle the activities of four kids."

"That's true, but she put in her time. She worked those hours for many years. It's much easier for me to do it because you're out of town several days a week."

He laughed. "Yeah, it keeps you out of trouble. Although today you didn't do a very good job of behaving, did you?"

She looked over at him and replied, "All I did was forget to take my phone out of my purse and charge it. That's not a major offense."

"To you, maybe not. But to the person trying frantically to reach you, it was very frustrating. What if there had been an emergency?"

"I guess I can see your point. I'll try to remember from now on," she promised.

Before he could say whether or not he was serious about blistering her bottom for her actions when they got home, the server brought their food to the table.

So, he really had been upset with her. But upset and frustrated enough to initiate domestic discipline after all this time without so much as a discussion about it before now? What had gotten into her hottie husband?

Oh, and hot he was, she thought as she glanced at him again. Even after being on the road all week, he was dressed impeccably, dark hair styled perfectly, with a bit of a five o'clock shadow beginning to show on his chiseled face. He had to be nearly as tired as she was, after the long week, but one wouldn't know it to look at him.

They chatted amicably during dinner. He told her about his week, and they made plans for the weekend. When she declined

dessert, he suggested they head home for the night, and she agreed, ready to kick back after a very long day.

Again, as she pulled out with his car following her from the restaurant to home, she wondered what would happen when they got there. She was trying not to hope, but why would he mention a spanking if he didn't intend to give her one? He had to know that would only frustrate her. Unless that's what he intended to do. She had frustrated him with the cell phone incident, so now he was doing the same to her? Oh, surely not! Her imagination was getting away from her now.

Well, she would find out soon enough, because they were pulling into the parking garage at home.

They parked next to each other and walked into the building together. The elevator took them to their floor quickly, and Zane was opening the door within two minutes after that.

He stood aside to allow her to enter first as he said, "After you, baby girl."

Her ears perked up. *Baby girl? Since when does he call me that? I am so confused right now.*

He followed her inside and locked the door. Turning to her, he said in a calm, even tone, "Now, Kayla, I want you to go on into the bedroom. There, you will remove every stitch of clothing; either put it away or in the hamper—wherever it belongs. After that, I want you to stand in the corner that is empty, nose to the wall. I'll be along shortly. Leave your phone and your purse on the table and don't move until I say you can. While you're standing there, you are to think about your two naughty actions today. Number one, you did not check your phone periodically for messages, letting it run out of charge in your purse so that no one was able to reach you. Secondly, you actually tried to order wine when you knew you had to drive on the busy streets of Manhattan afterward. You know better than that. Or, at least, you should. I can see that the lack of discipline in your life has



made you become lax. That's my fault, I'm afraid. I intend to correct that mistake, starting tonight."

She looked at him, surprise written all over her face. Really? Wow.

"*Now*, Kayla, or I'll add more punishment than what is already on its way."

She wasted no more time. He sounded dead serious. Did he even know how to give a proper spanking? This was what she'd been craving, wasn't it? So why was she dawdling, giving him more reason to stripe her behind?

She did everything he had commanded her to do. As she stood in the corner, she shivered. She wasn't cold. Their apartment was toasty warm, even though she was as naked as the day she was born. Oh, no, that wasn't it at all. She was remembering the tone he had used with her, and it was every bit as dominant, sexy, and demanding as any Dom she had ever heard. What in the world had changed him? Whatever it was, she was grateful for it.

It seemed like hours before he came to her. Actually, she had only been standing in the corner for thirty minutes.

She heard his footsteps on the hardwood floor as he walked into the bedroom. She stood as still as she could until she felt his presence behind her.

Zane pushed her hair to one side and kissed the nape of her neck. She shuddered.

"Now, my little Kayla, are you ready for your punishment?" he asked.