
Chapter 1

“**W**hat the fuck is *he* doing here?”

Tira Franklin was in the middle of making her famous sausage, onion and apple stuffing in a cast iron pan on the stove. Due to the open style of the house, when she looked up from stirring the ingredients because of the exuberant greeting her best friend was giving someone, she could hardly mistake his presence.

As usual, he was the tallest person in the room – not necessarily all that broad, *per se*, but she knew from personal experience just how strong he was, even if he didn’t have a deadlifter’s overt muscles.

Of course he heard her, she’d always had that kind of luck. He lifted that leonine head, with its shoulder length, wavy black hair, the smoldering intensity of his gaze visibly spiking her nipples and dampening her panties as memories of their time together rampaged through her body.

Tira had to stop herself from literally taking a step back.

But then she saw him mouth “tsk, tsk,” as he shook his head slowly, subtly, at her, making her grimace back at him. She fought

all the while not to blush and felt angry at the way he could make her feel as if she'd just been a naughty little girl.

But she was intimately familiar with his stand on bad language. Most particularly from *her*, although he did hold himself to the same standard – she had to give him that.

She'd paid his price before for having used it in front of him, and he'd made sure that she wouldn't be interested in repeating the experience.

She wouldn't give him the chance to repeat it, she vowed to herself, dragging her eyes from his and back to the stuffing, which was just about ready to be put into the oven. The enormous pan was almost too much for her to lift. She had to use two hands or it would be Winston, the loveable goofball of a pit mix, who would end up enjoying the fruits of her labors, as opposed to the humans who were anticipating eating it along with their Thanksgiving bird.

“Let me get that for you.”

Flustered by seeing him again, she was holding the pan, but hadn't yet opened the pre-heated wall oven. He was already making himself much too handy and holding it open for her.

She wished she'd been better prepared than that – knowing how petty it was that she didn't want him to do so much as even the slightest thing that might put her in his debt. Her “thank you” was blatantly grudging as she busied herself setting the timer, then adjusting the temperature, which had no need to be adjusted, but she just didn't want to look at him. Unfortunately, wishing wouldn't banish him to the far reaches of the Earth or he'd already be there.

At least she was dressed better this time than when she'd first met him – Lake liked a more formal Thanksgiving than she might have preferred, so she'd acquiesced to dressing nicely, even if somewhat grudgingly.

“Do you have anything else that you need to accomplish at the moment?” he asked smoothly.

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Tira looked around the kitchen with a critical, and somewhat frantic, eye. The bird was in the oven, the potatoes were bubbling away and would take at least as long as the stuffing before they needed to be mashed, her homemade rolls were already in the basket with a pretty napkin, but they wouldn't be heated until just before everyone sat down, so they'd be warm to eat. And the table was set.

Son of a bitch, everything was done. Even the dishwasher was loaded, because she and Lake, her sister-from-another-mister, who were equally responsible for producing the Thanksgiving meal, both cleaned as they cooked. There wasn't even a mess she could apply herself to cleaning up, damn it!

As soon as she began to pronounce the word, "N—", she found her wrist captured in one of his enormous, long fingered hands, and herself guided – not dragged, as was her instinct, because, again, the open floor plan of this blasted house was working against her – she didn't want to alarm anyone and make them think that he was dragging her off against her will.

Not that that characterization was wrong, necessarily.

It wasn't, really.

There were no bedrooms on the first floor, the downstairs bathroom was occupied – for which she was eternally grateful – so they ended up in Dan's study, a smallish room that was dominated by the presence of an enormous partners' desk and bookcases filled to overflowing with books, papers, and files.

Pulling her in behind him, and still keeping a light, yet unbreakable – she'd already tried – hold on her, Baz Doyle reached back to flip on the light, closing the door with an unsettling finality. While Tira tried her best to look anywhere but at him, he murmured softly, "It's good to see you again, little one."

Her head came up at the sound of that endearment, a wary female gaze colliding with a determined male one.

He watched her face set stubbornly as he let go of her arm, standing with his fingers laced in front of him, legs spread widely,

as was his habit. “Manspreading,” she’d called it whenever she’d teased him about the fact that one leg was usually in a different zip code from the other whenever he was sitting or standing.

After putting as much distance as she could between them, which wasn’t much in the crowded room, and realizing with not a small amount of alarm that he was between her and the door, she refused to reply in kind. She acknowledged his greeting with a stiff, “Baz,” and a deep scowl. “And don’t call me that.”

His eyes made demands of her that she wasn’t willing to meet. “But it is, at its heart, always true. You *are* a little one, to me.”

Tira’s frown deepened. “Not all of us are trees.”

He just smiled at that, and then added fuel to the annoyance she was already feeling towards him. “No, some of us are delightful little bushes, like you.”

Her eyes rolled so exaggeratedly at that, she was surprised neither of them could hear it. “I need to get back to dinner before it burns,” she tried, walking towards him as if she had every expectation that he was going to give way to her – as if she really didn’t know him at all.

He stood his ground, letting her almost run into him, although she was smart enough to stop herself before that happened. Not really wanting any physical contact with him, she took a few steps back to cross her arms over her chest and give him an impatient look.

“I can read timers too, you know. You’re not due back there for another fifteen minutes or so, and even if something needed to be done, Lake will handle it quite ably, I’m sure.”

The fact that he was right just gave her something else to fume about. “What do you want?” she finally snapped.

“*You*,” he answered quickly, and with alarming emphasis.

Baz took the step closer that she hadn’t, and Tira moved a step away from him in response, disliking intensely the amused

grin he wore as she did so. But he remained where he was, for the moment, not wanting to scare her off.

“Been there, done that.” And have the tee shirt – his enormous one that, early on, she’d sometimes slept in. She had, as well, the broken heart to prove it, she thought, but wisely didn’t say.

“Yes, but you didn’t do as you were told, now did you?” he rasped pointedly, taking another step forward, such that they were very close to touching, and she found herself in that endearingly familiar position of having to look up at him, which had always made her feel terribly small and submissive.

Her step back was halted abruptly by Dan’s desk, so she perched her butt on the edge of it as if that was what she’d intended to do all along. “No, I didn’t,” Tira admitted, “but then, *I* didn’t decide to jet off to parts unknown and abruptly cease all contact between us for six months, either.”

Was that worry she saw on his face? Baz? Worried? Never. Certainly not about anything that involved her. She was a passing fancy, at best – despite all of those delicious things he’d said to her at the time. He’d proven what she was worth to him in the most blatant way possible.

“I ended up going to Vietnam unexpectedly on business,” came his tight-lipped reply.

Tira’s eyebrows rose. “Oh dear,” she simpered. “I’d heard tell that they had cell phones even there!” Tira opened her eyes wide, her sarcastic tone deepening. “And the interwebs too!”

“Not where I was,” he outright growled, shoving his hands into the pockets of his immaculate pants and looking uncharacteristically uncomfortable.

She shrugged, as if it couldn’t have mattered less to her. “Apparently not. Whatever.”

His eyes flashed angrily. “And I ended up leaving that trip earlier than I had intended because my mother became seriously ill.”

Unlike many of her male contemporaries, she knew that Baz had a fantastic relationship with his mother. He adored her, openly and unapologetically, and the moment he'd begun to accumulate the fortune he now had, he had insisted on taking care of her in style, sparing no expense.

Of anything he could have said to her, that was the one thing that could soften her when little else would have. All trace of anger and scorn gone, she breathed, "Oh, Baz, I'm so sorry. She's better, I hope."

When he lifted his head, she could see just how upset he still was about it. "No, unfortunately. But I was able to get home to her and spend a little time with her before... before she died."

The unexpected force with which she threw herself at him, hugging him as hard as she could, nearly knocked him back a step. He was surprised at her actions, but then, knowing what he did about her, he knew he shouldn't have been. She was very open and loving and empathetic with anyone she had any feeling for, which was something that gave him hope.

He allowed his arms to fold her close to him as she wrapped her arms around him as if she'd never let him go, her cheek on his chest, patting his back and whispering soothing nothings as if it had just happened.

When Tira tried to pull away from him, it was in his mind to hold her there, but he decided that it wouldn't have been right. He didn't want to spoil her altruistic act by making it a part of the uncomfortable situation that existed between them, which was something that he intended to resolve – in his favor – as soon as possible.

She reached out and patted his hand. "I'm so sorry, Baz. I didn't know her, but I certainly liked what I knew of her. And I know that she was very special to you."

Baz turned his hand beneath hers so that he could drag his fingers across her skin for as long as possible as she withdrew it.

"She certainly was; one of a kind. And she liked you too."

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Tira chuckled. “I find that hard to believe, since we never met.”

“I told her a lot about you.”

Her blushes always made him hard, not that he wasn’t usually around her. He had been perpetually aroused since they’d met, which was damned awkward at times.

He ran a hand through his hair in a gesture she recognized as a sign that he wasn’t feeling as confident as he usually did. Of course, his hair immediately returned to its former glory. It wouldn’t dare do anything else. If she’d made the same gesture, her hair would have ended up looking like more of a mess than it usually did.

“Look, I apologize. I’m very sorry that I didn’t get back to you.” He sounded sincere, and she might have bought it, until he raised his eyebrow at her as he took her hands in his. “I do distinctly remember telling *you* to call *me* when we parted, though.”

“A lot of good that would have done me with you unreachable in the back of beyond,” she pointed out, but, judging by his tone, that didn’t sit well with him.

“You had every possible method of getting me a message if calling me failed – if all of my info didn’t get you anywhere, you have Nick’s info too. If you’d wanted to get in touch with me, you could have.”

“And I could say the exact same thing about you, Baz,” she returned quietly, deliberately keeping her eyes on his.

To her surprise, he nodded, dropping his eyes down, staring at her hands where they lay in his as he dragged the pads of his thumb lazily over the backs of hers. Then his head came up suddenly and their eyes met again, nearly causing her to gasp at the depth of passion she saw there. “I am truly sorry. I was wrong. I know we really just had that one weekend, but I wanted much, much more than that with you, and I would have

addressed your lack of obedience immediately if I had been here.”

Tira tried to reclaim her hands on a frown, but found that they were captured; held easily and without pain, but unavailable to her until he allowed her to have them back.

“You’re right. *Mea culpa*. Being away was no excuse. I should have done everything I could to get word to you that there would – there will – be a reckoning.”

Her efforts to break free doubled at that, to no avail. “Bullshit! There’s not going to be anything of the s—”

Using the hold he already had on her, Baz drew her inexorably into his arms, one curving around her waist in a manner that she knew she should have found annoying but couldn’t seem to muster the indignation it deserved, while his other hand came up to cup her cheek, gently tipping her face up to his as his mouth found hers before she could issue any kind of meaningful protest.

Her hands spreading themselves on the silky softness of his shirt didn’t count. Tira couldn’t even seem to get herself to push against him. They just lay there, absorbing his warmth and the feel of the muscles she knew were just beneath his shirt.

Nor was she able to do anything but melt in the almost calculated onslaught of his passion as his lips slid over hers, coaxing – in a demanding way – her to open hers when she shouldn’t want to, but desperately did. He lost his grip on his patience more quickly than she remembered, big fingers insinuating themselves into her hair, arm tightening just shy of rib cracking. He literally lifted her off her feet while his mouth slanted over hers, tongue slipping past her rapidly crumbling defenses to claim the hot, wet heat of her mouth.

Was that her shudder or his? Honestly, it was hard to tell. His hands had taken to roaming over her possessively; making her body respond to him in ways she had no ability to counter.

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It had been that way from the start, from the moment she'd been introduced to him.

She was his – at least as far as her weak flesh was concerned. She didn't usually have that kind of reaction to men, but he was different, apparently. From the moment he'd engulfed her small hand in his, shaking it firmly before letting it go, if somewhat slowly and reluctantly, as if he'd felt the same thing, her body had not been her own.

And she hadn't liked it. Not at all.

She liked it even less now, when she should have been taking him to task for deserting her, when she should have been making a scene and screaming at him and maybe even throwing things at him. Telling him that she was no longer interested in a man who could just leave like that – without a word – for nearly six months, refusing to dwell on the fact that she'd done essentially the same thing as he had.

But she wasn't going off on him, as she – rightfully or wrongfully – felt she should.

Why wasn't she going off on him?

Instead, her hands were on his broad back, not pounding against it trying to get him to let her go, but rather clinging to him as if he was the only safe thing in her world as he reached behind and beyond her. A big, outstretched arm impulsively swept the clutter haphazardly off the desk, depositing her bottom on the very edge of it, leaving her slightly off balance and needing to lean on him to remain there as he stepped between legs that somehow parted for him of their own accord – in recognition of their master.

Baz immediately pressed himself against the crux of her desire in a manner that drew a tantalizing whimper from her that made him reach down to grab the two parts of the hem of her shirt, intending to rend it up the front, consequences be damned. He didn't give a damn if Dan was still picking pearl buttons out of his books for the next few months or so.

Knock, knock, knock.

“Is everything all right in there? We thought we heard someone fall.”

Lake. Son of a bitch. It was taking nearly all of his strength of will not to groan at the unexpected interruption.

Tira drew a breath to answer, but found her mouth covered by a big paw as he answered for them. “Sorry, hon, it’s just me bumbling about looking for a book Dan said he’d loan me. Everything’s fine. I’ll be right out.”

Lake laughed. “Yeah, it’s a bit of a rat’s nest in there, no matter how much I nag him about it being a fire hazard. Have you seen Tira? I took her stuffing out when the timer went off, but I can’t find her. I think dinner’s almost ready.”

“Can’t wait – I’ll be right out!”

They could hear Lake walking away, and Tira expected Baz to take his hand away from her mouth any second.

But he didn’t. Instead, he glanced down at her with a devilish gleam in his eye.

Her skirt was already rucked up nearly to her waist, her loose blouse untucked by his own hand. A few flicks of his nimble fingers left her bra completely exposed, the lace easily tucked away into the cups to reveal nipples that were already standing tight and proud.

His mouth descended to ravenously worry those tender peaks, enjoying her muffled squeal as he used the edges of his teeth on them before suckling soothingly. Simultaneously, his hand found its way between their bodies to easily exploit a hole that already existed in the crotch of her pantyhose, inserting his fingers into it and spreading them so that he could fit most of his hand into it, easily ignoring the tiny strip of material that constituted her thong in order to reach his goal.

Yet again, she should have been fighting him. She should have been doing anything she could to stop him, to get away from him.

Her halfhearted attempts only seemed as if she was writhing in his arms, although Tira did manage to lean back away from him a little, that only encouraged him to lay her down on the desk. His hand remained over her mouth as he did so, that greedy mouth still nipping and razing and tugging demandingly at her nipples.

To her dismay, she found herself at least as sensitive to him as she had been, if not more so because of how long it had been. He might as well have been suckling at her clit; her reactions would have been no more fevered than they were now.

Two fingers – then three – fought their way through the hole he'd made in the only real barrier that existed, finding her sloppily wet for him and sighing in relief against her breast. Having gotten what he wanted, he slowed what had been his more frantic movements, taking possession of her there more slowly and deliberately and watching her avidly as he did so. He remembered every single nuance of just how she liked to be touched – the memories would be forever burned onto his own hot, hungry flesh and into his equally lust-addled brain.

Baz kept his fingers wet easily, something her body helped him with regardless of how her mind might have felt about what he was doing. At first dragging them slowly over every intimate inch, as if reminding her that all of her was his to do with as he pleased, then thrusting first two fingers, then suddenly three into her slickness. His thumb found a clit that instantly began to swell even further and throb beneath his touch, which made him chuckle softly.

She gasped loudly behind his hand and started when he'd invaded her, and he whispered soothing nothings against her breasts until she became more accustomed to his presence there. But as soon as he began to delicately worry that little pearl of hers, he returned his attentions to nipples that were now at least two sizes larger – and much more sensitive – from his efforts.

Tira was moving now, but not in a way that might convince

him to let her go – exactly the opposite. She was writhing, undulating, raising her hips to offer more of herself to fingers that were already occupying all of her, and trying to press herself against a thumb that was touching her only lightly, making her mad wanting a firmer pressure.

But he was more than big enough to easily control the movements of her body, holding her down with his big, imposing one as he continued to finger fuck her roughly, biting her nipples, gently, but more often than he might, to offset the pleasure he knew he was inspiring within her.

The rhythm he had first established with his thumb on her clit remained the same slow, light, petting motion – never varying, never wavering, never stopping.

She was desperate. She was going to die if he didn't quicken his pace, she was sure of it. Tira's movements became wilder and much less coordinated in the depths of her need, but he merely chuckled softly down at her useless efforts to thwart his will.

“Do you want to cum, little one?” he rasped, the intimidating presence of his big bulge pressed up against her and the huskiness of his voice both telltale signs that he was far from unmoved himself.

Eyes, that had been screwed tightly shut with the raw sensations flooding through her body, flew open at that question. Fixing her gaze beseechingly on his heated one, she bit her lip behind his hand and nodded – emphatically.

“Then what do you need to say to me, hmmm?”

She remembered. Everything he'd said and done to her that weekend, every single thing, was branded indelibly into her psyche.

His hand left her mouth so that she could speak clearly, which somehow made her feel somewhat at a loss, as if she had been robbed of some level of safety, or of complacency, perhaps. This made her blush furiously as he used that now free hand to pinch

the nearest nipple while his other hand continued to ravage her relentlessly.

Feeling terribly embarrassed by the animalistic responses he'd driven her to so easily, she, nonetheless, never contemplated not answering him. "Please, Sir, may I cum?" she asked breathlessly.

Both of his hands and his mouth were immediately removed from her. Baz took a small step back, but not too far, wanting to stay close in case she was unsteady. He could still reach down easily and button up her blouse, tugging her skirt down and generally setting her to rights.

Tira lay there, throbbing and gasping and growling in something akin to pain as she found herself not granted the ultimate in satisfaction, which he certainly knew how to bring her to. Instead, left in the lurch; her entire body surging, aching, itching for a release that he had apparently decided not to give her, the bastard!

Her hands went to her breasts immediately, legs crossed tightly, rhythmically as she was still moaning and twisting, desperate to find release.

"Uh, uh, uh. That's naughty," he chided as he tucked her blouse into her skirt. "Take your hands away and uncross your legs."

She knew she shouldn't have, but Tira hesitated – just slightly.

Before she knew it, she wasn't flipped over onto her tummy as she might have expected, but rather, he lifted her legs over her head, using a hard arm across the backs of her thighs to hold them there, then he proceeded to deliver stinging smacks to her nylon covered behind.

Normally, she would have been promising to behave, or at the very least whimpering and whining at the pain of the spanking, but she couldn't do either, now, without the fear of being heard by everyone in the house.

And he didn't go easy on her either. He blistered her backside

thoroughly, watching it turn a lovely shade of red until he finally allowed her to put her legs down.

Her hands stayed where they'd been throughout the spanking, splayed on the top of the desk as if she was holding on for dear life.

And she was.

Despite the thorough punishment, or because of it, she'd never wanted to touch herself more desperately in her life.

Suddenly, she found herself on her feet, and he finished putting her back into a socially acceptable state, using his fingers to comb her hair, putting her bra to rights and tugging her skirt back down.

Giving herself a shake to try to clear the sensual web he'd woven around them, which didn't work in the least, and forcing herself to breathe in a less frantic manner, Tira moved to step around him.

But he caught her chin and made her look at him. "You are not to touch yourself until you are given permission, Tira."

Stupid move or not, she snorted in derision at that order, until she found herself over his knee, being spanked for the second time. "All right, all right," she hissed in agreement.

Standing her on her own two feet again, he slipped an arm around her waist, making her look into his eyes and demanding, "Tell me."

With a put upon sigh, she grumbled, realizing that she was letting him weave that magical spell around her that he seemed to be able to conjure at will. "I'm not to touch myself until I'm given permission. Happy?"

Grinning, Baz let her go, but gave a sharp swat to her behind as she preceded him out of the office. "Yes, I am, although I could do with a little less sass from you, especially considering you just got spanked twice."

Tira was only half paying attention to him. Instead, she was wondering how she was going to manage to get through this

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dinner, and the long afternoon and evening that accompanied it traditionally, all the while knowing she was soaking through her panties, her skirt and no doubt the chair beneath her.

Come to think of it, though, this situation wasn't a lot different from the first time they'd gotten together. She'd been dripping wet then too, and she'd only just met him.

Definitely a bastard.