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Tryst

INSOLENCE

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By

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Dedication

For my Yahoo group whose members are like
the proverbial cigarette after sex.

Of all the clubs she could have walked into, she had to pick his, Aric Calderwood thought sourly, paraphrasing his favorite actor's famous quote. She spelled trouble for him, and he would rather do without the headache. When she sat down at the bar, he waved off the regular bartender and headed over to her.

Sleek strands of chocolate-colored silk spilled over her shoulders. His fingers twitched with the need to touch them, but he pushed away that need as he had every time he'd felt it. A spike of annoyance went through him. Last night, he'd told her not to come to Insolence, yet here she was. Disobedience didn't sit well with him, and usually, he didn't tolerate it. He wasn't going to tolerate it from her either. Not this time.

A pale, heart-shaped face turned up to his as he stopped in front of her, the width of the bar's gleaming surface between them. Peridot eyes gazed at him defiantly, and his gut clenched. He really didn't need this tonight. She would have to go.

"I'll have a Jack and Coke," she said in a firm voice that did nothing to hide the sensual, husky cadence of her natural tones.

"I don't think so," Aric replied, crossing his arms over his broad chest.

Her eyes narrowed, and Aric resisted the urge to check his chest for a poison dart. He hardened his heart against her. She didn't belong at Insolence, and he'd told her so. Showing up here in spite of his warning threw his annoyance into high gear. No one disobeyed Aric Calderwood. He was probably the most powerful Dom in the community, yet one pushy, bossy woman thought nothing of thumbing her nose at his orders.

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"It's just a drink, Aric. I'm not here to poach on your subs."

The hard, determined expression on Ainsley Connor's face reminded Aric of the last time she'd been in town. They'd met for dinner as they usually did. They'd chatted about the same stuff they usually did. Yet, Ainsley had seemed different. Her demeanor came off edgier than usual and held a hint of despair he didn't want to speculate on. When she'd hit town yesterday, they'd gone to dinner again, but this time Ainsley's despair had been replaced with belligerence.

"That's not the impression I got from you last night, Ains." He leaned over the bar, bringing his face closer to hers. "You said you wanted to come here. You said you were interested. I know you, Ains. You're a loose cannon, and I won't have that in my world."

Her pale green eyes flashed, and for a moment, Aric could have sworn he saw hurt there before defiance took over. "I never realized you didn't like me," she said in a flat tone, a muscle twitching in her jaw.

"Don't put words in my mouth." Anger speared through him. Talking to Ainsley when she was in this kind of mood would try the patience of a saint, and he was about as far from that status as one could get. "I've liked you since the first grade. We go to dinner every time you come to town. We talk on the phone a few times a month. Hell, I talk to you more than I talk to my own father. You're my best friend, but that doesn't mean I don't know what you're like. You're a whirlwind sweeping everything before it. I like my world ordered not chaotic, especially at Insolence."

Ainsley put her hands flat on the bar. Aric glanced at the long, elegant fingers, and his gut tightened again. He hated how she had the ability to tie him in knots with just a touch or a look. When she spoke, her voice lowered to a register that sent warning bells through Aric's mind.

"I just want to—"

Aric sucked in a breath and ruthlessly cut off her explanation. "You just want to pick out a nice sub and have some simple fun just like any other dominant female in here."

Aware that his harsh words were fueled by anger at his lack of self-control around her, Aric felt the warning bells become an acute alarm.

He didn't *care* what she wanted. She'd disobeyed him. The urge to punish her set his senses alight, and he fought for control. Only Ainsley had ever been able to shake his much vaunted self-possession. All the more reason to keep her out of his club and out of his world, except for the periphery where she already stood.

"I know you, Ainsley. Nothing is ever simple with you, and I won't have you turning my place into some kind of flesh auction or wrestling pit as the subs fight to be with you!"

The shimmer in her eyes might have been tears if he thought she had it in her to cry.

"Don't put words in *my* mouth," she shot back.

The warning bells inside him turned from an alarm into full-blown sirens as the emotion in her eyes deepened. No way. In a million years, he would not believe that Ainsley Connor could cry. Slug someone who hurt her, yeah. Drop kick someone who put her down, absolutely. Cry? Never!

"I don't want a sub, Aric. That's not why I'm here."

He stared at her, the inexorable fact of her tears glaring back at him. Shock rippled through him, and he suddenly wanted to kill whoever had made her so vulnerable that tears misted her beautiful eyes.

"Then why are you here, Ainsley? Why did you disobey me?"

She turned her hands over so the palms faced him. She pushed them across the bar toward him. "I want you to punish me for disobeying you, Aric." The soft words barely registered above the noise of the music and the raucousness of the crowds. "I'm here to be *your* sub."

Aric took a step back from the bar. Her words slammed into him almost physically. No. Fucking. Way. She was no submissive. He knew it. She led. She never followed. She created chaos wherever she went. She didn't have a submissive bone in her six-foot-tall body.

Those eyes glittered up at him, and her lush mouth turned down at the corners. "You've known me longer than anyone else so I thought maybe you would understand why I came. I can see I was wrong."

Her words were choked with emotion, her voice thick from the tears. She curled her fingers into her palms and pulled her hands back toward her.

Acting solely on instinct, Aric snapped his hands out and caught her wrists, clamping down, her fingers biting into his palms as he held her immobile. Emotion began to unfurl within him. “Why?”

Now, the eyes turned angry and defiant, their expression familiar to him.

“Because this is who I have always longed to be. Who you never *let* me be.” Her whispered words rasped harshly, raw with emotion.

Aric’s heart rate had pretty much gone into cardiac arrest zone. It beat so fast and hard, he expected it to stop at any moment. Ainsley spelled danger. To him. For him. She always had, so he’d made it a point to keep part of himself back from her. In the beginning, it hadn’t been that way, but somewhere during their junior high years, he’d figured out that she had the rare ability to get beneath his skin as no one else could. He’d begun to keep parts of himself from her.

Looking at her now, he thought perhaps she had done the same thing, because he sure as hell didn’t recognize this wet-eyed woman who asked him to dominate and punish her. Her lower lip quivered just a tiny bit, giving away her lack of confidence.

A crack in Aric’s defenses appeared. The wall within him suddenly gave way. Ainsley had been a model of confidence the entire time he’d known her. He’d always admired that in her. As he got older, the admiration had turned to desire. But she was his best friend, and he couldn’t take advantage of that. Now, he could not let another man—another Dom—take advantage of what he knew must be a temporary weakness on her part. To keep her safe, he would risk anything, including his heart.

As desire swept through him, freed at last from a place deep inside where he’d banished it years before, he realized that being with her would challenge his control, his self-confidence, and the plans he’d made for his life. He didn’t know what would happen after being with her, but he knew it would change everything.

His fingers eased on her wrists, his thumbs stroking over the wild pulse that beat there. He liked that her reaction to him seemed intense despite her stillness. She let her hands lay lax in his grasp, not initiating

any move herself. Unbidden, the thought rose in his mind. *Just like a good sub.*

He tugged at her hands, and she lifted her eyes to his, a question in their depths. He fought back a smile. A good sub wouldn't have done that, raised their eyes without permission, but he understood why she had. They were in public, and nothing was settled between them. She had a right to question his intent.

"Let's go up to my place."

Confusion filled her face. "Not the dungeon?" She glanced over her shoulder at the entrance to the club's play area.

Revulsion rose within him, shocking in its intensity. He'd been a Dom for nearly a decade, but the thought of parading her through the dungeon, of dominating her and fucking her in front of the club's patrons, turned his stomach. Bile rose in his throat. This was too personal for the club. She meant too much to him. No way could he do anything to her in public. Besides, his body already trembled at the thought of making love to her. He didn't think he could control himself enough to participate in a scene with her. But since she didn't know that, he'd give her a taste of his dominance, get his libido under control, and then find out just why the hell she'd come to him asking to be his sub.

"No," he said firmly. "You're my best friend. I don't fuck people I care about in public nor do I participate in public scenes with them. We're going up to my apartment."

Aric released her hands and stepped around the end of the bar. Ainsley, in low-heeled shoes, was eye level with his nose. They had always been the tallest in their class from first grade through their senior year in high school. The fact that their names were close in the alphabet meant they often had to sit by each other. At six years old, placed next to each other in first grade, both of them new to the town, they had naturally latched onto each other.

Taking one of her hands in his, Aric led her to his office at the back of the club. Although muffled, the music still thumped the walls. Her head swiveled slowly as she looked around curiously, but Aric had no use for the room at the moment. Every cell in his body screamed for him to

take her upstairs to his home.

He walked over to the small elevator in the corner and put a key in the lock. The door slid open, and he ushered Ainsley into the small car. He stepped in, facing her, and the door slid shut behind him.

“No turning back now,” he whispered as he stared into her impassive face.

“Good.”

That single syllable fired Aric’s blood. Had the woman before him been anyone else but Ainsley, he would not have had to continuously caution himself to go slow. Of course, no other woman would have pushed his buttons so quickly either. From the moment he’d thought of another man dominating her, possessiveness filled Aric and his cock had been ready to go.

For twenty years, since they were twelve, Aric had known that to think of Ainsley in a sexual way was courting far more trouble than he could deal with. Yet, he’d been on fire to have her the entire time. He just hadn’t wanted to acknowledge it. Now, since she’d asked to be his sub, under his complete control, maybe he could work out those long-held feelings of lust for his oldest and best friend.

The elevator stopped, and he heard the door open. Cupping Ainsley’s chin in his hand, he tilted her face toward him.

“This is it. If you step into my house, you belong to me. You do what I say, when I say it. I do not tolerate disobedience. If I do something you don’t like or ask you to do something you don’t want to do, you need to say your safe word. And you will give me that word before you step out of this elevator,” he said quietly, holding her gaze with his own. He didn’t see a lick of fear or hesitancy there, and he knew she would agree to whatever he said. His balls began to ache.

“Patience.”

Aric blinked, startled by her one word response to his warning. “What?”

Her lush lips curled into a smile. “My safe word is patience. Can I go in now?”

Heart thudding heavily, Aric stepped back into his apartment.

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When she followed, her tall, lithe frame crowding into his personal space, he thought he would pass out from excitement. She cast her eyes down from his, not even looking around at his home. His senses went into overdrive. This was Ainsley. The girl he'd wanted to fuck from the time he'd turned twelve. And she'd given him the right to do whatever he wanted to her. Every cell in his body exploded with joy.

He knew what her field of vision held, his legs and the thick ridge of his erection pressing against his zipper. She didn't seem curious about his apartment, didn't try to sneak looks at it as she kept her head slightly bent and her eyes downcast. Her nostrils had flared when she'd stepped close to him. His scent had caught her attention. Beyond that, she acted the perfect sub. Acted being the operative word, of course. He needed to know if she truly wished to be his submissive.

Aric would fuck her. He'd already decided that. If that was all she wanted, he'd give it to her and send her on her way. However, if her desire to sub for him stemmed from something other than a years-long curiosity about sex with him, he would have to take things to another level. Because God knew he'd had years to wonder what it would be like to have her. Her choice of safe word summed it all up for him. No one had ever tested his patience as Ainsley did, nor required so much of it.

Aric touched her cheek, his fingers brushing lightly against her soft skin. She trembled, and awe swept over him. Despite her forceful personality, she appeared to have no difficulty letting him take control. Her trust called to him as deeply as her sensuality did. He just needed to discover the truth behind her actions.

"Have you been formally trained?"

Keeping her eyes cast down, she said, "No, sir."

He hissed in a breath. He hadn't realized how arousing it would be to hear her call him sir. "When is your flight home?"

She swallowed hard, as if she didn't want to answer. "Sunday evening."

"You can't learn to be a proper sub in a couple of nights, Ains."

Fear flickered across her face, and Aric sensed her panic. He chuckled. "Don't worry. Now that you're here, I'm not about to let that

stop me. You wanted this. It will be my pleasure to fulfill your desires.”

He took her small purse from her and tossed it on the couch. Getting her naked would be like unwrapping a Christmas gift. He wanted to savor every moment of anticipation. Aric pushed her suede jacket over her shoulders, stripping it from her. It followed the purse. He held his breath, his hands skating down her silk-covered back and over her jean-clad ass. A shudder rippled through her. Touching her with the intent to arouse, and succeeding, sent his own arousal soaring. But he controlled himself easily. It was something else entirely to control Ainsley.

He shifted closer to her and brushed back her hair, exposing her throat. He dropped a kiss on her sensitive skin, and she moaned. With a chuckle, he took her earlobe between his teeth and flicked it with his tongue.

Aric sensed how hard-pressed her stillness was. When he touched her ass, her muscles contracted, and he knew she yearned to rub her thighs against each other. He wondered if she could get off like that, letting her wet panties press her swollen clit as her legs squeezed together rhythmically. God, he'd pay good money to see that, he thought, remembering all the years he'd fantasized about her. Now that she stood before him, it was time he stopped thinking of the past and got on with the task at hand: seducing Ainsley.

Aric kept his voice deliberately soft. “Look at me.”

Raising her eyes to his, she gazed at him with an expression he'd never seen on her beautiful face. Lust etched itself on her features, giving them a haunting quality. He'd always thought her gorgeous. As tall as a man, slender but athletic and muscular from years of martial arts, she had the kind of inner grace that came from knowing exactly who she was. The kind of inner grace many of the best subs had.

He stood a full four inches taller than her six feet, and she usually took advantage of that by wearing heels around him. Tonight, her heels were low, and she had to tilt her head back to meet his gaze. Although she kept her face impassive, her eyes skimmed his features. For the first time in his life, he wondered how a woman saw him. He knew his thoughts were irrational because Ainsley had known him since they were both

children. If anyone knew what he looked like, she did. Yet, he couldn't deny that he wanted her to think that his dark hair and light eyes, his bronzed skin, and the dimple in his cheek all added up to handsome.

As if she could read his thoughts, a glint of appreciation appeared in her eyes. His heart leapt, and a smile turned up the corners of his mouth.

"I never thought I would have the opportunity to speak these words to you, but, Ains, I want you," he murmured, his fingers slipping into the open neckline of her silk shirt.

Her breath caught audibly in her throat when he stroked her skin. Swiftly and expertly, he unbuttoned her shirt, letting it fall from her body. He marveled at the satin of her skin. She wore no bra, and her full breasts tantalized him, the hard, dusky tips standing at attention. His groin fired anew.

Then, for the first time in all the years they'd known one another, he bent his head and kissed her. The softness of her lips seduced him. Liquid fire rushed through his veins, and his control snapped. His tongue brushed the seam of her lips. She opened her mouth, shivering as he licked at the wet flesh inside. The taste of her intoxicated him more than the finest champagne, and he floated on a euphoric cloud, all because he was finally kissing Ainsley.

Aric's hands glided up her naked back, pressing her against his chest, her unconfined breasts molding themselves to his hard contours. The sensation of those hard nipples poking into his pecs through the thin material of his t-shirt couldn't be denied. He reached up to cup the firm mounds. Ainsley began to shake, and he deepened the kiss, his tongue no longer teasing but demanding. He pushed past her teeth and took control of her tongue, coaxing it into his mouth. He sucked on it lightly while his fingers made short work of her jeans.

The denim slid down her thighs. Aric broke the kiss, needing to see her silken skin, touch it, and taste it. He resisted, only letting himself look. "Remove your boots."

She knelt before him to remove the boots and stayed on her knees, eyes downcast, arms crossed at her back. Jealousy flicked at him. He

wondered where she had learned that since she'd already admitted to not being trained.

Aric felt completely out of control. He had just broken every rule he'd steadfastly enforced in life since he'd opened Insolence. He had no contract with her. He'd brought her to his home instead of the dungeon. She had asked to be his submissive, yet he hadn't treated her at all as he would a sub. He had just blown by every rule he'd ever put into place to keep his control at its maximum. And he didn't fucking care.

The woman in front of him had been his wet dream for the better part of his life. He'd kissed her, and a whole new world had opened for him. He'd touched her and marveled at how cardboard his dreams were compared to the reality. Now, his every sense had swung into stunning focus, as if he'd put on 3D glasses.

"Undress me."

Aric closed his eyes when she rose to her feet. His senses opened fully as she slid his t-shirt up, tugged his arms through, and cupped the back of his head to pull his shirt off. Her fingers trailed lightly down his chest, and his control threatened to snap at her touch. When she reached his jeans and popped the top button, he opened his eyes. He didn't want to miss a moment of her expression when she saw his cock.

The zipper came down carefully, and he could swear she held her breath, but he was so busy holding his own he couldn't tell. Her long fingers brushed against his swollen length through his denims. Aric gritted his teeth. The sensations licking along his nerve endings had him on the verge of orgasm already.

"Oh!"

Whisper soft, the startled exclamation accompanied her discovery that he wore no underwear. Too intent on her reactions to smile, Aric thrust his hips toward her.

"Take them off."

She tipped her head to look up at him, but before her eyes could reach his, she dropped her gaze, dipped her head and slipped her hands into his jeans. Her warm fingertips grazed his buttocks, and Aric bit back a groan. Her hands stroked down the outside of his thighs, taking his

jeans with them. She froze for a moment as his cock sprang free. Her nails scored his thigh muscles, and the tip of her tongue flicked out to dampen her lips.

“Do you want me, Ainsley?”

Again, her tongue swiped over her lips. “Yes,” she whispered, without raising her eyes. Hastily, she corrected herself. “Yes, sir.”

Aric smiled. His body thrummed with a sexual tension far beyond what he usually felt with a new sub. His actions were not by the book, but this was Ainsley. His emotions and his body never reacted normally to her. He knew in his gut that he could never have a Dom/sub relationship with her. Nor did he want to, a fact that only surprised him a little. For years, he’d gotten off on dominating women. With Ainsley, he wanted to control her, but not dominate her. The realization that he needed so much more from her had begun to shred the fabric of the life and the lifestyle he’d lived for the last few years.

“Finish undressing me. I want to fuck you.”

Aric’s crude words didn’t elicit a reaction from her. She quickly finished her task and sat back on her heels, her eyes lowered. Gooseflesh prickled her skin, and Aric knew she was acutely aware of him, of his nakedness, his strength...and his cock. He reached out to stroke the shining strands of her hair, his fingers trembling slightly. His control felt shattered. No one had ever affected him as she did.

As her silky hair slid through his fingers, he drew a deep, calming breath. He took a step back from her. “Come,” he commanded and turned toward his bedroom.

He knew she followed him, but had the disconcerting urge to glance back and make sure. In the bedroom, he didn’t turn on the lights. Instead, he opened the blinds. The wall of glass let in every bit of ambient light from the street below as well as the brilliant silver moonlight. His four-poster bed stood in the center of the room, dominating the huge space. Ainsley stood just inside the door, her eyes lowered.

For a moment, Aric thought he would completely disgrace himself by coming. Standing half in moonlight, half in shadow, her naked body so close to his idea of perfection, he knew she’d been made for him. The

vision of her naked in his bedroom, submitting to his dominance, almost did him in.

“Lie on the bed with your arms stretched above you,” he said hoarsely.

She moved like liquid silver, her muscles and flesh fluid and graceful. She turned back the sheets and comforter and stretched out on the dark paisley-patterned sheets. Her breasts rose, the stiff points of her nipples arcing upward, as she lifted her arms above her head.

On legs that shook from the force of his arousal, Aric walked to his dresser. He swallowed hard. No sub had ever been in his bedroom. Ainsley was the first and only woman ever to lie on the bed he slept in. He couldn't even remember the last time he'd spent the night with a woman. He usually didn't have the accoutrements of the lifestyle in his home. He'd always played in the club.

For a moment, he stood staring at her, thinking how he'd kept his life completely compartmentalized. He lived the life of a Dom, but always in public. Not around his family and never around Ainsley. Yet she knew what he did to get off. She knew he didn't do vanilla sex.

He stared at her, taking in the sexy body he longed to touch and taste. His cock and balls began to protest his lack of action. Shaking off the sense that he had just jumped off a cliff without a parachute, Aric grabbed a set of steel handcuffs from the top of the dresser. Lined thickly with plush velvet, the cuffs weren't meant to pinch or hurt, only to restrain. The cuffs were the only thing he had in the apartment that spoke of his lifestyle. He'd brought them upstairs to customize them by adding a few links to the chain. His fingers closed over the cool metal, and he took the cuffs to the bed.

Ainsley's head didn't move. Her eyes were still lowered even though she lay on her back. Aric knelt on the mattress. He started to reach for her arms and hesitated, the weight of the cuffs heavy in his hand. The realization that he was about to cuff his best friend, a woman he loved more than any other person in his life outside his family, made him hesitate. The thought occurred to him that he should be making love to her, cherishing her, not cuffing her to his bed so he could fuck her into

submission.

Cool fingers brushed his, stroking the metal of the cuffs.

“I want this.”

Aric froze. Again, she hadn't acted as a true sub would, but he really didn't care, dismissing her demeanor in favor of the sensations ripping through him. His body reacted to her words and touch as if someone had struck a match inside him, setting off the fuse to a block of C4.

Closing the cuff around one slender wrist, he threaded the short chain through a bar on the headboard and snapped the other cuff on. He stared at her restrained arms. Shock reverberated within him. Holy shit. He'd cuffed Ainsley Connor.

A thousand ideas about what to do with her first clamored for attention in his brain. Aric sat back on his heels and let his eyes take in the eerily strange, yet wholly satisfying image of Ainsley in his bed, restrained by handcuffs. He'd dreamed it so many times he almost pinched himself to be assured of his wakefulness.

He breathed deep, and a citrus scent filled his nostrils. Ainsley had smelled like oranges and limes for as long as he could remember. Now, his nose picked out another scent. The scent of her arousal. His cock twitched painfully as he glanced down at her legs. Her thighs were parted slightly, enough that he wanted to burrow between them and push them farther apart so he could bury his face in her pussy.

Lust spiked hard within him and, unable to control himself any longer, he cupped one breast in his palm. She sucked in a breath, the sharp sound breaking him free of his reverie. He tested the weight of the firm flesh, his thumb raking over the stiff nipple. Her skin felt like soft, plush velvet. Her body rippled, the undulating movement letting him know she'd pressed her thighs together.

Aric smiled. As horny as he was, at least he wasn't alone. She wanted him just as badly. Maybe more, since she'd had to come all the way here and offer herself to him.

He deliberately ran his fingertips over her body with the lightest of touches. From her throat down to her collarbone. Around each breast in a

swirl until he reached the hard, peaked tip. Along her ribs to the flat planes of her belly. Across her hip bones and into her navel. Trailing his fingers down her hip to where the curve of her buttocks sank into the mattress, he stroked down one thigh, over her knee, up the inside of the other thigh...

A moan broke from her, and his fingers stopped.

"You like that. You like me touching you." He let his words brush over her in lieu of his fingers.

"Yes!" Her reply held a loss of control he found empowering. She practically sobbed with wanting him.

He wanted to cover her body with his and kiss her until they both turned to Jell-O, but remembering what she'd asked for downstairs, he smacked her thigh sharply with the palm of his hand. "The answer is 'yes, sir'! Don't forget why you are here, Ainsley," he warned.

"Yes, sir," she said in a low, shaken voice.

He heard the lust that underscored her words. His cock ached to take her and get it over with, take the edge off his arousal, and to know what it felt like to fuck her. He wasn't ready to relinquish control yet, however. He'd waited twenty years. Another twenty minutes didn't matter despite the bitching from his balls.

Aric slowly parted her thighs, his gaze raking over their slender form, the well-toned muscles sleek and pliant beneath his fingers. Her pussy lay before him, the petals of her slit unfurled and engorged with blood, moisture glistening on the pink tissues. She waxed, something that kicked his lust up a few more notches.

He stared at the apex of her thighs, enthralled with the delicate flesh. Finally, the handcuffs rattled as she moved restlessly. With gentle hands, Aric pushed her thighs wide and angled his torso between them.

"Oh, you are something else, Ainsley," he murmured, his fingertip teasing the swollen petal of her labia.

She whimpered at the slight touch, and he knew she'd become exquisitely sensitive. With his thumbs, he carefully eased her open, his eyes drawn to her deep pink center where more moisture pooled. He blew a stream of air on her, and a strangled cry escaped her. He grinned. He

loved that what he did drove her crazy. Payback, he thought to himself with deep satisfaction. Every jiggle of her breasts, every sway of her hips, every brush of her body against his for three quarters of his life had been torture.

“Hold very still, Ainsley,” he commanded. “If you move, I may have to punish you. Do you understand?”

“Yes, sir.”

The reedy sound of her voice gave away her hard-won composure. She had to concentrate to speak, and all she wanted to do was thrust her cunt into his face. He knew the signs, knew how badly she ached with the need to come. He bent down and sucked her labia into his mouth, his tongue rolling over the sensitive skin as he tasted her salty, sweet essence.

The hitch in her breathing coupled with the quivering of her muscles made Aric smile. She held herself still with difficulty, and he was about to make it even harder for her. Determined to break her down to mindless pleasure, he let the point of his tongue graze her wet folds. Swirling his tongue then lapping at her with the flat of it, he worked her into a frenzy. Cream coated his chin, and he rubbed its stubbled surface against her, using the friction as part of his assault on her pussy.

Aric licked, nipped, sucked, stroked, and teased every millimeter of her engorged flesh. He had three fingers embedded in her depths, working her pussy and pressing relentlessly at her G-spot. By the time he pulled back the hood of her clit and circled it with his tongue, he had her so worked up he knew she could no longer control herself.

A keening cry escaped Ainsley as she came, her pussy clamping down on his fingers as her hips jerked, her body beyond her control. Aric flicked his tongue repeatedly over her clit. Her skin rippled as her muscles contracted. He looked up briefly and saw that she had a white-knuckled grip on the slats of the headboard. Pulling his fingers free of her body, he lifted his head, licking his lips and tasting her essence on his mouth.

As he watched the rapid rise and fall of her chest, Aric thought about kneeling over her and filling her mouth with his cock. The Dom in him hoorahed at the notion of making her suck his cock while she was cuffed to the bed. But the man who had spent years dreaming about her

giving him a blow job wasn't satisfied with that scenario.

Leaving the bed, he retrieved the key to the handcuffs. He leaned over and unlocked them, drawing them from her wrists and setting them on the nightstand. Ainsley's eyes met his, and he saw a very un-sub like touch of anger in them.

"I said I wanted this, Aric. Why are you stopping?" she asked softly, but with a hint of steel in her voice.

Aric bit back a grin at her tone and question. If he hadn't been more focused on having her blow him, he would have taken exception to her lack of control and aggressive manner. He took her hand and pulled her up until she sat on the edge of the mattress, feet on the floor. His gaze slid over her nude form, her skin still flushed from her orgasm.

"I'm not stopping. I just want to see my sub on her knees."

Firmly, he pushed her to the floor, spreading his thighs and drawing her between them. She went willingly, her eyes cast down again. Gazing down at Ainsley's bent head, Aric thought briefly about the road that led him to this searingly significant moment. All the high school and college years of dating, girlfriends, and vanilla sex had left him restless and with the nagging sense that he'd missed out on something. Discovering BDSM and his dominant tendencies after college led him to a career path and a lifestyle that he'd been happy with for nearly ten years. Being a Dom satisfied him as nothing else ever had.

As Ainsley knelt with her face only inches from his swollen cock, Aric had an epiphany. Maybe being a Dom wasn't the perfect fit he'd thought it was. Sure, he'd had the best sex of his life since he'd become part of the BDSM community, and he'd been happier than at any time since he'd hit puberty, but that same nagging sense of something missing had still been there. He'd just been too busy having fun to notice.

With Ainsley's cream still tart on his tongue, it dawned on him that he'd used being a Dom to keep people at arm's length. He hadn't had a girlfriend in more than five years. He'd never brought a woman to his home, never taken one to meet his father, never slept with one overnight. He'd cut intimacy from his life.

He didn't want to shove his cock in Ainsley's mouth while she'd

been restrained because he wanted her to touch him. He needed the intimacy of her hands on him, needed her to have the freedom to express how much she wanted him without a submissive's compulsion to please.

As she'd knelt between his thighs, he knew that with her he could never have a true Dom/sub relationship, one that encompassed every facet of their lives. Ainsley was too dominant herself, and Aric didn't want to change her. He needed to take her beyond vanilla sex, but at the same time, he had no urge to completely master her. The city's most prominent Dom might have the fierce urge to collar her and dominate her in the bedroom, but he had no desire to put a leash on her and parade her through his club publicly. Her submission, such as it was, would be solely for him.

Aric stroked his hand over her hair. He'd broken all his own rules and reveled in it. Instead of disengaging his emotions, he had given them free rein for the first time in years. And his cock had never been so hard.

"Sir?"

Ainsley's soft murmur pulled him from his thoughts. Pain jabbed him, shocking him. Earlier, he'd found it incredibly hot that she'd called him that. Now that he'd tasted her and touched her, he found it disconcerting that he preferred the sound of his name on her lips to the evidence of her submission. His lips quirked in a derisive smile. All the years he'd spent building his reputation as a Dom and he'd been brought to his knees—figuratively anyway—by a woman who knew what he'd looked like with a mouth full of braces and an outbreak of acne.

"Do you want to suck my cock, Ainsley?" he asked, a slight sense of apprehension snaking down his spine.

A visible shudder went through her, and her hands fisted on her thighs. "Y-yes sir," she whispered, her voice exhibiting the same tremor as her body.

He leaned back on his hands, his hips lifting toward her. "Then go ahead."

Her body angled toward him, her fists still on her thighs, and her breath wafted over his heated flesh...and then he raised a hand to stop her. Cupping her chin, he tilted her face up so their eyes met.

“I want you to look at me, Ainsley. I want to feel your hands on me,” he rasped hoarsely. “I want you to show me how much you want to suck me, how much you want me. Can you do that?”

For a moment, the submissive demeanor she’d adopted, the one she had such trouble sustaining, fell away, and her eyes shimmered as if with tears. “Oh, God, yes, Aric!” she groaned.

His name on her lips sent heat flaring through his body. His cock twitched, and her eyes flickered, drawn to the thick stalk of flesh that rose from his neatly trimmed pubic hair. She reached up and tucked her long hair behind her ears. She dropped her hands onto his knees, and Aric trembled with lust. Her long, slender fingers smoothed over his thighs confidently. She leaned into him, her torso pressing against his calves and knees. The pale green of her irises darkened, and he felt the weight of her gaze on his balls. They tightened, aching unbearably.

Ainsley smiled, her lush pink lips parting slightly. Her hands caressed his thighs, stroking up to his hips and teasing the sensitive skin over his hip bones. She bent her head, and the wet lick of her tongue danced over his balls.

Aric moaned. He couldn’t stop himself. Her fingers encircled the base of his cock as she licked and sucked the firm globes of his testicles. She took one in her mouth, and the hot, wet suction nearly made him come. His brain began to short-circuit as lust threatened to take over. For one angry moment, he wondered where she’d learned that trick with his balls, but then her mouth began a wet glide from the base of his cock to its tip, and he quickly forgot his anger in the rush of pleasure he experienced.

“Dear God, Ains!” he exclaimed, flames engulfing his body as her mouth touched him. “That feels so fucking good!”

He sat up so that he could tangle his hands in her hair, pushing the chocolate strands back. His eyes focused on her as she ran the tip of her tongue over the crown of his cock, teasing the weeping slit, tasting his pre-cum and licking her lips. She hadn’t even taken him in her mouth yet and already it had been the best blow job he’d ever had, he thought, stunned by his reaction.

Pink lips parted moistly and fitted themselves over the engorged

head of his penis. Aric sucked in a breath. Her mouth opened wider, and his cock slid into the wet depths, her lips stroking over him until her face was buried in his short pubic hair. Her throat muscles worked him, and Aric suddenly had a very tenuous control over himself.

She pulled back slowly, sucking and licking as she went, and the visual had him in knots. His cock emerging from her sweet mouth, the mouth that argued with him for most of his life, had to be the most erotic sight he had ever seen. Wide-eyed, he stared as she set up a rhythm, sucking him strongly, her mouth, throat, and tongue working in conjunction, expertly pushing him toward orgasm. Her cheeks hollowed, throwing her cheekbones into prominence, and her pink lips turned ruddy around his flesh.

He could barely breathe because his heart beat so quickly and so hard. His cock jerked every time her tongue swirled over it. His balls were tight and painful, more than ready to dump a load of his cum down her throat. And, all the while, her mouth worked him over, and her hands stroked his body, learning the dips and angles, finding the sensitive spots and teasing them.

When her fingers glided along the crease of his ass, one fingertip like lightning on his anus, he lost it. His fingers tightened on her hair, and with a hoarse shout, he came, spurting hot cum into Ainsley's mouth and throat. She sucked him harder, swallowing expertly. By the time she eased back on her heels, his semi-hard cock slipping from her mouth, Aric knew what they'd shared wasn't like anything he'd ever experienced before. He'd just come, but already he burned to possess her, to fill her with his cock and make her his.

"Look at me," he said, his voice husky with satisfaction.

Her long lashes lifted. A flush stained her cheekbones, and her eyes glittered. Her lower lip pouted, slightly swollen, reddened, and damp from her tongue and his cum. He cupped the side of her face, and she nuzzled his palm absently, as if she wasn't fully aware of her actions.

Brushing a thumb over her cheekbone, feeling the heat of her slight blush against his skin, Aric whispered, "You are the most beautiful woman I've ever seen."

The color in her face deepened. She licked her lips, the darting of her tongue betraying her nerves. "I'm not. I'm just...me."

Her voice had a desperate edge to it, faint, but Aric still heard it. "I've always thought so. Why do you think I'm single? No one can ever measure up."

The green irises darkened. She opened her mouth to speak, but then closed it, her gaze falling from his. Aric decided that now wasn't the time to pursue the discussion. His cock had been left at half-staff, and he ached to fuck her.

He stood and reached down to pull her up beside him. He wrapped his arms around her and fitted his body to hers, reveling in the feel of her soft curves as he took her mouth in a commanding kiss. She whimpered, and her lips parted. She acquiesced to his domination of her mouth, melting against him as he tasted himself on her tongue. He kissed her with all the pent-up emotion inside him. She took his kiss and responded to it, but he could tell she held back a part of herself. She didn't reach for him or touch him. She let him orchestrate every facet of the embrace. He knew a good sub would do the same, taking her pleasure in the fact that he was in charge. However, with Ainsley, he would have loved to have her respond with equal aggression and show him just how badly she wanted him.

Aric took them down onto the paisley sheets and stretched his body over hers, rubbing his half-hard cock over her thigh. Reaching up, he gathered her wrists in one hand, holding them over her head.

"I'll restrain you again later, and tomorrow there will be other things we'll do, but tonight, it's just you and me, Ains. I want to learn how you respond, learn your triggers. And I want you to become comfortable with letting me take charge." He nuzzled her throat, feeling the pulse that beat erratically there beneath his lips.

"You have to be willing to give me all your trust. You have to understand that whatever I do is not just for my enjoyment, but for yours as well," he murmured softly against her delicate skin. "I will not do anything you don't want to do. If you don't like what I do, say your safe word. I will stop. I don't ever want to do anything that you don't like,

Ains. Do you understand?"

Her eyes glowed a bright green as her lids flashed upward. "Yes, sir," she whispered.

She moved her thighs restlessly against his. Aric sensed her arousal had gone up the instant he'd pressed her down on the bed. She wanted him to fuck her. Every little movement and twitch of her gorgeous body told him so.

Keeping her wrists in his grip, Aric used his free hand to caress Ainsley from her shoulders to her hips. He moved his fingers slowly and studiously avoided her breasts and thighs. He discovered that she didn't have a ticklish bone in her body, the inside of her elbow held a magical erogenous zone, she had a minute tattoo of a delicate green vine around her pierced navel, and behind one ear he found another tattoo, a tiny star outlined in red.

Aric flashed back to their senior year in high school. He and Ainsley had been growing apart a little as he became more popular at school for his basketball prowess. Ainsley's height had relegated her to the group of female jocks who had their own brand of popularity but who still stood outside the golden circle of acceptance. He'd been voted captain of the basketball team and given a red star to add to his letterman jacket. The principal had awarded the star at an assembly, and the head cheerleader, some petite, bubble-headed blonde he'd dated for a few months, took it from him, kissed him in front of the whole school, and made a little speech about sewing it on for him.

Until that day, every insignia he'd earned had been sewn onto his jacket by Ainsley. He knew she had assumed she'd sew the star on as well. He'd looked out at the crowd in time to see her turn and walk away. In that moment, he'd known something had broken between them.

With a deep sigh, he stroked one finger over the star, turning his head to kiss it gently. Her breath caught in her throat.

"I'm sorry." His apology ruffled the silk of her hair.

"For what?" she asked, again forgetting to call him sir.

Her voice held a slight tremor, and her skin rippled with reaction as he rubbed his hand down her side. He should have smacked her for her

disobedience, but he just couldn't focus on dominating her. Too many other things—emotions, memories—had gotten in the way.

“For not letting you sew on the star.”

She shuddered, and when he looked at her, her eyes were tightly closed.

“What makes you think that star is for you?”

For a moment, he wondered if he'd been wrong. Then he shook his head. He knew Ainsley too well. The star was for him.

“I just know.” He kissed the red-lined star again.

“The star is to remind me that no matter how much I believe in something, in someone, I can still be disappointed. I got it the instant I was old enough,” she murmured, a harsh note in her soft voice.

Shit. Aric felt like a schmuck. He'd never realized how much he must have hurt her over the years. “Ains, I—”

Her eyes popped open, green fire blazing at him. “Don't, Aric. The past has no place here. Please. Forget about the star. Just fuck me.”

The F word dropping from her lips fired his body even while it made him frown. He dropped his head and licked the star, wondering what other surprises her body might hold for him. He traced the pale green vine on her belly and tugged at the purple titanium bar through her navel. He wondered what the vine meant. Hell. He wondered how many things had happened in her life that he knew nothing about. She had been incredibly talented with her tongue. Someone had to have taught her to give a blow job like that.

Fury ripped through him. Why the hell had he never thought about other men possessing her? He'd told her she couldn't come to his club because he'd known he wouldn't be able to stand aside and watch her fuck some sub.

He drew a deep breath, calming himself. *He* was with Ainsley. She'd chosen him, not some other man. Her gorgeous body was stretched out on *his* bed for *his* pleasure. His and hers. He'd waited his whole life to have this fantasy come true and here he was thinking about her being with another man. He needed to get a grip—and quickly.

Bending his head, Aric took one dusky peach nipple into his

mouth. Ainsley moaned and arched against him, pressing her breast against his face. Her thighs opened, cradling him between them, stroking up over his hips to nudge him more firmly into place. He flicked his tongue over her nipple, then bit it lightly. He moved to the other breast, and she squirmed beneath him, his now fully erect cock nudging the entrance to her pussy.

Aric couldn't remember the last time he'd had missionary sex. He'd never been a fan of it really. Yet, the feel of Ainsley writhing beneath him, under his control, made him hotter than a firecracker in July. He kissed her again, deeply, feeling her response right down to his toes. He knew his cock had to be leaking pre-cum all over her pussy and thighs. His control unraveled to the point that he didn't think he could even manage another position besides missionary. If he didn't get his cock inside her in the next few moments, it would be all over.

Then it hit him. *Fuck!* Condom. He gazed at her, frozen. For the first time in his life, he didn't want to put it on. He was grinding his cock on *Ainsley*, and he didn't want a freaking thing, including a thin layer of latex, between them. Shock held him immobile. He'd never wanted to go bareback before.

"Aric?" she whispered, fear flickering in the depths of her eyes.

He bit back a sigh and leaned over to jerk open the nightstand. Thank God, he typically kept the box there even though it was only so he could refill his pockets or wallet. He fumbled a little as he yanked out a strip of condoms.

Ainsley's eyes widened. "I'm on the pill, and I get tested regularly. I'm clean," she offered quietly.

His hand shook. He badly wanted to forgo the condom, and the urgent desire to do so surprised him. He knew the lifelong bond of trust between them made up half of his reason for not wanting to use protection. But the other half seemed rooted in a possessive urge to make her his in a way he'd never done with any other woman.

"Me too. In the lifestyle, regular testing is mandatory." He stared down at her. She didn't want the damn thing either. He could see it in her eyes. "And condoms are mandatory too."

Disappointment bloomed on her beautiful face. His cock throbbed painfully. *Bloody hell!*

"Are you sure?" he asked through gritted teeth, throwing his caution to the wind.

"Yes!" she moaned, thrusting her hips upward, rubbing against his straining cock.

He tossed the condoms back in the drawer. "God, I shouldn't do this, but I can't fucking resist you, Ains. I've never gone bareback before. You'll be the first."

Her eyes glittered with satisfaction, and Aric swallowed hard. Anticipation rocked him even harder. He knew the feel of her wet cunt closing around his cock would be amazing, and he couldn't wait a moment longer to experience it.

"Hold the headboard," he ordered harshly, his breath rasping in his throat.

She gripped the bars with both hands. Slipping his hands beneath her buttocks, he tilted her hips up. His knees and thighs spread her wide, and she wound her legs around him. He sent up a little prayer for her love of martial arts. It had kept her supple and flexible. He thrust his hips forward, his cock sinking into her depths.

A strangled scream emerged from her throat as she tossed her head, her body bucking beneath him. Her legs hugged his hips, and Aric leaned over her. Balanced on one arm, he kissed and nibbled at her lips, letting her get used to the feel of him within her. He needed a moment anyway. The feel of her tight channel gripping his bare cock nearly sent him over the edge. The sensation filled him with uncontrollable lust.

Aric settled into a slow rhythm. She undulated beneath him, rising to meet him movement for movement. He let go of her hands and cupped her head, kissing her again and again as he fucked the tightest, hottest, wettest pussy he'd ever had the privilege of being in. Ainsley wrapped herself around him, arms and legs clinging tightly as she matched each of his quickening thrusts with one of her own.

Feeling his orgasm begin, the spiraling heat enveloping his spine and groin as he teetered on the edge, Aric slipped his hand down to tease

her clit. She yelped, and her body jerked. She came quickly and hard, a flush staining her torso. Aric drove hard into her, holding her hips up off the bed, plunging into her at an angle to get maximum friction. Ainsley's eyes widened, her hands coming up to grip his arms, her fingers biting into the corded muscle as he strained toward his orgasm.

"Shit! Aric..." Her eyes widened in shock. "Oh, God. Aric I'm coming again."

This time he felt the difference in the ripples that shook her. The clitoral orgasm had been sharp, hard, and fast. The vaginal orgasm, triggered by his battering of her G-spot, welled up from deep within her, the ripples small at first then bigger, longer, deeper. Her pussy milked his cock with each spasm that rocked her frame. The milking motion, coupled with the gush of her cream that increased his friction, sent him over the edge. His orgasm burst from him, his balls tightening until he thought they would split open. His cock expanded as it twitched, then jerked as he came, spurting his seed deep into her pussy.

Aric bit her neck, sucking the flesh between his teeth, to stop himself from screaming out loud. He shuddered convulsively, unable to control his body as his orgasm ripped through him. Colored lights swirled inside his eyelids as he blinked his eyes shut. Despite being consumed by the incredible sensations, he knew deep in his heart and brain that he'd just had the biggest orgasm of his life.

Gasping for air, he sank down onto her body, still shaking hard. He looked into her eyes, and she smiled. No. She grinned.

"Can we do it again?" she asked with a shaky chuckle.

Aric groaned, but an answering grin stretched across his face. "Tonight, yes, but I'm restraining you for the next round," he growled, his voice hoarse. "And tomorrow, I take out my whips and chains."

She blinked at him, and before his eyes, the glorious woman turned herself from satisfied seductress into a submissive goddess. Her eyes lowered, and her expression became serene. "Yes, sir," she murmured.

* * * * *

The sun had been above the horizon for nearly an hour by the time Aric dropped the handcuffs into the nightstand. Ainsley lay on her back, one arm above her head as if she remained cuffed. Her naked breasts rose and fell evenly in her sleep. Despite his exhaustion, Aric felt slightly on edge. He slipped down on the mattress, his head denting the pillow as he pulled the sheet and comforter over them both. He wriggled, scooting into a comfortable position, and waited. With a frown, he realized he was waiting for Ainsley to snuggle up to him. She didn't move.

Strangely disgruntled, he closed his eyes. Didn't all women want to snuggle? Wasn't that one reason he never brought a date home? So they wouldn't disturb his sleep?

He lay unmoving for what could have been only minutes but felt like an hour, trying to fall asleep. His body had that heavy, sexually sated sensation that usually led to a deep sleep. He couldn't have been more awake. A rustling sound accompanied the dip of the bed as Ainsley rolled to her side, away from him. With a growl, he gave up all pretense that he didn't care where she slept. He rolled to the center of the bed facing her back, and then reached out and pulled her hips toward him. She turned, her long legs tangling with his, her face unerringly finding the spot where his neck met his shoulder. She nuzzled him, her arms curled between their chests.

He sighed deeply as he settled her warm body against his, his hands stroking over her long, smooth back. This time, when he closed his eyes, sleep stalked him immediately. Vaguely, he knew that meant something, but his long night of sexual activity caught up with him and his brain just refused to function as he sank down into sleep, cradling Ainsley to his heart.

By the time Aric awoke, half the day had passed. Ainsley lay curled against his side, but the instant he moved, her eyes popped open. Shocked eyes gazed at him for a moment before they lowered. He grabbed her chin in his fingers and pulled her face close. Her eyelids dropped shut, and he brushed a kiss over her forehead.

"Go soak in the tub," he murmured. "Don't budge from there until I tell you to."

She wriggled away from him, scurrying across the room to the bathroom.

“Leave the door open!” he called out as she stepped inside.

She disappeared from his sight, and he heard the water come on. A few minutes later, the toilet flushed. With a grin, he got up and headed to the guest bedroom where his father usually slept when he visited. He showered quickly and padded naked back to his bedroom. The sound of gentle splashing came from the bathroom.

Aric dressed quickly and took the elevator down to his club. In his office, he made a couple of quick phone calls and then went down to the security room where he found his daytime guard watching college football along with the security cameras.

“Hey, Chuck. How’s your wife?”

The guard turned in his swivel chair and grinned. “She’s good, boss. What’s going on?”

Aric leaned his hip against the counter and set Ainsley’s rental car keys in front of his employee. “The car should be in the lot. There’s an overnight bag in it. Can you bring it in? Oh, and I ordered some food. It should be here in a half hour. Just put it in the elevator with the suitcase and send it up, okay?”

Chuck nodded. “Sure, boss. Anything else?”

Aric smiled thinking about his second phone call. “Yeah, Luke is bringing a piece of furniture over. Should be here within the hour. Same as the food and the suitcase, okay, Chuck?”

The security guard nodded again, curiosity in his faded blue eyes. “You got it. Stick it in the elevator. Send it up.”

Aric patted the guard on the shoulder. “Great. Thanks, Chuck.”

Going back to his office, he raided the locked cabinet beside his desk. He took out a flogger, a paddle, and nipple clamps, grinning widely at the thought of using them on Ainsley.

When he walked into the bathroom fifteen minutes later, he found her dozing in the sunken tub, the heated, jetted water swirling around her body. He knelt beside her and stroked her hair. She opened her eyes, and for a split second, he saw raging hunger in her pale eyes. As quickly as it

had come, the emotion fled, and Ainsley dropped her gaze from his.

"How are you?" he asked softly.

She shrugged. "I'm fine, sir."

Feeling an odd twinge of anger that she was obviously hiding her emotions from him, Aric rose to his feet. "Lunch will be here soon. You may get out of the tub and get ready. Your suitcase will be here in a few minutes, and after lunch, I have a surprise for you." He turned toward the door, but stopped when he heard her turn off the jets. "Oh, and Ainsley? You may wear only my robe. It's on the back of the bathroom door."

He left the room, closing the door behind him. While she was busy in the bathroom, he set the table on the glass-enclosed part of the terrace, and collected the food Chuck had sent up. He left Ainsley's overnight case just inside the bedroom door.

He'd just finished opening the food containers when Ainsley appeared, wearing his forest green silk robe. The material clung to her lush body, and his cock responded instantly to the visual.

He gestured toward the table. "You may sit down."

She seated herself, and he pushed her chair in, reaching for the take-out containers. He dished up the spicy Mexican food and sat across from her. As he picked up his fork, he said, "You may eat now, Ainsley."

She never lifted her gaze to his, which pleased the Dominant in him. At the same time, he found her submissiveness grating. She followed his cues perfectly, but not knowing why she did irked him. Despite what she had tried to make him believe the night before in the club, he knew she was no submissive. That left him with a single reason for her actions. She wanted him as much as he had wanted her all these years. Asking to be his sub had been her way of getting into his bed.

After they ate, Aric cleared away the food and dishes as she sat at the table, eyes cast downward, the autumn sun spilling over her. He opened the elevator and eyed the expensive padded spanking horse his club manager Luke had sent him. The damned thing was a work of art.

Last night, he'd been way too wound up to have Ainsley to be able to master her properly. Now that the initial excitement and lust had subsided to a manageable level, it was time to up the kink. He rather

thought the rest of the day would be a lot of fun. Perhaps not quite as exciting as it had been fucking Ainsley for the first time after fantasizing about her for years, but what he had planned for the next twenty-four hours would definitely be an event he would always remember.

Aric set up the horse in the open area between his living room and kitchen. He laid out the flogger, paddle, and nipple clamps nearby. Next, he retrieved a bottle of lube from the bedroom. He glanced out the glass slider door and found Ainsley with her eyes still downcast. However, her hands fiddled with the ties of the robe, giving away her nervousness. Aric smiled. His Ainsley had never been one to back down from a challenge, but that didn't mean she had nerves of steel. Her composure the night before had virtually been unflappable from the moment she'd walked into Insolence. He was the one who'd been caught off guard and spun out of control. He'd regained his self-possession, so now it was time for him to show her his dominant side, especially since she finally seemed unnerved.

He walked over to the sliding door. "Ainsley. Come here."

She got up and came to him without hesitation. When she stopped in front of him, he drew her into the living room and untied the robe. The silk dropped to her feet. Aric stepped back. He stared at her for a moment before circling her, taking in every tiny detail of her body, all the things he hadn't noticed the night before. A scar near her ankle. One on her elbow. A tiny mole on her hip. A fine dusting of pale gold freckles on the tops of her shoulders. The absence of tan lines.

He came up behind her, sweeping aside her hair so he could kiss her nape, and froze. At the base of her neck, just where her spine curved and where it had been completely hidden by her hair, lay another tattoo. Swirling, artistic lines formed an intertwined A and C. For a brief moment, Aric thought she'd had herself marked as his with his initials. His heartbeat picked up, beating wildly. Possessive pleasure streaked through him, until he remembered that they had the same initials.

His pleasure subsided, but he bent and placed a kiss on the tattoo anyway, feeling a tremor go through her. Sliding his hands down her arms, he picked up one hand and lifted it so he could kiss the inside of her wrist. She shivered again.

Insolence by Lex Valentine

"Do you remember your safe word?" he whispered in her ear, his tongue darting out to lick at the tiny red star.

"Patience." Her low tone held a thread of apprehension.

"Good." He spun away from her and went to the spanking horse. "Come here."

She turned and came toward him. As the horse filled her vision, her muscles tensed. Again he circled her, watching her reactions carefully.

"Do you know what this is, Ainsley?"

She swallowed hard. "A spanking horse, sir."

He grinned. She'd been doing some homework before she came to him. He liked that. "Correct. Kneel on the horse, Ainsley."

He indicated one side of the horse. Gingerly, she knelt on the soft brown leather. Aric kissed the nape of her neck again. Then he pressed her forward, over the horse, until her bare ass rose into the air. He walked around the horse and looked at her head hanging down, her hands braced on the bench.

"I'm not going to restrain your arms, but if you don't behave, I will," he told her in a firm but soft voice. "You need to hold very, very still for me. Can you do that, Ainsley?"

Her "Yes, sir" was muffled, but he heard it clearly.

"Good." He walked back around to the other side of the horse and eyed her heart-shaped ass. He picked up the wooden paddle. "Have you ever been spanked before, Ainsley?"

"No, sir."

He grinned. He knew she hadn't unless she'd gotten into some kinky stuff the last few years. "We're going to start with the paddle. Just a few swats to warm you up."

With that, he swung the paddle and smacked her on the right buttock. She jerked at the strike. He swung again and smacked her on the left buttock. Tension crackled through her body. He could sense it. He stared at the red marks on her ass for a moment. Then he whacked her on each cheek again. Her body went rigid as the red marks deepened.

Aric frowned. She didn't like the paddle. He could tell. Tension underscored every line of her body. He hadn't hit her very hard, but her

buttocks were awfully red for only a couple of smacks. He got the sense that a frustrated sort of anger simmered very close to her surface. He bit back a sigh. He hadn't gotten a reputation as a good submissive trainer without listening to his instincts. He put the paddle down.

"You didn't like that, did you, Ainsley?"

"No, sir."

There was a hint of relief in her words, and Aric bit back a smile. So she wasn't into pain. He wasn't really either. He'd never mastered the bigger whips because he just wasn't into hurting women. He'd been with a few who craved pain, but it had never suited him to dole it out.

He picked up the flogger with its soft leather falls. He rubbed them over Ainsley's red butt. He flicked the tips at her, not a stinging move but one that would tickle. She sucked in a breath. Aric smiled. He'd had a feeling she might like the flogger. It was his favorite whip.

He took a step back and aimed the flogger at her more purposefully. The tips snapped at her bare ass. She jerked a little and sucked in a breath. But she didn't tense up. He did it again and again. Ainsley's skin rippled with awareness, prickling with each snap of the falls. Aric knew she was becoming aroused.

After ten minutes of flogging, he stopped, admiring her reddened buttocks. He swept his hand over her heated skin, and her breath hitched. He stroked her flesh and slipped his fingers between her thighs. They came away covered thickly in her cream.

Aric helped her up and reached for the nipple clamps. Now that they were both aroused by the flogging, he figured he'd push her a little harder. He tweaked her nipples until they stood erect. Next, he tipped up her chin so he could look into her eyes.

"This is going to sting for a moment after they go on, but the real pain will come when I remove them and blood rushes back into your nipples," he explained. "You will be exquisitely sensitive here when I fuck you. You'll see."

He grinned at her and slipped on the first clamp. She gasped in shock. While she fought to marshal her features, he slipped on the second one. She went rigid. Then she relaxed. Aric turned her back toward the

horse, but this time, he pressed her over the end so that her chest brushed the leather.

"You have the most beautiful ass." He caressed it again, loving the feel of the taut muscles beneath her velvety skin. "Has anyone ever fucked it?"

She stiffened a little. "No, sir."

Her words were a wisp of sound, barely audible, but Aric heard the apprehension and the excitement in her voice. He shucked out of his jeans and t-shirt and reached for the lube, fiercely glad to be the first one to fuck her ass. He leaned against her, kissing his way along her spine. She moaned, and he bit back a smile. He loved her responsiveness.

Tracing the crease of her ass with a slow, seductive finger, he bent and nipped at one buttock. She moaned again. With his face pressed to her ass cheek, he smelled her arousal. He straightened and used his knee to spread her thighs, widening her stance. He pressed his finger against the puckered rosette of her anus. She shivered.

Aric's cock leaked a steady stream of pre-cum as he squirted lube onto his fingers, rubbing them together and warming the liquid. He stroked the wetness over the tight hole where he'd be putting his cock. She shuddered, little sounds of arousal escaping her as he worked in first one finger and then two.

He slipped his fingers into her, stretching her and getting her used to the feel of something in her ass. Nibbling at the indentation of her spine, he fucked her with his fingers. After a few minutes, she pushed back, and Aric's cock throbbed. He squirted lube onto it and spread it thickly, shaking with anticipation. He held the bottle over the crease of her ass and squeezed. Clear lube ran down between the globes.

With his fingers, Aric spread her open, looking at the delicate pink skin glistening with wetness. He groaned and pressed the head of his cock to her tight opening. She made a little sound but again arched back.

Filled with lust at the idea of fucking Ainsley's virgin ass, Aric pressed his hips against her. His cock met resistance.

"Push back, Ains," he gritted, trying to hang onto his control so he wouldn't hurt her.

She pushed. He eased the thick crown of his cock past the tight ring of muscle and sank halfway into her ass. A surprised yelp escaped her. Aric kissed her shoulder.

“Are you okay?” he murmured, caressing her thigh soothingly.

Ainsley wriggled a little. “God, Aric. My whole body is on fire. My nipples. My ass...”

She shuddered, and he inched forward, finally sinking fully into her. A muffled sob reached his ears. He froze.

“Ains? Are you okay?”

Please be okay. Please be okay, he chanted silently. There’s no way I can stop now!

“Touch me, Aric. Holy shit. Just touch me,” she moaned.

Aric didn’t care that she’d slipped from her role as submissive. All he cared about was the tight, velvety stroke of her ass on his cock. He pulled back a little and thrust into her again, watching as he pushed her against the horse, her clamped nipples brushing the cool leather.

“More!” she cried out, her fingers reaching backward for him.

The movement shoved her nipples harder against the horse, and she whimpered. Aric knew she was wracked by intense sensation. Using his superior height to advantage, he angled his hips into the cushion of her buttocks, short-thrusting quickly into her tight anus. Her flesh gripped him so hard he could barely move. He reached around her and tweaked her nipples with his fingertips, watching her shudder with reaction.

The hot, wet heat of her ass pushed him quickly toward his orgasm. He couldn’t believe just how great it felt to have his naked cock filling her backside. His breath came in rapid pants that matched hers. When he felt her arm shift beneath his, he realized she’d slipped her fingers into her cunt without permission.

“Oh, fuck. Ainsley, I’m going to come,” he groaned.

Aric imagined each of his thrusts pushed her clit against her hand, and the thought drove him mad with lust. He pinched her nipples, tugging on the clamps. She gasped and shook, her ass clutching his cock, milking it as she came, a stifled scream on her lips.

He pumped into her velvet flesh twice more then shouted her name

as he went up in flames, his cock filling her with hot cum. Dazed, Aric slumped onto her back, his fingers digging into her hips with bruising force. His cock slipped from her ass, and he stumbled back. Lube and cum streaked her slender thighs. Her fingers were still buried in her pussy. Her shoulders heaved as she tried to catch her breath.

Aric shook his head, trying to clear it. He felt groggy, muzzy, and incoherent, as if someone had hit him upside the head with a two-by-four. He staggered a little as he grasped her around the waist, drawing her upright. He kissed her neck and her cheek, murmuring to her how great she was, how awesome, how much he liked what they had done.

She blinked at him sleepily, passion slowly fading from her beautiful face. Aric kissed her, teasing the seam of her lips with his tongue for a moment. Then he smiled at her.

“Breathe in,” he ordered.

She stared at him, bewildered, but drew in a deep breath. Aric released the nipple clamps. Her eyes widened, and a hoarse yell broke from her throat. He bent his head and laved the reddened flesh, sucking it lightly into his mouth. First one nipple, then the other.

Her breathing came erratically, and Aric smiled.

“More lessons?” he asked.

She blinked, stunned lust suffusing her face. Aric laughed and kissed her, turning her toward the bathroom.

“We’ll wash first. Then there’s some other stuff we can do.”

“Oh, Aric,” she said on a long sigh.

He laughed again and rubbed a hand over her ass cheek. “We have all night, you know.”

She moaned again, and he realized he’d never felt quite so satisfied in his life, even though she had again forgotten to address him as sir.

* * * * *

Sunday morning, Aric stared at his reflection in the bathroom mirror. He looked the same. Same dark hair spiked up uncontrollably. Same crinkle-cornered grey eyes, piercing, no-nonsense, unemotional...

He drew a breath. Not unemotional. Not any longer. Being with Ainsley seemed to have opened his internal floodgates. Hope gleamed in the midst of clouded confusion in the grey irises.

He studied himself closely, trying to be objective. He was the same man he'd always been, wasn't he? All he'd done was control Ainsley, fuck Ainsley, make love to Ainsley...

Aric leaned forward, closing his eyes. His forehead met the cool surface of the mirror. The reality of the past two nights sank in. Dear God. He'd made love to Ainsley Connor. Touched her naked breasts and the satin skin of her inner thighs. He'd tasted her, feasting on her cream until his head buzzed like a drunk's. He didn't dare think about her lying naked in his bed. His body hurt. At thirty-two, he couldn't spend two nights fucking more than a half dozen times without paying the price. His price had turned out to be groin muscles that complained when he walked, balls that felt tender to the touch, and a cock that hesitated at the notion of another erection. Still, despite their abused state, his genitalia stirred at the thought of what he'd done to her. Apparently, even weakened by last night's orgasms, his body couldn't get enough of Ainsley.

But it was Sunday, and Aric had limited time left with her. He still hadn't figured out what to do. Obviously, they needed to talk, but he didn't know what to say. He wasn't even sure what he wanted, except that he didn't want to lose his best friend—nor did he want to lose the most incredible lover he'd ever had. The thought of her going home and finding another man filled him with panic and possessiveness. She belonged to him now, and he wouldn't stand for her dating or sleeping with another man. Hell. He wouldn't stand for her even looking at one.

Geez. He backed away from the mirror, running his hand over his face and around the back of his neck. He had somehow become a total basket case in the space of forty-eight hours. He had no idea one woman could wear out his body, twist his guts into knots, turn his brain to mush, screw with his carefully ordered life, and fill him with aching confusion. Of course, he should have known that if any woman could, it would be Ainsley.

He stalked softly into the bedroom. She still lay face down on the mattress. Her hair spilled across the pillows, one arm hanging over the side of the bed. The sheet covered one leg and the curve of her buttocks. His gaze roamed the creamy expanse of her skin. He saw a couple of small bruises on her hip, nothing very big, definitely very minor. Her skin was so delicate, the marks could have been made by the flogger or even his fingers. He'd had difficulty containing himself with her. He'd never seen a woman be so wanton, and it called to a primitive part of him.

Aric opened a drawer silently and pulled out a soft, worn pair of jeans, buttoning himself into them before slipping out of the room. Standing in front of the coffee pot, watching it drip, he asked himself what would be acceptable. Let her go home? He didn't want to, but he could do that. Let her go to another man? No. Fucking. Way. Every cell in his body protested at that thought. His heart thudded painfully at the very idea.

He poured the coffee into a mug and blew on the surface to cool it, acknowledging that he had a very big problem. He didn't want the weekend to end. He didn't want Ainsley to leave. To leave *him*. At the same time, his head was so mixed up and his emotions so confused that he didn't know what to say to her when it came time for her to leave. He'd never in his life felt such primal emotions. If he acted on them, he'd walk into his bedroom, take the cuffs out, chain her to the headboard, and flush the key down the drain. The thought scared him shitless.

"I smell coffee."

The husky tone of her voice stroked his libido, sending his aching groin into full alert. His entire body came alive with sensation at her nearness. To cover his undeniable reaction to her, he reached into a cupboard and took down a mug, filling it with the fragrant brew. Drawing a slight breath and holding it, he turned and held the cup out to her. Wary eyes met his as she took the cup, her fingertips brushing his briefly. Electricity crackled within him, his awareness of her arcing higher.

She sipped from the cup, and his hungry eyes feasted on the movement of her lush lips, his own coffee forgotten. He stood staring, blood rushing in his veins, his heart racing, as her scent—that tart citrus aroma overlaid with the smell of sex—filled his nostrils. Unable to

suppress his reaction, he shuddered.

“Aric?”

The soft sound of his name on her lips shattered his control. Reaching out, he took the mug from her and set it on the counter. He wrapped one hand around the back of her neck, his body beginning to shake as his bare palm touched her nape. Pulling her against his chest, he bent his head and took her mouth with his. Contentment laced with an all-consuming fire took hold of him. He wound his arms around her slender form, holding her possessively. His brain couldn't function. He operated solely on instinct, and at the moment, those instincts told him to take Ainsley into the shower and show her just what she would miss if—when—she went home.

A rough sound filled Aric's ears as he kissed her, his tongue twining with hers. It took a few moments before he realized the sound was him, growling. She brought out every primal urge inside him, and he longed to revel in them, but feared scaring her off. He'd always known the caveman gene resided within him. He'd just never realized it would take two nights of sex with Ainsley to release it.

Tearing his mouth from hers, he turned her within the circle of his arms. “Bathroom. Now,” he whispered roughly in her ear as he nipped her lobe.

Ainsley moaned, but her body moved to do his bidding. In the bathroom, he stripped off the t-shirt she wore and ripped open the buttons on his jeans. The denim fell to the floor, beside the t-shirt. Once they both were naked, Aric pulled her over to the shower and turned it on. Water cascaded from two heads, and steam began to fill the room.

“I love the smell of sex on your skin, the smell of me on your body,” he said softly, his hands stroking over her smooth flesh.

“I smell like cum.” Her eyes twinkled with amusement.

Emotion ripped through him, the primary one triumph. “*My cum,*” he agreed. “You belong to me now, Ainsley.”

She blinked, and confusion clouded her pale green eyes. “Aric, am I supposed to keep my eyes lowered now? I mean, when we're not... uh...” She broke off, and a slight tinge of pink stained her cheekbones with

embarrassment.

He should have known that his laxness with regard to how he'd treated her offer of submission would lead to such confusion. Hell, he was just as confused, but in a much bigger, long-term way. She was confused about how to behave. He was confused about his life.

He put two fingers beneath her chin and angled her head up so that she could see his face, his expression. "Every Dom is different, Ains. Each has their own requirements. Between you and me, because of our long-standing history with one another, unless I specifically tell you to lower your eyes or unless we are in a scene where I expect that from you... No." He brushed a quick kiss across her lips. "I would be a fool to think that you could be anything other than the forceful personality you've always been."

Her eyes darkened with some unnamed emotion. "If you asked me to, I would do it. I would do anything for you, Aric. Don't you know that?"

Elation stabbed him, letting rays of blinding sunshine into his soul. "You've always been your own person, Ains. I can't take that away from you. It's one of the things I lo— admire the most about you."

Surprised at how easily the L word had nearly slipped from him, Aric turned away, adjusting the water and stepping into the shower. He held out his hand, and she placed hers in it, letting him draw her into the warm water. As he washed her body, watching the soap suds glide down her skin, he thought about her words.

Ainsley wasn't the type of woman who gave herself lightly. It had taken a lot for her to ask him for this and give herself to him, let alone submit to what he'd asked of her. He stared down into her beautiful face, emotions tugging at his heart. Cupping her head in his hands, Aric kissed her again. He took his time, letting his mouth move on hers slowly, building the heat between them deliberately. She watched him as he kissed her, eyes wide open, her expression moving from caution to passion.

When he deepened the kiss, his tongue sweeping into her mouth to flick over her teeth and tangle with her tongue, she shivered. Her

diamond-hard nipples grazed his chest, sending little zings of lust through him. With one arm lodged comfortably around her waist, he let the other hand explore. He stroked his palm over the elegant lines of her back, then his fingertips skated along the taut curve of her buttocks, and finally, he dragged his palm over the sensitive curve of her ass.

“Oh, Aric!”

Her whispered moan pushed him over the edge. Angling her against the side of the shower, he palmed one thigh, lifting her leg up over his hip. He slipped his hand down to tease the swollen flesh between her legs. The feel of her slick heat on his fingertips had his semi-erect cock hard in moments. His earlier soreness seemed a thing of the past as his body reacted to her arousal. His heart contracted painfully with an onslaught of emotion, and his body surrendered to the lure of her flesh.

With a wriggle of his hips, Aric positioned his cock at her entrance. Emotion swamped him, confusing him at the same time that they fueled his need to make love to her without all the trappings of his dominance. Just the two of them, their bodies engaged in a sexual act driven by emotions. He wanted it more than he wanted his next breath. Had the end of the world threatened in that moment, he would not have cared. He rocked his hips, pressing his cock deep within her tight channel, her body clasp him so tightly that he could barely move. With Ainsley in his arms, her pussy wrapped around his cock like wet satin, he didn't care about anything else. The sum total of his existence had become centered on the woman he held and who held him.

Thrusting into her, he broke their kiss and nipped and sucked at her neck, throat, and shoulders. The urge to mark her as his drove him to suck on her soft skin harder than he normally would have. Water fell gently on them, steam rising in fine clouds from the showerheads. Aric pushed her against the side of the shower and hitched her leg up higher so that his cock slid deeper within her.

Ainsley's hands clutched at his shoulders, and she clung to him, her body rocking into his rhythm. She trembled in his clasp, quivering with each of his thrusts. The flush that rose to her chest and the little gasps that escaped her lips tripped his sensual radar and pointed to her

imminent orgasm. He lifted her feet from the floor with the increased tempo of his thrusts, and the uncontrolled clenching of her thighs around his hips indicated that her ecstasy was within his grasp.

Locking his arm around her to hold her weight steady, he slipped his other hand down between their bodies. Ainsley's breath hitched. Her eyes met his, their gazes locking.

"Aric," she whispered hoarsely.

His balls drew tight to his body, and the familiar spiraling tension uncoiled from the base of his spine, heat spreading throughout his lower body as his pleasure rushed toward completion. Aric pressed his forehead to Ainsley's, his breath sounding loud and harsh in the small space.

"Now, Ains. Come for me," he grunted and pinched her swollen clit between his thumb and forefinger.

Her eyes widened as her body convulsed. A squeak of sound emerged from her mouth, and she slid her arms around his shoulders, clinging tightly to him. She took his mouth in an aggressive kiss that had his eyelids slamming down, stars spinning against their darkness. The explosion of his orgasm centered within his cock and balls, the reverberations rippling outward and making him shake with reaction. His cum spurted endlessly, or so it seemed, within the tight clasp of Ainsley's pussy.

Aric's mind spun as again he experienced one of the strongest orgasms of his life. His knees felt weak, and his breath burned in his chest. The taste of Ainsley's kiss was sweeter and hotter than any he'd received in twenty years of kissing girls. And it left him totally wrecked.

They leaned against each other until they could breathe easily once more. Then they washed each other leisurely. Once dried and dressed in jeans and t-shirts, they made brunch together, falling into their old familiar friendly ways. Aric needed the space the mundane tasks provided. The enormity of what had happened between them and what that meant for the future sat like a specter in a shadowy corner of the room where he refused to look. He felt confused and completely out of his element.

Keeping things neutral seemed to be the best way to spend the day

if they weren't going to head back to the bedroom, so they ended up on the couch watching football. Aric sensed the tension lying just beneath the surface of Ainsley's quiet demeanor. He felt the same tension within himself. More sex was out of the question. His body had pretty much given up the ghost in that department, demanding a respite. He could tell that Ainsley felt the same. They both sat limply on the couch, obviously satisfied but exhausted.

Aric's base instincts hadn't all been swamped by exhaustion, however. Ainsley's scent teased his senses, and he sat as close to her as he could without touching. By halftime, he couldn't take it any longer, and he stretched his arm along the back of the couch, his fingers tangling instantly in her hair. He rubbed the satiny strands between his fingertips, content to touch that little bit of her.

"My flight leaves in a couple of hours."

The words crashed into his contentment, sending panic racing through him. Aric swallowed hard, his heart thudding erratically. Shit! He blinked his eyes closed and drew a deep breath before he re-opened them. Ainsley stared at him warily.

"I'd almost forgotten," he replied, trying to keep his voice neutral and even. "But I guess we could probably use some space to think about this thing between us." He swallowed hard again. "You should go home."

Aric was trying to convince himself more than Ainsley. His instincts set off alarm bells inside him. He didn't want her to leave, but he couldn't tell her to stay either. The specter of their changed relationship and clouded future left the shadowy corner and loomed over him. It reminded him of how much he enjoyed being with Ainsley, how intensely he wanted her to stay, and how easy it had been for him to let go of his lifestyle.

"You *want* me to leave?" Ainsley's incredulous tone shook him to the core.

"Yes. No! I— Geez, Ains," he sputtered, feeling like someone had just put his self-confidence in the paper shredder. "It's just that I guess we need some space to think about this."

Ainsley scooted away from him on the couch. She rose to her feet,

her green eyes glittering. "Don't include me in your 'we', Aric. I can think and speak for myself." She frowned at him. Anger and something else, something that looked like pain, suffused her face. "What do you think is going to happen now? What do you want from me? From this? Tell me what you're thinking!"

He knew that her exasperation was wholly warranted. He hadn't dealt with any of it correctly.

"I don't know what to think, Ains. This weekend has been... weird. Strange. Unbelievable. God, I don't know what to feel let alone know what to do. You've turned me inside out, and I just want to toss you over my shoulder, carry you back to bed, and chain you to it so no other man can ever have what you gave me." His breath came out in frustrated puffs as he struggled to find the words to explain himself.

"What? First you tell me to go home, that we both need some space. Now you tell me you want to chain me to your bed. Just what the hell do you want, Aric?"

"I can't answer that. I don't know what I want," he gritted out, fear and anger warring within him. "All I know is that you've seriously fucked with my head."

"I see. *I fucked with you.*" Ainsley's eyes dropped to the floor as she turned away. "I'll just get my things. I have a flight to catch."

Panic flooded Aric. He was so messed up inside his own head over her that nothing he said came out right. She took a few steps away from him, and he lunged off the couch and caught her arm, spinning her around.

"No. You're not going anywhere," he growled, knowing he had probably bruised her arm with his grip.

Ainsley's eyes closed, as if she couldn't bear to see him. "Please, Aric. This is difficult enough. Please don't make it harder," she whispered.

"Why is it hard? I want to know, Ainsley. I felt all along that there was something behind you coming here and offering to be my sub. Tell me what's going on." The panic inside him raged, nibbling at his control until fear began to creep in too.

She hung her head, the sleek dark hair spilling over her face.

Beneath his hand, her body trembled. After a moment, she raised her head, and Aric nearly gasped aloud. Pain darkened her eyes to forest green. A white line of tension encircled her full pink lips, making them pinched and paler than usual. Instantly, he wanted to take her in his arms and soothe away her hurts.

"It's hard because I've spent twenty-six years waiting for something that I now know wasn't ever going to be mine. I spent those years hoping that one day my dreams would come true," she rasped, her voice rough and uneven with emotion and obviously suppressed tears. "They're all gone now. I really tried to make them happen. I came here with that express purpose, but..." She broke off on a shrug, pulling her arm free of his grasp.

At that moment, her words came back to Aric, the words she'd spoken at the bar when he'd asked her why she'd offered herself to him. *"Because this is who I have always longed to be. Who you never let me be."*

Damn it! He'd misunderstood her! She'd meant that she longed to be with him in whatever way he would have her. He had just never gathered up his courage, set aside the fact that they were best friends, and acted on his attraction to her.

Swallowing, she drew a shaky breath, her eyes boring into his. "Didn't you ever wonder, Aric? Didn't you ever stop to think that maybe there was something more to me than what you saw? All I ever wanted in life was to come home to you. Why do you think I used to hang out at your house all the time? It had nothing to do with my parents' divorce. It had everything to do with you. I felt like I belonged when I was with you."

Shoulders drooping, her eyes fell again, and she turned away, taking a couple of steps toward the door before stopping. "I waited a long time before I gave up my virginity because I wanted you to have it." A rusty, self-deprecating laugh escaped her. "My God. I was so naïve. So stupid. All the men I could have been with, men who wanted a chance to love me, and I turned them all down because I had this dream in my head of the two of us and how good it would be."

She spun around then, her eyes flashing fire for a moment. "And it

was so incredibly good. So fucking hot I thought I would literally melt," she snarled, her expression almost feral with defiance and pain. "Even you can't deny how good it's been between us. The chemistry is perfect. No one will ever measure up to you now, but you knew that when you brought me up here. You knew you would spoil me for anyone else, as if I wasn't already ruined."

Bitterness dripped from her every word, and Aric stood in stunned silence trying to make sense out of them. At first, his head filled with images of her with other men, men who touched her and licked her and put themselves inside her. And the man who'd taken her virginity? He wanted to beat the man bloody. His hands clenched into fists at his side. His thoughts were irrational, and he knew it, yet he couldn't stop himself from thinking them.

"This was my last hurrah. I came here to give you everything that I am, Aric. Give you what I would give no other man."

She walked back toward him, her spine straight, her eyes direct, the Ainsley he'd always known...and loved.

"I've given you my submission such as it is, my body, my heart, and I can see that it's changed absolutely nothing between us."

Her chin tilted up defiantly, with that touch of insolence that fired his blood. His cock stirred, but he ignored it, his senses and emotions completely captured by her.

"I came here to tell you I love you. I'm *in* love with you. I always have been whether you wanted to see it or not. I used to try to hide it from you, but not any longer. It's part of who I am, and I'll be damned if I'll spare your feelings by hiding my own."

Her voice rose slightly, and the challenging expression in her eyes made him ache to toss her over his shoulder and carry her back to bed. But shock held him frozen as he tried to reconcile the fact that, despite his big, bad Dom lifestyle, when it came to Ainsley, he'd been a fucking pussy for years.

"Since we're done here, I'll just get my things and catch my flight." She turned away again. "I don't think I'll be coming home anymore. There's nothing here for me."

Her long legs carried her into the bedroom so swiftly Aric couldn't marshal his thoughts to stop her. His head rang with her words. She loved him. She'd always loved him. Warmth spread in his chest. Happiness began to overtake the panic and fear that had held him in its grip from the moment she'd said she was leaving. She was his. She'd always been his. Possessiveness exploded within him. *She loved him.* She'd subbed for no man but him. *She loved...him.*

Over the years he'd rejected woman after woman, knowing instinctively that none of them were right for him. He'd thought he just wasn't interested in a relationship, but the truth was that he wasn't interested in a relationship with *them*. The only woman he'd ever felt comfortable with was Ainsley, but for years he'd told himself that he couldn't bear to ruin their friendship, that she wasn't the kind of woman who could embrace a life of kinky sex. She could never even play at being his sub. She was too strong, too dominant herself. And he had been too fucking afraid to act on the emotion that now seemed to seep from his very pores.

By the time Ainsley came out of the bedroom with her overnight bag, Aric had marshaled his scattered and emotional thoughts. He knew exactly what he wanted and knew the lengths he would go to in order to get it. His eyes tracked her across the room. She pressed the button for the elevator and stood fidgeting, waiting for it to come. She kept her face resolutely turned away from him.

"I didn't give you permission to leave."

Aric's words were soft, but the command was there nonetheless. Ainsley stiffened. Since she wouldn't look at him, he walked over to her and cupped a hand beneath her chin, turning her head so that their eyes met.

The door inside him that he'd kept closed for two decades sprang open. His heart soared, recognizing her as the one woman he'd always needed, always loved. He smiled at her, angling his body closer, his free hand taking her case from her and dropping it on the floor. He snaked an arm around her waist, pulling her closer despite her stiffness. Then he played his hand.

“Will you marry me?”

She became so still that he knew she held her breath. Finally, she drew a deep, sobbing draught of air. “No.”

Ice sluiced over him, instantly and painfully taking hold of his heart. “Why not?” he ground out, fear getting a toehold within him.

She tipped her head back, looking up at him with a scornful expression. “Because that isn’t what I want, and it’s not what you want.” Her lip curled derisively. “But for whatever fucked-up reason you’ve decided on, you don’t want me to walk out on you. Marrying you won’t give me what I need, Aric. It won’t make you love me. Now, let me go.”

His nostrils flared as possessiveness gripped him. “Never.” Knowing the elevator door wouldn’t open without his key, he pinned her against the aluminum surface with his body. “You said you love me. You are mine, Ainsley. I keep what’s mine. I don’t intend to let you walk out of here and into the arms of another man or another Dom.”

She glared at him. “This isn’t about me being your sub, Aric. You were right. I’m not naturally a sub. But you’re a Dom, and I love you enough to be happy fulfilling your needs. There isn’t anything I can’t or won’t be for you.”

His breathing grew heavier with each word she spoke. His heart pounded like a jackhammer. His cock thickened until it ached. “Then be my wife.”

A strangled sound rose from her throat. “No!”

Aric decided the time had come to just take what belonged to him. Threading his fingers through her hair, he lowered his mouth to hers. When his lips brushed hers, he said, “I love you, Ainsley. I’ve loved you for as long as I can remember.”

He kissed her, taking her mouth in a masterful manner, his tongue demanding entrance, his lips commanding a response from her. Over the past two days, when he’d kissed her like this, she’d whimpered and gone weak beneath his onslaught. Now, she threw her arms around him and kissed him back fiercely. She took from him and gave back at the same time. There was nothing of the Dom and sub in either of them as they each gave from their hearts. With years of yearning to make up, they devoured

each other with lips and tongues and hands.

Finally, Aric broke the kiss, wanting to lift Ainsley into his arms and take her to his bed—their bed—so they could seal their commitment. He'd never unleashed the emotions that currently swirled within him. All those years ago something inside him had recognized something in her, and he'd been wise enough to know that it would overwhelm them both if he didn't lock it away deep inside himself.

Early on, they'd been too young, and later on, he'd been too stupid. He'd gotten involved in the lifestyle and had lied to himself about why he held Ainsley and every other woman at arm's length. But now he'd freed his emotions from their stasis, and he wasn't going to let her walk away from him.

Pulling her along behind him, he marched into his bedroom and shoved aside a lithograph on the wall. He kept one of her hands clasped tightly in his as he manipulated the combination lock. The door swung open, and he reached in, withdrawing a dark green velvet box. He thumbed it open, and tears sprang to Ainsley's eyes.

"Oh, my God. It's your mother's ring," she whispered reverently as she gazed at the sapphire surrounded by diamonds.

"No, Ains. It's yours." Aric took her hand, startled to find that it trembled in his grasp. He drew her close, brushing his lips against her temple as he slid the ring onto her finger. "Two years ago, on your thirtieth birthday, my father gave me the ring box, accompanied by the cryptic remark to 'get with the program.' At the time, I didn't realize he meant for me to give you the ring."

It fit perfectly. Somehow, he'd known it would. When he tilted her chin up to kiss her, tears ran from the corners of her eyes. He thumbed them away, unnerved to see her cry. She'd been a hurricane force in his life, and he couldn't remember ever seeing her break down into this kind of emotional display. However, it told him more than the bowing of her head and the lowering of her eyes that she was his.

The kiss that sealed their commitment started slow and soft and grew incrementally as their lips parted and their tongues tangled. Heat seared Aric, sending spirals of lust through his body. Breaking the kiss, he

went back to the safe and pulled out a big black leather box. He set it on the dresser and opened it, keeping his back toward Ainsley so she couldn't see the contents.

"Every now and then, I design special collars," he told her in a matter-of-fact voice. "We're holding a charity auction in a few weeks here at the club, and this was to be my donation, but now, I have a better use for it."

He turned to face her, and she gasped, her eyes riveted by the black suede collar studded with silver spikes and diamonds.

For all that their relationship wouldn't be a traditional Dom/sub one, Aric still felt the need to collar her. He thought perhaps it came from the wholly primal urge to mark her as his own. When he stepped toward her, she dropped her eyes, her head bending elegantly, and his heart soared. He reached out and pushed away the dark fall of hair, exposing the vulnerable nape of her neck.

With swift, sure movements, Aric collared the only woman he had ever loved. This time when he lifted her chin, her eyes blazed with passion.

"I belong to you, Aric. I always have," she told him boldly.

Feeling a grin break out across his face, Aric faced the fact that he had always belonged to her too. "There are cuffs as well," he teased.

It amused him to find her wrists held out eagerly for the soft leather cuffs with silver rings and buckles. He kissed each inner wrist and flicked his tongue over the point where her pulse beat.

"Later," he laughed, taking her in his arms. "Shall we call my dad?"

"No," she said, laying her head on his chest and wrapping her arms around his waist.

The feel of her body pressed to his sent his temperature soaring.

She sighed contentedly. "I'm not sure I believe it yet, so I'm not ready to share the news."

This time, Aric did scoop her up into his arms, finding that, despite her height, she didn't seem to weigh a lot. "I must be slipping. I can't remember the last time a sub didn't believe me," he murmured teasingly

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as he carried her to the bed.

She wound her arms around his neck and nuzzled the side of his face. "Well, I'm just the disobedient type, you know." She nipped the lobe of his ear and whispered, "You'll have to punish me for my insolence."

Aric laid her on the bed and covered her body with his, admiring how she looked with his collar around her throat and his ring on her finger. Symbols of possession. Symbols of love.

"Oh, I intend to punish you very thoroughly. Every day of your life," he promised, then took her mouth in a commanding kiss.

The End

Author Bio

Lex has been writing ever since she could hold a pencil, but wasn't published until 2009. A native of California's Central Coast, Lex has lived in Southern California since 1992. She works as a network administrator for a large cemetery and mortuary company in Orange County and lives with her long-haired, tattooed rocker significant other and her daughter, an art college student.

Lex loves loud music, builds her own computers, and has a propensity for having very weird vivid dreams about Nikki Sixx. She is an EPIC author and a Covey Associate.

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