

Riley Ashford

Cougar

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Cougar

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When a gorgeous young man fourteen years her junior approaches Anna Brevington in the hopes of having a little fun, she can't resist the challenge. Nic Dumont is sexy, intelligent, and confident. He also seems to know exactly what she needs -- in bed and out.

Nic Dumont has never wanted a woman more than he wants Anna. The sexy forty-two-year-old knows her worth as a woman -- and she sure as hell knows how to use that delicious, curvaceous bod of hers. But Nic wants more than just the fling she's offering. He wants Anna -- heart and soul.

Chapter One

Nicholas Dumont stared at the paper cup holding his still too hot Sumatra blend coffee, and studied the brown lid with an undeserved intensity.

Then he snuck another look at the beauty two tables over.

Fifteen minutes until midnight, on a Friday night no less, so the bookstore coffee shop was mostly empty.

Tired clerks enjoined customers to bring their purchases to the front registers, but last-minute browsers still scurried among the shelves. Those readers were hardcore.

He, on the other hand, was just bored.

Brevington Books and More was a classy mid-town independent -- it was all glass and wood and metal, with three levels housing books, music, DVDs, and other treasures -- such as framed posters of old horror flicks, a display of first edition comic books, and the mini-museum showcasing ancient artifacts from around the world. The kids' section was a paradise for youngsters -- bright colors, small furniture, and chunky toys. He liked that the store made just as big a deal out of their small press published authors as they did the *New York Times* bestsellers. He'd found himself drifting more and more often to the place, just to hang out, to people watch, to think.

He sipped the coffee, deemed it too hot, and unable to resist, looked again at the lady. She wore her blonde hair long, longer than was usual for her age. It had multi-toned highlights and loose curls that flirted with her shoulders. She was rounder than the stick thin club girls who so often pressed their bodies against his while trying to woo him. She was taller, too, her long legs stretched out under the table, her ankles crossed, her feet shucked from cork wedge heels. He noticed the pretty red toenails and

the little star tattoo above her ankle. It was gold, and he had the insane urge to flick his tongue there. Her concession to summer was a pair of khaki capris, and a filmy animal print shirt with three-quarter sleeves. Yes, she was beautiful, but he recognized camouflage when he saw it.

Still, the woman typing so efficiently on her laptop was just that -- a woman.

He got up, taking his coffee with him, and sauntered to her table. "May I sit?"

She flicked her gaze from her laptop to him, and frowned. He was nearly struck dumb by the intense blue of her eyes. He smiled to hide his discombobulation. She was softer in the face, too, but her beauty wasn't faded and her make-up wasn't applied desperation. That's what he enjoyed so much about older women -- they had grown into themselves, comfortable with their bodies and what they could do with them.

He wondered what she could do to him.

"The high school is down the street," she said, recognizing his interest and dismissing it.

"Oh, I wasn't on my way to school, ma'am," he drawled. "I just wondered if you needed a lift to the nursing home."

Her gaze had returned to the laptop, but after his comment, those gorgeous blue eyes snapped to his, and he waited to see her reaction. He could see the corners of her lips quiver. "Don't you worry about me," she offered coolly, "I have my walker and my Life Alert pendant."

"Oh, now I couldn't let you go off all alone. My grandmother would never forgive me if she knew I'd left one of her friends to fend for herself."

She stared at him, her gaze revealing nothing, and then she grinned. The impact of her curving lips was nearly as devastating as her eyes -- especially with the dimple that appeared like an exclamation point on the left side of her mouth. "Grandmother, huh?"

"She's eighty-six," he said. "But you might be a little younger than that."

"Only by a year or two."

He studied her face, and let her see how much he wanted to nibble those apple red lips of hers. She wasn't intimidated. She flourished a hand toward the chair across from her. "Go on, Romeo. Have a seat."

"Romeo?" he said as he took her invitation. "You know, that story ends tragically."

"So will this one," she muttered. She closed the laptop. "You got a mommy complex, or what?"

"I love my mother. She bakes chocolate chip cookies and sends me the wedding announcements from my ex-girlfriends." She was also the genius behind Genteel, a chain of upscale lingerie shops that catered to women over forty. She and Dad had made a mint on the concept, and last year, they'd sold the company so they could travel. Even though he'd grown up rich, he'd made his own fortunes in technology. Between his trust fund and his own fat bank accounts, he never had to work again.

Keeping himself entertained was another matter.

"How old are you?" she asked.

"How old are you?" he countered, just to see if she'd bite.

"Forty-two." She said it with pride, as though she'd earned the age and the rights that came with it. Here was a warrior with dented armor and bloodied wounds, but still standing on her own two feet. He wondered what kind of life she'd had, what had shaped her to become the woman she was now.

"I'm twenty-eight."

"Yes," she said, her gaze sliding over him. "You certainly are."

He grinned.

And she sighed. "What do you want?"

A cougar, he thought. You.

Before he could formulate a response, she leaned over the table, and looked beguilingly at him. "How about a quickie?" she whispered. "I'll get a hot young man, and you'll get yourself an experienced woman."

He considered her offer. He had no doubt she would have sex with him, but there was a sneer in her tone, as though she would think less of him for fucking her. Or maybe she was hoping to drive him away, mistakenly believing that his fantasy would crumble under the reality.

"Okay," he said. "How about my car?"

"I don't fuck in frat boy cars."

He didn't think anyone would mistake his Aston Martin for the ride of a college student. But he'd gotten an upgrade from highschooler to frat boy, so that was progress. "You're a woman of discerning tastes."

"You could say that." She chuckled and waved him off. "The store's closing, Romeo. Better get on home so you can finish your math report."

"A woman of discerning tastes," he repeated, "but not a woman of your word."

She froze. Then fury marched across her lovely features. He'd pricked her pride, that impressive and delightful warrior honor that shone like a battle-ready sword, and she wasn't going to let him get away with it. He tried to keep his grin at bay.

"Come with me," she said, standing up. She held out her hand, and he rose to take it. He flicked his gaze at the laptop, and she said, "It'll be fine."

He noticed she'd also forgone her shoes.

She led him across the gleaming marble floor of the coffee shop, past the glass counter with offerings of pastries and chilled drinks, and into the ladies bathroom.

He locked the door behind them.

Now that she'd obviously committed to the endeavor by taking him to the quickie location, she seemed to run out of steam. While she gathered her nerve, or so he suspected, he took stock of the small bathroom. It was painted mauve and had framed pictures of flowers with swooping lines of poetry bleeding over the edges of the petals. There were two stalls; the doors were open and revealed typical white toilets. The counter was a marbled pink and gold with two sinks. It smelled nice for a bathroom, probably due to the spritzes of air freshener occasionally hissing from the discreet devices placed on the walls.

She placed a hand on her cocked hip and looked him over. "Well?"

He smiled. Then he enchained her wrists and backed her against the only wall without a dryer or paper dispenser. He liked the way her breath hitched and her eyes went wide. She wet her lips and looked at him, her gaze letting him know he'd only take it as far as she wanted.

God, she was sexy.

She reached for the fly of his jeans, her smile cunning when she felt the ridge of his hard-on pressing against her fingertips.

"No," he said when she tugged the zipper.

"What?"

"No."

Her eyebrows slammed down as she glared at him. "Then what the hell are we doing in here?"

"Keep your arms above your head pressed against the wall, crossed at the wrists."

He could see the debate raging behind those blue, blue eyes. How far would she let him push her? How far would she go? He imagined she was feeling a little regret right now, maybe a whisper of fear. Also, she might even berate herself for letting her woman's vanity get her into this mess.

He waited. He was, if anything, a patient man.

Another minute crawled by before he saw her capitulation, but knew she'd drawn a boundary. If he crossed it, he'd find her knee in his crotch, her manicured nails in his eyes. The very idea she might well hand him his ass just made him harder, made him want her more. She was tough, a woman made, and he appreciated that iron core as much as the softness surrounding it.

He let go of her arms, and she left them above her head, lazily crossing the wrists as though she wanted to do it, instead of conceding to be obedient. She even looked amused, as if she were indulging him.

Yeah, honey, keep looking at me like that. He wasn't blind. He saw the way her chest rose and fell erratically, as if she couldn't catch her breath. Her eyes were dilated, and her tongue kept flicking against that plump lower lip.

"If you move your arms, I'll stop," he warned.

"You gonna talk?" she asked in a husky voice that made his dick jump. "Or you gonna play?"

He unbuttoned the top of her capris, and lowered the zipper. Then he pushed the material off her hips. She watched him through hooded eyes, and he could smell the musk of her arousal. He resisted the urge to play with the nipples poking against her gauzy blouse. He allowed himself a moment to think about her breasts, about their soft weight cupped in his hands. What color were those peaks? Dusky or coral?

He sucked in a breath, tried to induce some calm. No matter what she thought, he wasn't an untried boy looking for a thrill with an older woman. It was her he wanted. Her he desired. There would be another time, another place for them to be equal partners in pleasure.

There would be, damn it. He'd make sure of it.

Now, though, this time, he had to prove himself. He had to show her that he was worthy.

He sank to his knees and pressed a kiss against her rounded belly, flicking his tongue along velvet skin. Her hips were round, too, but perfect. Sexy. Here were the curves of a real woman who knew her worth, and not an emaciated girl still searching for hers within calorie counts and yogurt containers.

She wore black silk panties, the kind a woman bought for herself because she wanted to feel beautiful.

And she was. Sweet Jesus. He might cream himself before he even got his tongue inside her.

He drew the panties down, his own breathing unsteady as he revealed the treasure underneath. The trimmed, narrow strip of hair was naturally blonde. It looked as soft and fine as peach fuzz, and there... oh, yes, the juicy center of his favorite kind of

fruit. His fingers trembled as he peeled back that delectable skin and looked at the glistening pink of her luscious cunt.

He leaned forward and breathed her in, her musk a finer scent to him than any perfume. He kissed those glossy folds, and reveled in the moan she graced him with. He would please her... and then later, when she'd accepted the inevitability of them together, she would please him.

He slid his tongue over her flesh, gently lapping the evidence of her desire. His cock was so hard it felt as though it might burst from the tight confines of his jeans. The urge to take her, to slam her against the wall and fill her with his cock, was damned near overwhelming.

It would be too easy to give her what she expected. To take the quick, hot pleasure she offered and spill himself inside her. But that would be it. She would come, and he would come, and she'd walk away from him because he wouldn't deserve her.

And he fully intended on getting her naked, completely naked again.

The thought of other opportunities to touch and kiss and explore this amazing woman was the incentive he needed to ignore his more primitive urges. Well, as much as was possible given his face was buried in her sweet pussy.

He took his time, went as slow as he could. He learned her clitoris was more sensitive on the left side and that she got more excited when he rapidly flicked his tongue over that juicy pearl of flesh than when he suckled it.

He made her pant, made her moan, and still she kept her arms pressed against the wall forming the X he'd commanded from her. And yet, he was her prisoner. Her worshiper.

His fingers dug into her hips as he focused his full attention on pleasuring her. And when she finally succumbed to her orgasm, her body going still, her gasp turning into a long, low moan, he spent delicious seconds licking her come, enjoying the pulsations that sucked at his tongue.

He licked and kissed her pussy until he'd memorized the scent of her, the taste of her. It wasn't enough, and he suspected, it never would be.

He pulled up her underwear and regretted it instantly. Another time, he promised himself. Soon. He drew up her capris, and got to his feet. He zipped the pants and did up the button.

She looked shell-shocked, and he loved that he'd made her feel that way, that her satiation was owed to him.

He grasped her arms and pulled them down. He wondered if she'd even remembered they were still there, invisibly pinned like pale butterfly wings against the mauve background.

"Meet me at Donovan's tomorrow night. Six p.m. Wear a dress, a short one. And no panties."

"What about you?" she managed. The whiskey sound of her voice made his cock throb.

He pretended to misunderstand the question. "I don't look good in a dress."

He licked her bottom lip, giving her a taste of her own essence, and stepped back.

"What's your name, frat boy?"

"What's yours?"

She smiled. That damned dimple made his heart skip a beat. "Anna."

"I'm Nic." He couldn't resist leaning in to sniff her neck. He wondered, just for a second, if he should mark her. Just a little bite, a little suck, and everyone would know she belonged to a man. To him. "Tomorrow, Anna."

He turned on his heel, then stopped and looked over his shoulder. "If you're late, I'm gonna spank you."

"Is that a threat to be on time or an incentive to be late?" she asked.

At least she hadn't said no. Or tried to come up with an excuse about why they couldn't meet again. He offered her a lazy grin. "Up to you now, isn't it?"

Chapter Two

Donovan's was an upscale steakhouse tucked into one of the nooks and crannies of downtown. At five minutes to six, Nic waited in the elegant lobby with its overstuffed chairs, abstract paintings, and low lighting. He'd dressed for her, for sweet, delicious Anna, even though he knew the Armani suit and the tailored Eton shirt with its gold cuff links, not to mention the Italian leather shoes, would be the same as wearing a sandwich board that screamed: *I'm wealthy!*

He realized now that he'd had his own shiny pride dented, just a little. Choosing Donovan's for their first date was a show-off move. He'd wanted to prove he wasn't a boy, someone she could dismiss as a whimsical youth. Damn it. He wished now that he'd stuck to the T-shirt and jeans and sneakers that he'd seduced her in, maybe asked her to meet at a burger joint. He wondered if she would've enjoyed that more, maybe even perpetuated the Mrs. Robinson fantasy she might be weaving. The one he'd started. God, he was such a prick.

He was surprised to find himself pissed off. He wanted her to want him. Him. Damn his age, his looks, his wealth. Too late he'd realized he was throwing his status at her, pointing out all the glitter of his money, and he wondered now if he'd made a mistake.

Naked in a hotel, that's what he should've demanded. Then it would've been raw passion, smoky looks, mouths and fingertips and skin on skin. They both could've learned their way then, been open and vulnerable with each other. Now, they were trapped in civility, in a web he'd spun.

"Nic?"

Shit. Ex-girlfriend alert. He turned from staring blindly at the wall to Sherron Moreland. He'd broken it off with her nearly a year ago, though she hadn't taken the hint for a while. She was two years younger than him, beautiful in a plastic sort of way, and the bony side of thin. She was a spoiled Daddy's Little Girl, but she also had brains. Too bad she used her smarts to screw over other people. He had no doubt she'd one day run the empire that was Moreland Construction. She wore a red mini with black calf boots. It looked like she'd gotten a boob job, though she sure as hell didn't need one.

She watched him noticing the new rack, and preened. "How are you?" she asked in a husky voice.

"Doing well," he said. "You?" He kept his tone polite, his manner distant.

She pouted at him, and put a hand on his arm. Her red nails looked like spots of blood against the black of his suit. "You sure know how to keep a girl waiting, Nic. We had some good times... we could have more."

"No." He plucked her hand off him and looked at his watch. One minute past six. Had Anna changed her mind? He'd never considered that she wouldn't show up. His heart dove to his toes. He'd go back to the bookstore every damn night until he found her again. *Why didn't I get her number?*

Then he realized he was staring down into the frowning face of Sherron. Her eyes were narrowed slits, her overdone lips thinned. "What do you mean, no?" she hissed.

He blinked at the venom in her tone.

"Am I interrupting?"

Anna's voice made relief jitter through him.

He turned toward her, smiling, and nearly swallowed his tongue. She wore a flirty black dress with a plunging neckline; its rippling edges ended mid-thigh. Her simple, elegant high heels were as black as her dress and clutch. The only color in her outfit was a gold pendant necklace; its large teardrop ruby rested at the top of her cleavage. Her hair had been arranged in an up-do with ribbons of hair framing her face

and touching those creamy shoulders. She wore a pair of small gold hoop earrings, but no baubles on her fingers. Here was a woman who knew how to let herself shine.

"Anna," he said. "You're late." He flicked the warning into the last word.

She smiled, flashing that dimple, and said, "I know."

His balls tightened and blood rushed to his cock. Smacking the flat of his palm against her quivering buttocks was a sexy enough image he wanted to ditch dinner and take her to the nearest hotel.

Instead, his ex-girlfriend, who so paled in comparison to Anna, inserted herself between them and said, "Hello. I'm Sherron. Are you Nic's mother?"

Her voice dripped innocence, but the mean curve of her lips bespoke the true intent of her question. She knew damn well Anna wasn't his mother. He watched as Anna turned to Sherron, her expression pure amusement. Sherron was unprepared for the pitying look she received. While she sucked in an affronted breath, Anna stretched up and cupped Nic's face with one hand.

Then she kissed him.

It was a full-on assault with her succulent lips pressed against his, and the lazy sweep of her tongue drawing his own into a delicious duel. She took her time, stamped him with her own brand of possession until his body hummed with need. When she pulled away, her eyes as bright as sapphires, he thought he might fall to her feet and kiss those pretty ankles of hers. He felt as though he was a suppliant chosen by a goddess.

She turned to Sherron, who gaped at them in outrage, and said, "I'm his lover."

She gave Nic one last, sultry look and sashayed away. He stared after her, his cock as hard as a fucking steel rod, and grinned broadly.

Sherron gave him a withering glance. "You'll get bored," she said coldly. "You always do."

He shook his head, his heart spinning, his body on fire, and knew that Anna would never bore him. "I'm gonna marry her," he told Sherron. Then he followed his lady into the dark recesses of the restaurant.

* * *

I'm such a fool. Anna Brevington sat in the curved booth thigh to thigh with Nic because he'd insisted on it, and she didn't back away from a challenge. She wasn't sure she liked his habit of looking at her as though he knew her thoughts. He had the surety of a man who knew what he liked and didn't mind working to get it. He was confident, too, though not in an arrogant way. He didn't act eager or vulgar. He was settling in to the maturity of his own personhood, which she appreciated.

She'd struggled with her own identity at twenty-eight. Her parents had died not long after she'd graduated high school, and she'd been their only child. Her college fund went toward funeral expenses and repairing the many problems with their old house so it could be sold. She couldn't afford to live there herself, and when it sold slightly above market value, she found a studio apartment to hole up in while she figured out what to do next. She took a string of low-paying jobs and went through a host of loser boyfriends. After a while, she lost any thought of a better life because every day had been a struggle to pay bills, to move forward. To survive.

Five years passed, then ten, and she split her time between waitressing and working part-time in an offbeat bookstore near the university. It was her boss there, Solomon Brevington, who'd encouraged her to go back to school. She had a mind for business, he said, and she should use it. Then he offered to fund her education, and she accepted his generosity because she was tired, so tired, of not having something of her own.

She graduated summa cum laude, and the day after the ceremonies, Sol asked her to marry him. He was in his fifties, a man comfortable with himself and his own habits. He wasn't particularly handsome and certainly not fit, but he was kind. And she'd so badly needed kindness. He knew how to tease a laugh from her. He didn't mind her flaws, her impulsiveness for one, and he also didn't mind she didn't love him the way he deserved. He'd been a good man and while she adored him, he never once caused her heart to flutter the way Nic did.

They'd been married five years when he died of heart failure. She'd been thirty-seven then. Construction on the reincarnation of Brevington Books and More in its new location had just begun. She followed through with their plans, and opened Sol's dream bookstore. He'd left her a wealthy woman, but it was the bookstore that gave her purpose. She didn't dishonor her husband's memory by falling into workaholic habits. She pampered herself with visits to the spa, she took off on impromptu road trips, she visited museums and whiled away hours at cafes. Sol had taught her many things, but the most important had been about keeping balance.

Except around Nic she didn't seem to have any.

Solomon would've liked him, she decided. And, she thought with a pang, he would've liked that Nic had shocked her. Had tilted her world just enough so that she viewed it differently.

She let Nic order for her, let him choose the wine, and let him direct the conversation. This evening wasn't about food or drink or small talk. It was merely a follow-up to what had started in the bookstore bathroom.

Even now, the thought of the way he'd made her come with just his talented mouth made her blush. "I think," she said after the salads arrived and Nic drizzled his own with an inordinate amount of ranch dressing, "You will break my heart."

His hazel gaze pinned hers and he carefully put his fork down. "I'm going to paddle your ass red for even entertaining such a thought."

The growl in his voice zapped her right to her toes. If she'd had panties on, they would've gotten wet. Instead, the moisture slicked her inner thighs.

"Punish me if you want," she said as if the idea of his spanking didn't mean a whit to her, "but you don't control how I feel."

"You won't bore me. Not in a million fucking years."

She merely quirked one eyebrow at him and sipped her wine. It was an interesting response. Had she touched a nerve about commitment issues? Or was he really upset she thought he could break her heart? Did he realize the admission was a

gift? He made her feel vulnerable, and she knew that at the end of their time together, she would be hurt.

She wouldn't regret it, not for a minute. But there was no way in hell she was getting out unscathed. "I didn't say I would bore you, frat boy. Only that you would break my heart."

His eyes went wild for a moment, making her heart stutter. She squeezed her thighs together. God, he was making her want him.

"Get your purse," he said. "We're leaving."

Fury pulsed from him in hot waves, and did nothing to cool her own ardor. She could handle Nic. And he could handle her. It surprised her to realize he might be the only man she'd met, and liked, since Sol's passing who could keep her attention -- and keep her in line.

Because she wasn't going to make it easy for him, for either of them, Anna made a show of putting down her wineglass, and tucking her clutch under her arm. He got out of the booth, and she slipped out behind him, accepting the crook of his arm. He tossed a couple of hundred dollar bills onto the table. Yeah, he was pissed off, but she bet he couldn't figure out why. The truth did that sometimes, poked holes in the heart. His reaction meant, she hoped, he felt something for her, though they didn't have much between them except first names and a bathroom tryst.

He didn't speak to her as they went up the narrow staircase that led to the building's lobby, and then through the double glass doors. He obviously hadn't used the valet service because he strolled down the block to a parking garage. He entered the walkway and took her up a set of concrete stairs, and then they strode across the mostly empty lot.

"We'll pick up your car tomorrow," he said.

"I took a cab here."

He stopped and stared at her; she stared serenely back.

"You knew you were coming home with me," he said. The possessiveness in his voice skimmed along her spine, made her muscles contract.

"I wanted to, yes."

"And if I hadn't invited you to my place?"

"You mean if I hadn't passed your boredom test?"

Anger sparkled in his gaze, and she looked away, trying to hide her amusement.

"Why," he asked with jaw clenched, "does everyone think I bore so easily?"

"Because you do?"

She watched his eyes narrow. Ooh. Direct hit. She went in for the kill. "You're young and wealthy and intelligent. You need to be entertained constantly. And when something, or someone, loses your attention, you move on. I'm not judging you, Nic. But whether you like it or not, it's the truth."

He studied her expression, a muscle ticking in his jaw. She knew the minute he'd figured out he'd given her the button she kept pushing. The tension seeped out of his stance as his lips quirked. "You're gonna be work, aren't you?"

He didn't sound as if he minded; in fact, he sounded exactly like Solomon had when she'd done something of which he approved. He never asked her to control her impulsiveness, only that she either enjoy it or pay the consequence for it. Usually she did both. That was why she was fully prepared to enjoy everything Nic would give her, and to deal with the heartbreak when it was over.

Nic threaded his fingers through hers and tugged her forward. They crossed the lot to a lone silver car parked at an angle in the corner. She whistled. "Aston Martin. Nice."

She curled her fingers under the passenger door handle, but he pulled her away.

"Bend over the hood and flip up your dress."

His rough command made her stomach quiver, but she placed her clutch onto the sleek roof then sauntered to the hood. She grabbed the edge of her dress and hiked it above her hips then leaned over until her breasts grazed the smooth surface of the hood.

Her concession to exercise was thirty minutes of yoga in the mornings and walking around her neighborhood in the evenings. She wasn't one to curb her

appetites. If she felt like a pint of Ben & Jerry's at three a.m., she went for it. But she also did a marathon vacuuming session, or took a swim. Balance, Solomon had taught her, was evaluating the price for each choice and knowing there would always be a reckoning. Either she worked off the extra calories of a late night indulgence, or she accepted the widening of her ass.

An ass that was being assessed at this very moment by Nic. She wondered what kind of price she would pay for choosing him.

"Move back. Place your palms on the car and lift up that beautiful ass."

She did as she was told, her body prickling with awareness. He hadn't even touched her yet and she was dripping for him. Anticipation buzzed through her like she'd mainlined caffeine.

She fully expected the slap of his hand against her buttock any second. Instead she felt him slide a finger into her pussy. "You're so wet," he said thickly.

The thrill of being out in a public place, the potential to be seen, to get caught, just made her hotter. The spontaneity Nic offered appealed to her nature.

Then he smacked her, hard, and the sweet pain of the blow traveled straight to her pussy. She wasn't ashamed of her moan or of the way her thighs quivered. He spanked her again, and she shuddered, her pussy convulsing. God, a couple more swats and she would come.

He was breathing hard, his control ragged -- she could hear it in his voice, feel it in the trembling fingers he drew across the welts he'd left on her skin. Then she heard the slide of his zipper, and the rustling of a familiar sound. He was putting on a condom. Seconds later, his cock nudged her entrance, his hands clenching her waist. "Anna."

Oh, her poor frat boy. She wiggled her ass. "Spank me or fuck me," she said, putting as much derision in her voice as possible. "Just don't bore me."

He slammed into her and she moaned, her fingers going white against the silver paint as she scrabbled for purchase.

One of his hands moved down, while the other held her steady, and she felt the tips of his fingers rub her clit. He fucked her hard, those fingers working her until the orgasm burst, a thousand bright sensations overwhelming her.

He stilled, piercing her to the core as he cried out her name. She clutched at the car as he came, his fingers digging into her skin, his palm cupping her slick cunt.

“Anna,” he whispered, dropping his head to her spine and licking the sweat pearled there. “Anna.”

Chapter Three

Anna wasn't too surprised when he drove them to the nearest hotel, a glass-and-chrome multi-story that catered to the business class. He'd only said, "My house is too far away," and then nothing else. His impatience crackled around him. The elevator ride was short, and then he was dragging her down the hallway and into a suite. She barely had time to register the sunken living room or gleaming bar.

Nic was a man on a mission.

She let him yank her toward the bedroom.

He snapped on one lamp then turned. "Take off the dress," he said tightly. "Leave the heels and jewelry."

She dropped her clutch and peeled off the dress, kicking it away. Then she took off the bra and let it go. She'd let him have his silence. She didn't think he was embarrassed by his need for her. Or the way he'd taken her in the garage, though she'd begun to believe he had wanted to wait. It pleased her to know he couldn't control himself.

No, Nic acted as though he had something to prove.

You already have me, she thought. What else could you possibly want?

He studied her, his eyes dark, his body radiating tension. His gaze captured hers. "You're magnificent."

She knew he meant it.

She walked toward him, no longer young, no longer thin, no longer cautious. She had her own confidence, her own pride. She'd earned every wrinkle, every scar, every softened curve.

She said nothing as she pushed off his jacket and unbuttoned his shirt. She kissed his firm chest, enjoying the ridge of muscles, the smoothness of his skin. She unbuckled his pants, and he sat on the bed to divest himself of his shoes, socks, pants, and boxers.

Then he drew her onto the bed with him.

And proceeded to torment the hell out of her.

He started with her breasts, plumping her not-so-firm C cups before setting to serious work on her nipples. He sucked them until they were hard, aching. While he squeezed one breast and tweaked the nipple, he cupped the other one and suckled her peak. Then he would switch.

She reached between them to stroke his cock, but he demanded, "Hands at your sides. Don't touch me until I tell you."

When he talked to her like that, she felt like melting into a puddle. No one dared to boss her around, much less someone fourteen years her junior. She quivered with expectation.

He drifted down her stomach, kissing the trembling flesh of her soft belly. He lifted her thighs, so they draped his shoulders, and then he paid an inordinate amount of attention to her pussy. He gazed at it as though he planned to render artwork of it then he made her squirm by touching, squeezing, stroking.

Then, he settled that talented mouth on her sex, and brought her to an earth-shattering orgasm.

As she rode that incredible rush of pleasure, he sat up and rolled on a condom.

"Where did you get that?" she asked breathlessly.

"I'm magic." He pulled her forward, holding her legs pressed against his chest by wrapping a brawny arm across them. With his other hand he guided his cock inside her still clenching pussy, and started to thrust. "Touch yourself, Anna."

His gaze was hot, and she swore the way he looked at her might turn her to ash. But she was up to the challenge he offered. She kept her gaze on him as she cupped her own breasts, massaging the globes while he watched. Then she pulled on her rigid nipples, gasping at the sweet pleasure-pain wrought by the actions.

"Yes, Anna. God, yes." He was panting now, sweat trickling down that gorgeous chest. His cock slammed into her as he strained toward his own completion. He looked so hungry, as if he couldn't ever be satisfied with just one taste.

She let one hand continue to play with her breast while the other coasted down her belly. She dipped one finger into the strip of blonde curls, and began to rub her clit.

His gaze swept down her, riveted to the movement of her finger. He shuddered, swallowing hard, and closed his eyes for just a moment.

"Come with me, Anna," he said. "C'mon, baby."

She knew he was close, so she revved up her own efforts. It didn't take much. He made her hot and needy, damn it. She rubbed her swollen clit and tugged on her nipple, and enjoyed each full thrust of her lover's cock. Pleasure built swiftly, tantalizing her with the promise of another orgasm.

"I'm coming," cried Nic.

He shoved deeply inside her, and the movement sent her over the edge into her own bliss. He held onto her legs, his face a mask of tormented pleasure as he came. Her cunt milked his cock as she reveled in the electric sensations washing over her.

After a long moment, he pulled out and collapsed on the bed next to her. He grinned at her wickedly. "You know the thing about us younger guys is shorter recovery time."

"And us older women," she murmured, "love that about younger men."

He laughed, then gathered her close and cuddled.

God, a cuddler. How could she resist him?

You're definitely gonna break my heart, she thought. Still, she settled into his embrace, pressing her face against his chest to listen to the strong rhythm of his heart. For all her bluster about having another go, Anna's exhaustion claimed her.

Before she realized what had happened, she'd fallen into peaceful sleep.

* * *

When Anna awoke, she was alone. She was startled at the depth of her disappointment. She hadn't quite expected things to end so abruptly, and certainly not to feel this sudden bruising of her heart.

Then Nic bounded into the room, dressed only in his boxers. He'd taken a shower, his hair still wet and as he drew close to the bed, she could smell his clean scent.

"Please tell me you ordered coffee," she croaked.

"Two pots," he said. "Arrived a few minutes ago."

She rolled over and sat up. The covers fell away as she stretched.

"There is a God," he murmured. He sat next to her and placed a kiss on the top of each breast. "I'll bring you a cup of java. You a purist?"

"God, no," she said. "Don't hold back on the cream and sugar." She grinned. "Or the kisses."

He laid one on her that made her toes curl, then left to get her coffee.

Damn, she could get used to this.

He returned with a mug, and handed it to her. While she sipped on it, he crawled into bed next to her. "You busy today?"

"Sunday is my day off."

"Day off from what?"

"The store."

"You work for Brevington Books?" He seemed rather delighted by the prospect.

"I own it."

His smile widened. "That's fantastic."

She lifted an eyebrow. "It is?"

"It means we can play naughty games there after hours."

Anna laughed. "I don't know if I can keep up with you," she said. "But I'll sure as hell try."

His twinkling gaze went serious, and he straightened. Anna felt her stomach pitch, and suddenly the coffee turned bitter in her mouth. She put down the mug on the nightstand and turned toward him, waiting to see what he needed to say.

"I think I'm in love with you."

Anna's mouth dropped open. She blinked at him, her mind blank. Of all the things she'd been prepared to hear, that was not one of them.

"Don't tell me how I should feel," he warned her. "Or that it's too soon."

She shook her head, her tongue glued to the roof of her mouth. Oh, shit. She'd thought they would have a fling, a wonderful, hot, glorious fling, and when he tired of the games, he would bid her farewell. Then she'd go off and nurse her broken heart in Paris. Or maybe the Netherlands. She really liked it there.

"Anna?"

"I don't know what to say," she managed to choke out. "This is unexpected."

He frowned. "That's not quite the response I was hoping for. You don't feel anything for me?"

"Of course I do," she said. "But love? C'mon, Nic. We've known each other two days."

"I want to marry you," he said stubbornly.

Panic bubbled through her. She couldn't think about love. Or marriage. She had a decent life, one free of obligations to other human beings. She liked it. *But you're lonely*, whispered a voice that sounded suspiciously like Sol's. *We aren't meant to be alone, kitten*.

"I have to go." She scrambled out of bed and grabbed her dress off the floor.

"You have to go?" Nic made no move to follow her. He sat on the bed and watched her search for her things. "That's your response?"

"Look, kid. I wasn't in this for love. And sure as hell not for marriage."

"Don't call me kid," he snarled. He got off the bed and stomped toward her. "Or I'll fuck you again and remind you that I'm all man."

Even though she was desperate to leave, the rough words sent a thrill right through her. She was stunned at her own slutty nature. She would happily spread her legs for him again, but damned if she'd marry him.

"You're not a kid," she said softly. "And neither am I."

She slipped on her dress, grabbed her clutch, and eschewed everything else.

"Anna."

She paused at the door, and turned to look over her shoulder. His gaze was filled with pain and longing. It was then she knew that he really believed that he loved her. And if, deep down, there was an answering song in her own soul, she pretended not to hear it.

Anna left as quickly as she could. She kept the tears bottled. No use blubbing when she was the one walking away. Like an idiot. But he'd scared the crap out of her. How could he know, really know, that he loved her and wanted to spend his life with her?

When she entered the lobby, looking exactly like the well loved older woman she was, without shoes or stockings, but with plenty of dignity, she found the concierge waiting for her.

"Your car is waiting, Ms. Brevington."

She nodded, as though she had expected it to be so. Nic had done her a kindness, even after she'd danced in spiked heels all over his ego. She felt ashamed of herself, but she couldn't drag her ass back up to the room and face him.

The limousine driver held the door open for her, and she told him her address before she slipped into the back seat. She stared sightlessly out the window until she arrived home. The driver declined her tip, and she smiled at him even though her mouth hurt from the effort.

After she shut the front door behind her, she slid to the floor and sobbed.

Epilogue

A week passed, and Anna threw herself into every activity imaginable. Business tasks she usually put off, she dove into with relish. She scheduled meetings with everyone, from the accountant to her manager. She even threw an after-hours party for the employees as a thank you for their hard work and loyalty.

After handling three months of work in three days, and having nothing mind-numbing left to do, she got into her Lexus and drove to the seaside. She spent an evening in a lovely hotel. She ordered room service, and tried to read one of the books she'd brought with her.

But not even the impromptu trip, and the shopping spree that followed afterward, soothed her. Everywhere she went, she saw Nic. How many times had she mistaken someone else for him? Even the slightest resemblance made her heart pound outrageously, and hope would surge.

She couldn't take pleasure in food, either, not even her favorite pint of Ben & Jerry's. She felt listless, and guilty, and wrong for running away from Nic. Maybe that's what scraped her pride the worst. She hadn't had the courage to explore what they could have together. Just because he wanted to marry her didn't mean he would force her to do it. And love?

Oh, God.

The reality of it all hit her.

She was in love with Nic.

It was inexplicable as hell. *In love*. In the blink of an eye, in the beat of a heart, in one deep breath. That's why she couldn't find any goddamned pleasure in her life anymore. She wanted to share it with the man who understood her, who... loved her.

Anna mulled over the idea, worrying over the concept until she couldn't stand being inside her own head anymore. As usual when she found herself mired in emotional quicksand, she visited Sol at the cemetery. He hadn't wanted to be buried, so she'd cremated him and spread his ashes over the waters in the Caribbean. Sol loved cruises almost as much as he loved books. Still, she had a grave marker placed in the local cemetery so she would have somewhere to visit, to remember the man who'd brought her so much happiness.

Anna sat against the marble tombstone, and laid out her problems. She talked until her voice went hoarse, then she leaned her head against the grave marker and had another good cry.

You know what to do, whispered the gentle voice of her husband, *you just gotta do it*.

Anna sniffled back the rest of her tears. He was right, just like always. She pressed her fingers to her lips and then to the marble. "Love you, babe."

Go love him. And be happy, kitten.

* * *

It didn't take much research to find out that Nic Dumont owned TechnoInc, which had headquarters downtown. Anna had no reason to believe that Nic was there, unless he too was trying to nurse a wounded heart and throwing himself into work like she had done.

Then again, he could be over her, and had jetted off to the Bahamas with someone much younger and who didn't need to cover her grays with hair coloring.

Well, she'd never know unless she tried.

She took a deep breath, straightened her shoulders, and entered the lobby of TechnoInc. She spied the receptionist at the end of the large foyer, and started in that direction. The elevator to her right dinged just as she stepped in front of it. The doors

slid open and out walked Nic. Right behind were three men, and it was apparent they had been deep in conversation.

She blinked at him in shock.

Everyone paused to stare at her. Nic's expression was inscrutable; the others' were just curious.

"Anna," he said. His formal tone made her flinch. "May I help you with something?"

She pressed a hand to her stomach, and wet her lips. *Just speak, already, you moron! You hurt him, remember? You shouldn't expect him to fall at your feet.*

"I think we should live together in absolute and decadent sin," she said. "I'm not taking marriage off the table, but I feel we should negotiate it at another time."

He could've made her wait. Maybe even punished her with silence or a stony expression, but he did neither. He swept her into his arms and kissed her until her entire body felt aflame.

"Oh," she managed when he pulled back just enough to let her breathe. "Is that a yes?"

"Damn right it is."

"We'll talk later," said one of the gentlemen. He sent her a grin, and clapped Nic on the back. He and the other two men left the lobby.

"I wanted to give you some time," he said, holding her tightly, "but if you didn't show up soon, I had every intention of coming after you."

Her heart went *bump-de-bump*. "Really?"

"God, yes." He looked at her, and she saw that not an ounce of his love or determination had dimmed. The idea he felt so strongly about her was dizzying. Her whole world spun, and she clung to him. Wow. She really was in love.

"I think... I mean, I know..." She swallowed the knot clogging her throat. "You're the one I want. You have my heart."

He grinned. "I love you, too."

Riley Ashford

Riley Ashford loves to write sensual love stories that explore unusual relationships and supernatural settings. She lives in the Midwest with her family, and enjoys reading, knitting, and watching action flicks.

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