

Capturing the lost woman

(book two of the lost woman trilogy)

august
XXIX

Anna Buckley

WARNING – This book contains explicit sexual content and language that may be offensive to some readers.

This book is a work of fiction. All characters appearing in this work are fictitious. Any resemblance to real persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

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Her aim is to write books about women taking control of their lives, financially, emotionally and sexually. Her books are set across the world and feature art, architecture, design, fashion, food and wine.

Anna Buckley has a blog where she posts stories and pictures behind her books. Visit it at annabuckley.com

Contents

Part 1	1
America and it all gets Bigger.....	1
Los Angeles.....	4
Weekend with Dan.....	19
The Power of One Woman.....	45
Wise Aura.....	50
The Price of Fame.....	53
New York.....	60
Part 2	79
Back to Business.....	79
Christmas.....	84
Coffee and Newspapers.....	91
Boxing Day lunch.....	94
Brotherly Love.....	102
Trampoline in the Bedroom.....	108
Meeting with Kate.....	111
Work, Work, Work.....	117
First Approach.....	121
Building.....	123
A really Great Man.....	130
Farewell Beautiful Lovers.....	139
Temporarily Homeless.....	144
Part 3	151
Tasmania.....	151
Lands End Lagoon.....	158
Rescue.....	166

Let's Eat.....	181
Settled.....	183
Joe.....	186
Domestic Goddess.....	190
A Cold Day In.....	193
Muse.....	197
Anniversary.....	199
The Bridge.....	206
Hunter Gatherer.....	214
Part 4	231
Captive.....	231
Lost and Found.....	234
Joe and Bob.....	236
The Cellar.....	237
Searching for Tina.....	241
Wild Goose Chase.....	243
Missing Presumed Dead.....	245
Prisoner.....	246
My Eyes Opened.....	249
Seduction.....	252
Upstairs.....	257
Feeding Moses Smith.....	266
Discovering Moses.....	284
Confused.....	296
The Pact.....	303
Trip to Town.....	310

Part 1

America and it all gets Bigger

I tossed and turned fitfully. The sleeping tablet didn't last long. Los Angeles was going to be a very drawn out fifteen hour flight.

My mind was still trying to process what had just happened. All that intensity, words of love and then abandonment. Who was I kidding? How could I have even considered a relationship with Adam? Would I have been his dirty little secret? Kept hidden from the brother who seemed to have an emotional stranglehold over him.

CAPTURING the lost woman by Anna Buckley

It would never work. I got out my computer and wrote.

Adam,

*A life with you would require you to choose your brother or me.
I can't and won't ask you to do this*

*Please understand that we can never see each other again, the hurt
would be too much to bear.*

Don't try to contact me, it will just make things harder.

Tina.

Short, sharp and brutal. This was the only way.

I'd been given this taste of what love could be, then had it ripped so mercilessly away. It hurt so much. And then I wept. Into the pillow, muffled, uncontrolled sobs.

I was interrupted by a polite knock.

'Everything ok, Mrs Brown? May I come in?' said James, the steward, with a concerned look on his face.

'Not really, but come in anyway. Stupid girl stuff,' I blurted out.

'Anything you want to talk about?'

It all came tumbling out, it was freeing. I was surprised at how easily my confession was made to someone I barely knew.

'There, there, I know it hurts now, but you've done the right thing,' said James, taking my hand.

CAPTURING the lost woman

Almost immediately I started to feel some relief.

'Now, let me do my job and get something to cheer you up.'

He returned with a tray of food. Steamed salmon and green beans, chocolate fondant, French brie and a glass of champagne. He turned on the TV and showed me the movie menu. I was quite hungry and pleased to be distracted by some mindless thing on the screen. The food and wine did its job and this time I slept like a baby.

When I woke a few hours later I felt slightly better, but still needed to get my mind off the events of the last day. I had promised to put together this week's editorial on the flight and, with a few more hours in the air, knew that writing would keep my mind occupied. 'Choices' was what I really wanted to write about, but realised this would not be the diversion I needed. Instead I decided to finish an article I had been writing about the difficulties we Australians have in the Southern Hemisphere doing business with Europe and America in the Northern Hemisphere. A bit of a nothing story, a mindless distraction. Perfect for the last few hours of the trip. It started with a humorous line about what it's like to live upside down on the bottom of the globe. Australia sleeps when the rest of the world works. Designing clothes in a hot Australian summer when the north is blanketed in winter snow. Dealing with the massive distance between us and the northern trade centres. I remember listening to a New Yorker complaining about jet lag after the eight hour trip to Paris. In Australia that would only get me to Singapore, with Paris still at least another 14 hours away. I fantasised about the idea of being able to leave in the morning for a Paris dinner date that same night!

I also wanted to mention other more trivial things. Australians drive on the left hand side of the road. I remember my first trip to America, trying to cross the road, checking for oncoming traffic, when I nearly

CAPTURING the lost woman by Anna Buckley

stepped into the path of a truck. I just instinctively looked the wrong way! We design our houses to face north to capture the sun. We don't know what a 'stick' of butter is when we are cooking from an American cookbook. And as for buying shoes and clothes online, who the hell knows what the sizes are?

The writing was a great panacea and, in all honesty, this flight was no ordeal. Far from it, the suite I was given was more like a private luxurious cabin. Cindy had mentioned to the airline that I would be travelling with them and might include a story about the experience. That's why I was upgraded. She was a very shrewd operator and as usual, I was extremely grateful. There were many perks to being a high profile blogger. James returned to tell me I could have a shower if I wished. What a great idea. I would be ready to hit the ground running.

Los Angeles

The first thing I did was send the email to Adam. A chauffeur was waiting for me. An electric window separated us. I had privacy, relieved I didn't have to engage in polite conversation with a stranger. I was not feeling that approachable just yet. Then I turned on my phone. A message.

'Tina, I'm so sorry. We need to talk, Adam.'

Too late, my email had said it all. I pressed delete. Dragging this out would only make it harder. I feared that hearing his voice would weaken my resolve and I'd succumb to a remorseful lover's persuasion. The

CAPTURING the lost woman

temptation would be too great. I had to be strong. The emotional barriers needed to be back in place. No more vulnerability or love struck blindsiding. I could handle this. I took a deep breath, then rang Cindy.

'Hi Cindy. Had a great flight. Brilliant upgrade! How are things back at the office?'

'Where are you now?' she said hurriedly.

'On my way to the hotel. Why?'

'You'll be going straight to the TV studio. Shauna, your publicist, will meet you there.'

'Fuck! Did you say TV? When, how?'

'Soon, within the next hour or so. You'll be going out live.'

Cindy told me what had happened. One of the largest syndicated 'News' talk shows on American TV was doing a show on the new media. One of the panellists, a blogger, had gone into labour and couldn't make it. They needed someone to fill the gap. It was Shauna who suggested me. Cindy told me I was heading straight to the studio, my driver had all the details.

'Hey, I've also had Adam on the phone. He wants you to call him. He won't let up. What's going on? What do you want me to do?'

'It's complicated. Tell him I'm unavailable. I don't want to speak to him. I'll explain when I get home.'

'Sure..... and good luck!' said Cindy, slightly bewildered.

All went as planned. I was met by Shauna at the studio door, rushed into wardrobe and make-up and introduced briefly to the host. Before I knew it I found myself on set, at a desk in the studio, bright lights

CAPTURING the lost woman by Anna Buckley

shining and a guy counting down. No time to meet the other commentators sitting either side of me. The host, Dan, introduced us.

'And our third guest today, Ladies and Gentlemen, all the way from Melbourne, Australia, Mrs Chris Brown, Mommy Blogger, over here to promote her new book 'Escape Money'.'

The studio audience politely applauded.

It was the term 'Mommy Blogger' that got me going, my blood started to boil. Somewhere in my addled brain I let rip at the presenter, saying I resented the term 'Mommy Blogger'. I barely paused to draw breath. I thought the phrase was a derogatory term thrown at women who were not considered real players. I quoted a few statistics about followers and responses to product promotion and said that people like me and my fellow bloggers were having success rates that the dinosaur media operators could only dream about. This term was misogynistic and women like me were getting sick of it, and so was our audience. Spontaneous applause. This then lead the discussion. I had set the terms. I thrived. After what seemed like no time at all, it was over. We shook hands and were escorted off set.

'You were amazing!' said Shauna, as she followed me back to the dressing room.

'Thanks.'

'Yes, you were great.'

I looked around and it was the host, Dan.

'Ah, thanks,' I responded.

'What are you ladies doing now? Can I take you out for a late lunch?'

I grimaced at Shauna, but she ignored my signals.

CAPTURING the lost woman

'Love to Dan. Where do you have in mind?' asked Shauna.

I didn't catch what he said, but Shauna seemed to know what he was talking about.

'Meet you there in 45 minutes,' said Shauna

'Yeah, see you soon.'

I removed the makeup and changed into something suitable for LA. The car was waiting, Shauna was already inside.

'Sorry about that, but having Dan Raven on your side is a good thing in this city. Nobody knocks back a lunch invitation from him.'

'I get it, but I feel so jet lagged. I don't think I'd make a good dining companion.'

'After your performance on the show! I don't believe a word you say about jet lag. Your mind was sharp, you had them eating out of your hands.'

Shauna's phone rang.

'Hey, yep, yep, yeah. How many? Shit! I'll pass that on. Bye.'

'Chris Brown, they're going crazy. The website, the retailers, all of them are being swamped with requests for your book, they love you. You're the talk of the town.'

'Wow! That's amazing! Things certainly happen fast around here. And Shauna, please call me Tina, Tina Maxwell. My real name, the one my friends use.'

'Well, buckle up Tina Maxwell, you're in for one hell of a ride,' she said.

CAPTURING the lost woman by Anna Buckley

We pulled up in front of a white walled restaurant, potted green topiary in dark glazed pots framed the entrance, the concierge opened the car door. The room looked masculine, the kind of place where the powerful men of Hollywood gathered, old school. It's interior, understated elegance, white linen, dark leather chairs, a glass wine wall. The entire space lit by a massive skylight, lifting what could have been a rather sombre interior, giving it a bright, fresh feel. The handsome maitre'd escorted us to a table in the centre of the room.

'This way, Mrs. Brown,' he said, with a knowing efficiency. This was, after all, Beverly Hills.

Dan stood to greet us, a double kiss for me, a perfunctory handshake to Shauna. He smelled of expensive aftershave, his skin smooth. He gestured for us to sit.

'Welcome ladies, would you like something to drink?'

'Ah yes. What would you recommend, Dan?' I asked.

'I think Champagne is in order today. A Krug, 98 Rose Brut, thanks,' said Dan to the sommelier.

'You certainly made an impression, Mrs Brown. Everyone's talking about you. The blogosphere is going nuts. That comment about misogyny has gone viral.'

'Well, we all know a put down when we hear one, don't we Shauna? However, I've got to say, I think my publishers might be a bit pissed off that I didn't mention the book enough.'

'Quite the contrary. That comment is what's started all the interest. Now it appears people are dying to read what else you have to say.'

CAPTURING the lost woman

'It's interesting that 'Escape Money' could almost become a subversive text, arming women for financial freedom,' said Dan.

'Yeah, I thought about that. It's why I included stories of women who run multinational companies applying those same thrift principals. Women have always been good at this sort of thing, but often don't think they can apply the same knowledge to business. Sometimes the language of business confounds women. It's not really what I say that's subversive, it's the fact I can.'

The champagne arrived, the sommelier said it was compliments of the men at table five, pointing in their direction. Dan looked across the room, smiled and nodded, acknowledging the gesture. The suited men smiled back, looked my way, and silently applauded. This is how business was done, networking, knowing who has the power. Sometimes I just loved America, this would never happen back home.

As time passed, Shauna was being more distracted by her phone.

'Listen guys, I'm afraid I have to get back to the office. Things are going crazy. Here are the details of your accommodation. Just call the driver when you're ready to leave,' she said, handing me a folder.

'Sure,' I replied.

'Get a good night's sleep. I'll be around early tomorrow morning, it's all on your schedule,' said Shauna, efficiently.

'Ok, no problems,' I responded.

'Bye Dan. See you tomorrow, Tina.'

'No worries, see you around,' he said, standing politely as she left the restaurant.

'She called you Tina, I don't understand.'

CAPTURING the lost woman by Anna Buckley

I explained the whole name thing, that my friends call me by my real name, Christina, Tina. How it helps to give me an identity away from the public persona, Chris Brown, the woman with the blog.

'I understand,' he said knowingly.

Of course he did, his celebrity was so much greater than mine. He was, after all, one of the most influential media men on the West Coast. And, after the general madness of the last few hours had calmed, I could see he was handsome and charismatic as well. He was tall, intense blue eyes, fair hair, immaculately dressed in a fine tailored suit, cuff links, manicured hands, flawless skin, not a hair out of place.

Dan told me he had found out a bit about me before I came on set, enough to get a basic profile.

'I read your blog, Googled your name, but it wasn't until we finished the interview that I wanted to know more about you. You've achieved so much in such a short space of time,' he said admiringly.

God these Americans were so polite.

'Well, I'd wasted so many years and there's still so much I want to do.'

I told him about the dress project in Cambodia.

'My Dad always used to speak about the atrocities in that country,' said Dan.

'Your father was there?'

'He was a Vietnam veteran. Spent a lot of time near the Cambodian, Vietnamese border. Saw the destruction caused by the carpet bombing of Cambodia. Hated the way this supposedly neutral country was being screwed over.'

CAPTURING the lost woman

'Always look behind the headline, he would say. It was his interest in the truth that got me into journalism in the first place.'

I had made the assumption that Dan was just a talking head, a pretty boy media presenter. I was wrong. He had studied journalism and was first posted to Kuwait during the Gulf War.

'I was just a kid, twenty one and on the front lines sending back stories every night. I am embarrassed to say I was fuelled by the rush it gave me. It was addictive. I went to every troubled hot spot for the next fifteen years, to feed my addiction.'

'Afghanistan was where it all fell apart. My dad said we were in an impossible situation, that it was just like Vietnam, we would never win. I became overwhelmed by the futility of it all. Had a bit of a meltdown. Came home.'

'What did you do?'

'I just dropped out. The network gave me time off. I bought a van and went surfing. I left a boy and returned a thirty five year old man with nothing to show for it but a fucked up head full of images I couldn't erase.'

He told me that eventually he decided to take a softer role, anchoring news and current affairs. He liked to ask the questions now.

He was fascinating.

It was getting late, the staff were beginning to prepare the restaurant for that night's dinner service.

'I think it's time we were getting out of here. Do you want to go somewhere for a drink, it's only five o'clock?' he said.

CAPTURING the lost woman by Anna Buckley

'Dan, I've had a really lovely time, but my body clock is completely thrown. I need to get some sleep.'

'How long are you in LA?' he asked.

'Till Monday morning,' I replied.

'Can I give you a call?' he said, handing me his card.

'Yeah, sure,' and I scribbled down my number.

'I've got the weekend off, maybe you could show me the sights?' I joked.

'I've got the weekend off, too. Maybe I just could,' he responded, with a twinkle in his eye.

I called the driver. He was waiting for me as we stepped outside.

'Bye Chris, it's been great to meet you.'

'Bye Dan, it's been really nice to meet you too. Thanks for a lovely lunch, and by the way, you can call me Tina.'

As he shook my hand he leant forward and kissed me, lingering for just a second. The driver held the door open, I got inside. Dan took the keys of his white soft top Merc. and drove off. What an interesting and unexpected start to the tour.

I woke early and saw the sun rise. The clock said six am, I had slept for twelve hours. To my surprise the driver had taken me to a house rather than an hotel. Last night I'd crawled into bed, barely noticing my surroundings, it had been dark and I was ridiculously tired. The house, a mid century modern, was stylishly fitted out, very luxuriously appointed. It was as if I had stepped onto the set of 'Mad Men'. I walked out to the

CAPTURING the lost woman

terrace and saw that this steep site overlooked a lake. I had pictured Los Angeles as a flat, dry urban city. I was pleasantly surprised to see lush green gardens, quiet winding streets and a clear bright sunny day. This would be a nice place to return home to, Cindy must have spoken to my publicist. The fridge was full of food. I was starving, hadn't eaten since yesterday. I remembered now, it had been lunch, not dinner. Lunch with Dan, in Beverly Hills. I was in America.

I gave Cindy a call, it was late afternoon in Australia. She told me the site had gone ballistic and book sales were through the roof. The traffic to the dress site caused it to melt down and our tech guy had been working on it all day.

'You've made front page of today's paper. Your rant about misogyny has hit a nerve here as well.'

'Wow! News travels.'

'Hey, I nearly forgot, thanks for finding the house, it's gorgeous.'

'Knew you'd like it. Shauna recommended it. Couldn't see you holed up in a hotel for five nights. You'll have enough of hotel rooms for the rest of the tour, although I'm sure whatever Shauna chooses will be good, she seems to be really on the ball. You should Google it, the suburb you're in, Silver Lake, is full of those houses.'

We talked about my schedule for the next few days, then said goodbye.

The next task was more onerous. I deleted all the texts from Adam, not bothering to read a single word. It was the only way. I cried again, the pain still real.

CAPTURING the lost woman by Anna Buckley

Thursday was crazy with more interviews and book signings. Shauna had filled my schedule to bursting point. That night a dinner was held for me at a small but fashionable Peruvian restaurant. Not knowing what to expect, I chose to wear a dark chocolate coloured dress and wedges, something sexy but safe. Unlike lunch, the room was filled mainly with women. A casual, more friendly vibe. We could easily have been in Fitzroy. The small shared plates were a delicious mix of South American, Spanish, and weirdly, Japanese fusion food.

'Tina let me introduce you to my partner, Nancy,' said Shauna.

'Hi Tina, pleased to meet you,' said the gorgeous, dark haired, woman on Shauna's arm.

'I've heard a lot about you.'

Nancy looked nothing like the cliché. Her pant suit was fitted and feminine, a jacket cut low to reveal the gentle curve of her small breasts. She wore Jimmy Choo heels and exuded a predatory sexual energy. Even the lesbians looked immaculate in Hollywood. We chatted about the interest my comments had generated. She told me how much harder women needed to work in this town to earn respect. I could well imagine. I discovered Nancy was a film producer.

'Do you have any plans for tomorrow night?' she enquired.

'No, why do you ask?'

'We're having a few people over for drinks and would love it if you could join us?'

'That would be great. I'd love to.'

CAPTURING the lost woman

I sensed that Nancy had wanted to check me out before she allowed Shauna to invite me to their house. Obviously I had met with her approval.

Friday was more of the same, only this time Shauna had given me some time off in the afternoon. Not that I could go home and curl up with a good book. She had scheduled me in for a bit of pampering at her favorite spa. I was groomed to within an inch of my life, skin smooth, no follicle untouched and I left the salon with an Audrey chignon, looking and feeling a million dollars. This time I wore a taupe backless number and, again, the almost regulation killer heels. I twisted a long strand of pearls three times around my neck. I was having fun doing business.

I had no idea what to expect of tonight. We drove up a steep, winding road and through a gate. In front of me was a sleek, long curved building, interrupted only by a wooden door. I rang the bell, Shauna opened the door. I was surprised it was her and not some black and white attired maid.

'Tina, lovely to see you, welcome to our house.'

House was an understatement. It was a massive white space. A wall of glass doors opened onto a beautifully manicured lawn terrace with spectacular views of the valley. The sun was setting into a dusky pink sky and the lights below were just starting to twinkle. Nancy was obviously not making Indie movies!

'This is spectacular!' I exclaimed.

'Yes, we've only just finished it. My sister designed it, she's an architect. We really love it. We thought we'd have a little house warming with just a few friends.'

CAPTURING the lost woman by Anna Buckley

Luckily I had brought a gift of hand stitched table linens. Something I'd purchased on Rodeo Drive, next to the spa. Not too overstated, just tasteful and elegant.

Nancy came up and greeted me.

'Tina, you look magnificent. Shauna tells me she sent you to our spa for some well deserved pampering. And that dress, where did you get it? It's stunning, like you,' she said admiringly.

'Thank you, it's one of my own creations.'

'Shauna honey, you didn't tell me your Tina was a dress designer as well as a bestselling author.'

'I don't back losers, babe,' responded Shauna, cheekily.

'Come with me, I'll introduce you to some people,' said Nancy, intimately taking my hand. I had never fancied another woman, but tonight seeing this beautiful couple together, I became slightly curious and wondered what actually happened in their bed.

We walked into the main body of the room where about twenty guests stood, mingling, drinking. The pleasant hum of quiet conversation, music playing in the background. All the guests looked stylish, I had dressed appropriately. I thought how surreal this seemed and how unlikely this would have been just one year ago. Much to my surprise the people here were very warm and welcoming. This was a party of friends. Not hustlers looking to do the next big deal.

We drank Californian wine and the appetisers reminded me of the food we had eaten the night before. Shauna must have hired the same team to do the catering.

CAPTURING the lost woman

There were a few recognisable faces, actors who looked so ordinary when not on the screen. I had no trouble chatting. People were interested in my misogyny comment and curious about Australia. The conversation flowed.

After about an hour we were ushered to the dining space where a long table was set. I felt a hand firmly touch the small of my naked back, guiding me to a seat.

'I do believe we are sitting together tonight,' said the familiar deep voice.

I turned and looked into those brilliant blue eyes, it was Dan. I felt a strange rush of warmth as we greeted each other like good friends.

'What brings you here?' I said, smiling curiously.

'You,' he said flirtatiously.

I was glad to be sitting next to someone familiar. I was keen to pick up on the conversations we'd started at lunch. The first course of sashimi was served. Appropriate for these beautiful bodies. I was very aware of him next to me. The brush of a sleeve against my bare arm, a foot accidentally touching. Dan Raven was sending out signals and I liked it. We talked to each other, to guests either side and across the table, pretending nothing was going on. Upping the ante ever so slightly as the discrete game became more daring. A hand lingering near my thigh, the sides of our bodies touching, breast rising as my breath quickened.

I felt the sudden weight of the pearls as they tumbled into my lap. A temperamental hook! I picked them up, fumbling with the catch as I tried to put them on.

'Here, let me,' said Dan.

CAPTURING the lost woman by Anna Buckley

He brushed away the stray wisps of hair and I felt his fingers run down the nape of my neck after he snapped the clasp shut. A barely perceptible arch of my back in response to his provocative touch. By dessert this subtle dance had let my mind wander. The touching had been electric, my body craved more. Some guests were starting to leave, the night was ending.

'Call your driver, tell him you won't be needing him. I'll take you home,' he whispered, as we stood to say our goodbyes.

I did as he requested and was intrigued as to where this was heading. We walked across the gravel drive to his car. The top was up, it was early December, the night air cold. He pulled up in front of my house and switched off the motor. He turned, took my face in his hands, staring intently with those deep blue eyes and then slowly kissed me.

'Would you like to come in?' I said breathlessly.

'I can't stay,' he whispered.

I pulled away, confused.

'I have an article to write, can I see you tomorrow?' he breathed.

'Yes,' I stammered, slightly disappointed.

He got out of the car and like a true gentleman opened my door. He kissed me again and I felt his hardness as he pulled me close. He walked me to the front door.

'What time tomorrow?' I asked, still bewildered.

'Early, very early,' he replied and walked away.

I went to bed baffled by his behaviour and shocked at how readily I was prepared to take another man into my bed.

Weekend with Dan

The bell rang, it was 7:00 am. I stumbled out of bed, grabbed a flimsy cotton top, pulling it on, aware it barely covered my body.

'You are early, didn't you go to bed?'

'Look outside, it's a beautiful day,' he said like an eager kid.

He looked different. He wore jeans and a tee shirt, his hair was messy and he hadn't shaved. Gone was the formally attired, well groomed person I was familiar with. The man standing in front of me looked fresh, relaxed and casual, unkempt. I barely recognised him.

'You look so different.'

'It takes a lot of effort to achieve neat,' he said grinning.

'There's a great farmers' market just up the road on West Sunset Boulevard. Saw it as I drove past. Thought we'd get a few things then head up the coast.'

'Sounds great, but I need a coffee.'

'You take a shower, get ready and I'll make some,' he said, already grabbing the cups.

Still half asleep, and a little bit hungover, I let the shower do its work.

I plodded out to the kitchen to see that he had made coffee and set the table for breakfast.

'Yum! You're domesticated,' I commented, as he pulled out a chair.

'Here sit. I thought you might need something more substantial than coffee.'

CAPTURING the lost woman by Anna Buckley

'God, you're right. I didn't think I drank that much last night, but my head is telling me something different.'

I was just collecting my thoughts about what actually did happen last night, when I remembered the awkward farewell. Digging through my post alcohol dulled brain, I tried to recall if I'd done anything to embarrass myself. I think I was ok, just a little taken aback by his rejection.

The eggs, bacon and coffee helped restore my body, clear my head.

'So what's the plan?' I asked.

'I thought we'd go for a drive along the Pacific Coast Highway. Stop at the beach, have a picnic, maybe a surf?' he said.

'Sounds great, but I can't surf.'

'You can't surf? I thought all Aussies could surf? Beaches everywhere,' he commented, sounding truly surprised.

'I live in Melbourne, more urban, more like New York. Sydney has the beaches.'

'Sydney, yeah, did a show from there a couple of years ago. Opera House and Bridge. Surf beaches close to the city, funny sounding names, Bondi, Coogee.'

'That's it, and you're right, there are lots of surf beaches, all around Australia, just not in Melbourne where I live.'

'Makes no difference, it's still a great day to sit, eat and watch the waves roll in.'

I grabbed my bag and we headed out the door, not too sure of what this day would offer.

CAPTURING the lost woman

'Where's your car?' I asked looking to the street, expecting to see the white soft top.

'Here,' he said, opening the door to a beaten up old van.

'I don't understand.'

'It's my escape vehicle, the one I hit the road with when I had my meltdown,' he said.

'It also means I can travel without being noticed. The white car is all for show. In this one nobody recognises me.'

He held the door open and I climbed up into the seat.

'Here,' he said, handing me a cap, 'Do you have sunglasses?'

'Why?'

'Travelling incognito. Today I want us to disappear. I'm leaving public Dan in town,' he said, donning a dodgy, old hat and uncool shades.

I understood his need for privacy.

We gathered together a feast of delicious produce, enough to feed a small army. He had wandered past the market stalls freely and was pleased that nobody recognised him, his disguise had worked.

We drove past the million dollar homes of Malibu and the white surf beaches, hugging the coastal road. The old van struggling at times. Dan told me we were heading to Santa Barbara, about a 2 hour drive north. I remembered seeing the movie 'Sideways', set in Santa Barbara, about two guys who spend a weekend touring the wineries, eating and having a last fling before one of them got married.

As we drove into town, he pointed out the mission style architecture, quite unique to this part of the world and yet there was a strange

CAPTURING the lost woman by Anna Buckley

familiarity. The Californian bungalow houses, the eucalyptus trees, the dry, fire scorched hills. We could be near Melbourne and the highway reminded me of the Great Ocean Road back home in Australia. I had to remind myself that we were in California and that Australia was a 15 hour flight away.

Dan said he had a place he wanted to show me. We travelled past acres of vineyards till eventually the landscape changed. No more grapes or wineries, just remote wilderness miles from any town. We drove through a set of imposing ranch gates, along a dusty road and past scrubby coastal vegetation. I was awestruck by the rugged beauty before me. Coastal dunes, a broad stretch of beach, rocky cliffs, bright blue water, waves rolling in. Not a house or a soul to be seen.

'What do you think?' said Dan.

'It's amazing! How did you know this place existed?'

'My grandfather bought it years ago, before the developers snapped up all the available land. It sits next to a national park. My dad put a caveat on the title so that no new buildings could be erected or the land divided. It's where I go to get away from it all. We used to come camping here when I was a kid,' he said, smiling.

We pulled up under a stand of tortured old pines, a small patch of grass, a green oasis amidst the wild surroundings. Some sheets of iron on the ground sat sticking out from under a few fallen branches.

'You hungry?' he asked

'I'm starving!' I replied.

It was two in the afternoon. Dan grabbed a blanket and I collected the bags of food. We walked down a sandy path, through the dunes, to the beach. It was a magnificent day, cooler than I had expected, clear bright

CAPTURING the lost woman

sunlit sky, rich azure sea. We ate, gorging ourselves, talking with our mouths full. Relaxed, chatting as if we'd known each other for years.

He took me for a walk along the beach, said he wanted to show me something, as we headed to the cliffs.

'This is where I'd come as a child and pretend to be a pirate, looking for hidden treasure,' he said as we entered a shallow cave.

I could imagine him as an angelic little fair haired kid and liked that he was revealing something private, personal. We seemed to connect.

'So how often do you get here?' I asked.

'Not often enough! The highway gets pretty busy in summer, weekends are a nightmare. I prefer the cooler months and anyway the surf's better in winter.'

'You said you surfed? Why didn't you bring your gear?'

'I did. Come with me.'

I followed him back to the camp site. He removed the old dead branches and lifted the rusty metal sheet, to expose a set of concrete stairs down to a padlocked iron door. I followed him in to a pristine bunker kitted out with supplies and camping equipment.

'Wow, you have everything here. No one would ever know.'

Dan told me his grandfather had been obsessed by the Russian Communist threat during the Cold War. He had it built to cope with the impending nuclear disaster he thought would most certainly hit the world. He was an eccentric man who used this bunker as his prototype and then made a small fortune building them all along the west coast. It seemed that many Americans held similar fears. Then Dan spoke about his father.

CAPTURING the lost woman by Anna Buckley

'Dad went to fight because he believed China was behind the Vietnamese conflict. Saw China as a bigger threat than the Russians. He continued this almost obsessive idea of impending doom, sure the Chinese would take over and wipe out all that we Americans held dear. Take away our property, our businesses, our freedom. He thought we could escape to this place, miles away from anywhere, sure no one would ever find us. Whenever he came back from active service he would insist we come to the bunker and go through a series of drills that, once rehearsed, we would seamlessly put into action if America was invaded. He would send letters to my mother insisting she kept everything well maintained, ready.'

'What happened when the war finished?' I asked.

'Well, Dad became increasingly disillusioned.'

Dan explained that his father felt the need to hang onto the idea of impending doom and when the Chinese didn't land he found a new threat. He started to obsess about climate change. He thought the earth would reap a savage vengeance on our mistreatment of the planet. Nature had usurped China. The bunker would save his family from the fires and extreme weather events he predicted would wipe out southern California.

'And your father, does he still come here?'

'No, not anymore. He shot himself, committed suicide a few years ago. He went mad, nothing could stop the voices in his head. His obsession, the things he saw in Vietnam, fucked him up.'

'God, I'm sorry. How did your mother cope?'

'I think she was quite relieved when it was over. In the end there was nothing she could do to reassure him, he lived a hermit's existence out

CAPTURING the lost woman

here. She remarried last year and moved back to New York. I don't see much of her now. She has rediscovered her Jewish faith. She never really fitted in here.'

The not fitting in, that was something I really did understand.

'And so now it's my escape, not many people know of its existence. I can come here and be truly alone, at peace. I fixed it up when I took that year off, got sick of hauling all my stuff. It means I can get away more easily.'

I looked around as he showed me the surfing gear hanging neatly in racks, near the entrance. This was the first of a series of underground concrete rooms.

'My Grandfather designed these modules so they could be interlinked, rooms that provided a semblance of normalcy if the family was trapped underground for any length of time.'

I was surprised the rooms didn't smell musty or damp and asked Dan about it.

'That was a big problem. I had an engineer look at the place and he designed a ventilation system that allowed air to circulate. There are a series of pipes that channel air from the cliff near the beach, away from any threat of smoke in the event of a fire.'

He continued to show me around. A completely stocked kitchen, cupboards filled with canned goods, dried food and bottled water. The next chamber was a spacious bedroom furnished with a double bed.

'Wow, this is hardly spartan,' I said, as we walked through.

It was painted white. A large mirror and framed black and white photos showing outdoor panoramas gave the illusion of windows. A

CAPTURING the lost woman by Anna Buckley

cupboard to one side was filled with sealed, plastic wrapped linens, towels and clothing.

'Looks like you have a touch of that family obsession?'

He laughed and told me that's how it comes back from the laundry, ironed, folded and sealed in plastic. I could see the cleaner's receipts inside. Perhaps he wasn't quite as obsessed as his forebears.

Next we walked through to another bedroom with two single beds and finally into a bathroom.

'Look hot water!' he said, turning on a tap.

I ran my hand under the slightly sulphurous smelling water and felt its warmth.

'How on earth did you do that?'

'We were trying to tap into the underground aquifer, to find a permanent water supply. This is what came up. It's drinkable, but it comes out warm.'

I looked up and noticed natural light streaming through reflective sky lit tubes in the ceiling.

'You really have thought of everything,' I said pointing to the source of the brightness.

'Well, I guess it does become quite obsessive after a while. When I fixed it up I kept thinking of how much Dad would love it. How he would love all this innovative technology.'

I marvelled at this strange, surreal place. I felt like I really had met the Omega Man. On our way out he grabbed a wetsuit and board.

'Want a suit? I have one that would fit you.'

CAPTURING the lost woman

'No thanks, I'm happy to sit on the beach. I have some writing to do.'

I sat watching him surf and imagined the release this must have given him after seeing the horrors of war. I thought about what Dan had shown me, about the lure of a safe haven. I could begin to understand this preoccupation with Armageddon. I'd read that a number of people in America shared this obsession. Many early settlers had escaped religious persecution in Europe or the poverty of a newly industrialised England, fleeing their own doomed existences, to come to America to find sanctuary. Perhaps it was hard wired into the American psyche?

I needed to write an editorial. I wrote a piece called 'Escape money, where would you go?'

It was getting late in the day. Dan emerged from the surf.

'I guess we should think about getting back. I don't really want to do that drive in the dark.'

'Yeah, I'm glad it's you driving, some of those bends were a little scary,' I commented.

'Could you give me a hand?' he said, struggling to remove his wet suit.

He unzipped the back, but couldn't seem to release his shoulders. I got up and as I started to yank down the black rubber, I was shocked by the horrific scarring I saw all over his torso. His eyes were closed, his face raised skyward, grimacing. I left the suit hanging at his hips.

'What happened?' I whispered.

He sat down, covering himself with a towel.

'Afghanistan,' he replied quietly.

CAPTURING the lost woman by Anna Buckley

We sat silently until he was ready to talk.

'I was embedded with some troops.'

He paused, then proceeded to tell me his story.

'It started out as a fairly routine patrol of the neighborhood in an armoured vehicle. We saw a young woman being beaten by a group of men and got out to investigate. It was a trap, the soldiers were shot and I was taken hostage. I was kept blindfolded for many days and had no idea of what the demands of my kidnappers were. Eventually I was taken to a room where I was videotaped and told to read from a script, basically saying that to secure my release the American government would have to find one million dollars. After a few weeks I discovered the government wouldn't pay, but negotiations had started with my employer. This became a game between negotiators from both sides. It turned out that I had been captured by a warlord just wanting money. If it had been a politically motivated kidnapping my chances of survival would have been much less.'

'Anyway this went on for months. Occasionally a guard would let me know that my employers were being stubborn and no agreement could be reached. It was frustrating, not knowing how long this process would take. I lived in fear that my captors would kill me in anger at having to wait for so long for the ransom to be paid.'

'The treatment I received was brutal. Daily beatings, isolation from people, thirst and hunger. The kidnappers had taken me to a remote, barren location, some type of outpost. My captors were holed up in a run-down mud brick dwelling. I was kept outside, exposed, in what looked like a stone animal pen, with just a canvas canopy in one corner for protection. The heat in summer was brutal, the cold of winter relentless. Most days my feet were shackled to a very short chain.'

CAPTURING the lost woman

‘Finally one night, I heard the sound of a low flying plane and then within minutes the whole place was bombed. I cowered against the wall for protection, saw a white flash of light, felt intense burning and then nothing. I woke up in hospital, I had been rescued.’

Now I knew why Dan got out. I sat closer to him and put my arm around his waist.

As the sun began to set we packed up and walked back to the van.

'Fuck!' sighed Dan, a pained expression on his face.

I could see the dimly fading headlights.

'I must've knocked the switch.'

He got inside and turned the ignition. The dull dying whir of the engine told me the battery was dead.

'Fuck, fuck, fuck!' he said thumping the dash.

He got out and looked at me.

'Do you have to be anywhere this evening?' he asked.

'No, I planned on having a quiet night in. What about you?'

'No, nothing.'

'Is there any way we can fix this?' I asked sheepishly.

We tried push starting it, but the road was too uneven for us to get any speed.

'I'll see if I can give someone a call,' he said wandering up the track to get a signal.

He returned after a few minutes, his anger dissipated.

'My mechanic will bring a new battery.'

CAPTURING the lost woman by Anna Buckley

'Great, I guess he'll be a couple of hours away?'

'Not quite, he can't make it till tomorrow. Family commitments. Looks like we're stuck here for the night.'

'Lucky we have so much food left,' I said trying to sound cheery.

'We've got enough to survive for months,' he replied in a slightly self deprecating manner, grinning, not taking himself too seriously.

We gathered wood and lit a camp-fire. It was pleasant sitting there, poking the coals, staring into the flames, something I hadn't done since I was a kid. I talked about what had happened in the last year, filled in some of the gaps not written about in the blog.

'And you, are you married?' I asked.

'Separated, have been for awhile.'

'What happened?'

'We just grew apart. When I came home she couldn't deal with me being around all the time. Our relationship had always been long distance,' he said wistfully.

'Any kids?'

'No. Timing was always wrong and the antidepressants I used to take screwed with my body.'

'How?'

'I couldn't fuck my wife. My cock couldn't get hard,' he answered with brutal honesty.

'That is one of the reasons I disappeared for a whole year. I wanted to see if I could get off the meds.'

CAPTURING the lost woman

'And did it work?' I asked, surprised at his candour.

'It did, but the marriage didn't. I guess we'll get divorced someday. We're still good friends.'

Our conversation was cut short by a sudden cold gust of wind signalling the arrival of a heavy down pour.

'I guess sleeping under the stars is out of the question?' he yelled, as we ran for shelter.

I grabbed my bag and the remaining food and followed him underground. Dan lit a gas lamp and I followed him to the kitchen.

'Here, pick something. I'm going to have a shower, wash off the salt,' Dan said, pointing to a well stocked wine cupboard.

Santa Barbara was a wine growing region, but the labels were unfamiliar. I picked a syrah, that would be safe. I caught my reflection in the mirror. I looked a bedraggled mess, my clothes were damp and I smelled of smoke. He came back into the room, towelling his wet hair, wearing only jeans. The muted light obscured his scars. He obviously felt comfortable around me.

'How rude of me, would you like a shower?'

'I'd love one, but I didn't bring a change of clothes. I didn't think we'd be away for the night.'

'Well, if you don't mind some of my stuff, I've got tee shirts and boxers that might fit. Here, come and have a look.'

We went to the cupboard in the bedroom and he showed me the selection of clothes. He ripped open the plastic and held them up for me.

'What do you think?'

CAPTURING the lost woman by Anna Buckley

'A bit big, but anything's better than what I've got on now.'

He handed me a towel and I went to the shower.

It seemed incongruous I was here, underground, taking a hot shower, washing myself with exquisite soaps and shampoo. Miles away from Australia, stuck in the middle of nowhere with a slightly fucked up rich journo. This seemed strange, even for Hollywood!

I dried myself off and put on the boxers first, white, pure cotton, they fitted well. The tee shirt was huge and suitably covered my body. I noticed that the beds had been made. The single in the second bedroom answered the question in my head about what the sleeping arrangements would be.

'Better?'

'Much, thanks.'

He poured me a drink and got out some bread and cheese. We talked for a little while until I started to feel sleepy.

'I think I might go to bed,' I said, drowsy from the long day and the wine.

'You can take my bed, I don't mind the single,' he offered politely.

I looked at his huge frame and laughed.

'Dan, I don't think you'd fit. But thanks for the offer. I'm a better size for that bed and I don't mind. It will be cosy.'

'Goodnight Tina.'

'Goodnight Dan. Thanks for a great day.'

CAPTURING the lost woman

I curled up in the crisp white cotton sheets and pulled the duvet over my shoulders. It occurred to me that this was the third time I was farewelling Dan, returning to an empty bed.

I was jolted awake by the sounds of screaming, deep guttural animal noises. It took awhile to get my bearings. I was underground in Dan's bunker. It was Dan I could hear. My instincts took over, I grabbed a torch and went to his room to see if he was ok.

He was tossing in bed, sheets strewn about the floor. I picked them up attempting to cover him, but the fitful thrashing continued. I sat down on the bed to comfort him, holding him tightly till the nightmare abated. His body slowly stopped trembling and I cradled his head in my lap, stroking his forehead until he was peaceful again. When I could hear the gentle rhythm of his breathing I placed his head on the pillow and crawled in next to him, pulling the blankets back over us, and wrapped myself against his back, holding him tight.

The dawn light woke both of us, he rolled over and looked at me, puzzled, wondering what I was doing in his bed.

'Nightmare, last night,' I whispered.

He stared with urgent eyes and held me. I felt his strong arms move firmly up my back, lifting the tee shirt, running his fingers down my spine, pulling me towards him and kissing me deeply. I responded with eager intensity and wrapped my legs around his body, feeling his awakening cock against my eager cunt. Our breathing quickened, his kisses more demanding. I reached down desperate for his body, I wanted him inside me. I grasped his cock, rubbing it against my damp sex, he stiffened to attention. He rolled me forcefully onto my back, and

CAPTURING the lost woman by Anna Buckley

wrenched down my boxers. I writhed under him freeing my legs, to open up, and then, with a forceful brutality he rammed himself into me. I thrust forward, hungry for him. We fucked with ferocity. I felt pain, transposed with intense pleasure. We both grunted and yelled as we greedily hunted for that build up of sensation before finally erupting in waves of cataclysmic pleasure.

We lay still, I could feel his heart pounding against my breast. I could smell his animal sweat and feel the heat radiating from his spent body. I had not had enough and lay there, my cunt throbbing for more. He had been taunting me, flirting outrageously over the last few days. I had built up a hunger that was far from sated. He eased himself off me and lay to one side, but I had not finished. I moved down the bed, placed his soft cock in my mouth and tasted the salty mix of his cum and my juices. I then began to swallow him deeply, taking his full length easily in its flaccid state. I sucked with a vengeance, desperate to bring him back to full rigid life. Quickly his cock lengthened, thickened and when I could no longer eat without choking I mounted his body and rode him hard. He knew I had found that sweet spot and grabbed my ass, forcing me even more deliberately upon him and again we fucked furiously until I exploded, an intense satisfaction spreading through every part of my body. This time I was done. Wordlessly he embraced me, my back cocooned against his firm, strong chest. It was still very early, we went back to sleep.

I woke in an empty bed. My watch said 11.30 I could smell coffee and followed my nose. Dan was in the kitchen preparing breakfast.

'Good morning. Coffee, juice, champagne?'

'Coffee please'

'Mmm... thanks. Have you heard from your mechanic?' I asked.

CAPTURING the lost woman

'Yeah, thinks he can get here sometime late this afternoon.'

'Well, I guess you've got plenty of time for a surf.'

'I don't think the raging weather outside will allow that. It's even worse than last night. We'll be stuck inside all day. Come and have a look.'

I went up to the entrance and saw it was pouring rain and blowing a gale. Not even a chance of a walk on the beach.

'God, it's shocking out there,' I said, slamming the door.

'What on earth are we going to do to kill time?'

'Well, we're not going to run out of food and we've barely touched the wine cellar. I propose we have a feast, and I could think of other interesting things to do if you get too bored,' he said with a suggestive smile.

'Mmm, I wonder what you have in mind?' I responded curiously.

'You'll just have to wait and see!'

He chose a wine and we sat down to eat.

'Dan, I don't understand why you come here. After what you went through in Afghanistan. Don't you feel confined, captive?"

'Quite the opposite. I feel safe, secure, in control. When I was being held, I would be left for days with barely enough food or water to live, isolated and exposed outside. This was a complete mind fuck for someone like me whose father and grandfather had an almost morbid fascination with Armageddon. They knew what was needed, they meticulously planned and prepared for survival. Their end of the world looked nothing like my imprisonment in Afghanistan. However I was no

CAPTURING the lost woman by Anna Buckley

fool and was not prepared to sit down and die. I caught insects, lizards, ate anything that wouldn't kill me. Dug holes in the earth to catch water when it rained. Prolonged my chances of staying alive.'

We continued to eat, drink and talk.

'I get it. I understand your need to create this safe place, but quite frankly I feel a bit strange. I don't know how long I could stay down here, it's a bit claustrophobic,' I said, looking around this bizarre, alien environment. No big windows or open air spaces like the architecture I was so fascinated with.

I told him about the farm, the road and that different form of incarceration.

'I actually feel quite trapped.'

'But you shouldn't, you have everything here you need, and you are free to go.'

'Well, not right now.'

'So you don't fancy being my prisoner? I would look after you,' he said with a devilish grin.

'Dan, I couldn't think of a nicer person to hold me captive, but aren't we treading on dangerous territory here. Doesn't even the mention of capture scare you?'

'Actually I have this pretty fucked up fantasy about being here in a post apocalyptic world,' he said.

'No kidding?' I said wryly.

CAPTURING the lost woman

'I've often wondered how I'd cope being here on my own. I fantasise about the idea of finding another survivor, a woman and what that'd be like. Would she stay, how would I establish trust?'

'And hoping that 'survival woman' wasn't some barren, toothless old hag?' I said, smiling, bringing him back to earth.

'Well, it is my fantasy and, of course, she would be beautiful, nubile and desirous. She might be someone just like you?' he replied smiling, his stunning blue eyes twinkling with the thought.

'Might she just?' I said flirtatiously, the wine loosening my tongue.

I was becoming quite intrigued by the picture he was painting. We had a whole afternoon to kill and I began to think of how I could make the next few hours a bit more interesting. I casually walked up to the door, slid the bolt and opened it. The storm had become more violent. I leaned heavily against the door, closing it, briefly shutting out the noise.

'One thing that you would have to remember, Mr. Raven, is to lock your captive in!' I yelled back as I yanked the door open, escaping outside and running as fast as I could.

I headed for the nearest cluster of bushes and watched as he emerged from the bunker and ran toward the beach. When he was out of sight, I left my cover and sprinted for the sand dunes, where I would be slightly more sheltered from the rain. I saw him briefly come up from the beach and scout around, but still he could not find me. My heart was beating not only from the physical exertion, but also from the shot of adrenalin this game of adult hide and seek was giving me. He came close and I shrank even further behind the undergrowth, almost too scared to breath, aware that any movement might tip him off.

CAPTURING the lost woman by Anna Buckley

He went past, more deeply into the dunes and out of sight. I had eluded him, but needed to find somewhere more protected from the driving wind and rain. I remembered the cave we had walked to, it was not far and Dan was headed the other way.

At last, some shelter. I was freezing and began to realise what an idiot I had been coming out wearing only a tee shirt and boxers. I wouldn't last long in this cold, somehow I had to get back to the bunker without being caught. I kept my eyes out for Dan, but could see no trace of him. He must have gone to the other end of the beach. I was ready for my next sprint. Cautiously I started to climb back up the dune, the coast was clear. Suddenly I felt a rope, lassoing me from behind, bringing me to an abrupt halt. My arms were trapped tightly against my body. A rough blanket was tossed over me and I could feel more rope binding me. I was completely encased. I screamed at him, demanding he let me go. He ignored my pleas and tossed me over his shoulder. He was rough, I was freezing cold and pissed off that he had won. The door slammed, silence, we were back inside.

I felt him dump me across the table, take off the outer ropes and pull away the blanket.

'Untie me you fucking bastard!' I shrieked as I writhed, trying to disentangle myself from the clutches of the lasso cutting into my skin.

'We can't have this noise Madam, you will need to learn to be quiet!' he said harshly, pulling off his tee shirt, ripping it apart to form a gag and tying it around my mouth. His broad chest heaved from exertion. He ran the back of his hand across his forehead, wiping the sweat, combing away the hair falling over his eyes, looking at me lustily.

My heartbeat quickened. I could feel the growing warmth between my legs and liked this twist to our game very much. Before he released

CAPTURING the lost woman

the lasso he bound my feet and tied my hands. I was still his captive. My desire grew.

'You are cold, I must get you out of these wet clothes,' he said.

My body shivered, nipples erect.

He produced a pair of scissors. First he cut through the front of my tee shirt and wrenched back the wet cloth, exposing my breasts. I felt his warm mouth engulf one, then the other, sucking hard. I let out a stifled groan. He cut the boxers, ripping them away, leaving me naked and exposed. The gag remained. I could barely take in enough oxygen, panting with desire, wondering what he would do next. I watched as he stripped off his wet clothing and again he tossed me, effortlessly, over his shoulder and headed to the shower.

A blast of steaming hot water poured over my back, warming me up, matching the heat building deep within my belly. His hands running along my spine, between my ass, slipping easily inside my willing sex, hot and wet, so very hungry to be fucked hard. I felt his weight shift, one strong arm tucked under my buttocks holding me firmly against his chest, the other hand withdrawn, running down my thigh to my ankles, pulling at the rope, unbinding my feet, till eventually my legs were free. Instinctively I opened them, wrapping my legs around his body, sliding down his torso, while he held me firmly against him. I felt the nuzzling of his huge thick cock. Swiftly he responded, pulling me down, impaling me on his rigid phallus, groaning at the sheer audacity of his action. Almost completely immobilised I communicated by squeezing my vaginal muscles firmly around him. He let out a deep moan, and reciprocated by violently pounding into me, forcing himself deeper and harder inside. He thrust until I could take no more. My back arched as my body gave in to the overwhelming sensations of this most savage euphoria. He drove

CAPTURING the lost woman by Anna Buckley

hard against my womb, until he, too, came violently. We were both panting and breathless. Exhausted, we collapsed to the floor, hot water still running over our bodies.

We sat like this for what seemed like ages, until I felt the delicious sensation of his cock coming back to life, wakening deep inside me. Still mounted on him, he struggled to his feet and carried me into the bedroom. The thrust of each step, pushing against my cervix, building a new level of arousal.

He deftly lifted me off him and tossed me onto the bed. I watched as he gathered the pillows, one on top of the other, then lifted me so I lay face down, my buttocks mounted high. He knelt on the bed, behind me. I felt him part my legs, open and wide. His hand stroked my gaping, exposed sex and spread my wet juices all over the tender folds. With my hands still tied hard against my back, he grabbed my wrists, linking his fingers through the ropes, and, without warning he rammed into me, entering from behind, pulling my bindings toward him like a bronco rider, fucking me hard, brutally. I had never felt such exhilaration and arched my spine driving my buttocks back at him with equal fervour. He let out a cry with each thrust, quicker and harder until he howled with ecstasy and we came together with shattering ferocity. He collapsed on top of me, panting, exhausted.

Slowly he lifted himself away from me and I heard the sound of his bare feet slapping on the concrete. He returned and cut the ties from my wrists, licking and sucking the delicate skin. He then removed the pillows and with ease rolled my limp body over. He cut the gag and slowly kissed my lips. I opened my mouth, our tongues hungrily connecting.

CAPTURING the lost woman

The sex had been fast and aggressive. I realised I had a lot of pent up anger, it seemed we both did.

'I've never taken a woman here, like that, before,' he spoke breathlessly.

And I'd never had such brutal sex, shocked by how exhilarated I felt by his capture and my submission. We fell asleep, exhausted.

Eventually the light changed, the sun was out, the storm had passed, we could leave our private chamber. I wanted to stay. I turned to look at him as he slept. His fiery scars were in full view. I traced my fingers along the damaged, imperfect skin and he reacted by covering his torso, grimacing with a remembered pain. Gently I took his hand and lifted it away, placing it back down on the sheet. I lay my cheek on his chest and listened to his beating heart. He put a protective arm around me. I continued to touch and noticed his heartbeat changing, and as it quickened I looked down seeing his cock faintly stir.

'I want to see your cock rise,' I whispered in his ear.

'Think about me fucking you, riding you hard deep inside me,' I continued, breathlessly.

I was entranced. Slowly it began to raise itself from its soft cushion, nestled against his balls and move to one side as it began to grow. The head emerged, shiny as the velvety skin became engorged and pulled away. I took his hand and placed it between my legs, letting him feel the wetness of my arousal. His penis lifted from his firm flattened stomach and stretched and thickened exposing the skin seam. The thick vein underneath formed a distinct separate ridge, and I knew he was now ready. I lifted my hips over his torso and then smoothly slid straight down on his rigid cock and gently began to rock, until he was so deep

CAPTURING the lost woman by Anna Buckley

inside me that I could barely stand the intense pressure. And I couldn't stop. I needed the ferocity of a hard fucking. Again he grabbed me, forcing his way deeper until I screamed out and felt the familiar pulsation of his cock, shooting cum deep inside me.

His phone rang. He hastily withdrew. It had come to an end. The mechanic was waiting at the gate. Dan told me to wait inside, the battery would be exchanged and we could get back to LA. I got dressed, cleaned up and after an hour or so we were ready to leave.

The evening fog made for a difficult trip. Dan seemed to be in deep thought, glancing over at me only occasionally. Neither of us spoke. I was wondering about tonight, tomorrow, knowing we had connected at a very deep level. It was a long drive home.

We pulled up in front of the house. He got out and, in that gentlemanly American style, opened my door. His piercing blue eyes looked at me longingly as we stood on the pavement and I kissed him passionately.

'Please, Dan, stay with me,' I whispered.

He couldn't, mumbled he had commitments. Our unexpected weekend had left us both a day behind. Something wasn't right.

I entered the house feeling truly alone. My computer gave me the answers. Dan Raven wasn't separated from his wife. The article spoke of the deep affection between the couple who defied Hollywood odds by staying happily married all these years. Photos showed him celebrating a birthday, a kid's party last Friday night. That night at dinner he had arrived late because he had been hosting his son's tenth birthday. No wonder he couldn't stay.

'Fuck, fuck, fuck!'

CAPTURING the lost woman

What had I done?

I had spent the last nineteen years being someone's perfect little wife. Trying to fit in with a group of people who resented my very existence. Then, with Adam, I nearly walked straight back into that world, lured by the temptation of adoration and an unrealistic belief that love would conquer all.

And today, here in California, thinking I was free to start again, only to be caught up in another man's fucked up utopia, potentially at the expense of his family. I wondered how he would explain what he'd been doing all weekend, to the wife left at home coping with the reality of the everyday.

I felt disappointed in myself for being so willing to walk straight into another man's arms. Not stopping to think about what I might have to give up if I were to have another relationship and what sacrifices I would have to make.

Had I succumbed to the naive idea some women have of being rescued by a man? That all I would have to do is love this flawed Prince Charming and my world would be perfect. What did any of us really expect? What did Dan's wife expect? Did she feel less attractive, less interesting, less like the woman a man would want to come home to? A man who needed to take a lover, not his wife, to his place of sanctuary. Where was her place of sanctuary? Who knew of the compromises she had to make bringing up his child, juggling home, work, marriage, dealing with the complicated man who was Dan Raven. Her knight in shining armour had betrayed her and spent the weekend with me. How different the fairytale becomes when reality sets in.

Sometimes it's particularly difficult when we try to be all things to all people. The compromised wife, mother, lover, breadwinner, friend.

CAPTURING the lost woman by Anna Buckley

Stretched beyond capacity needing to fill other people's expectations of what a woman should be. Often so harshly judged when we fail in a world so heavily weighted against our success.

When we try to compete with our male colleagues who rarely have to race home before day care closes, or when we arrive late to an early morning breakfast meeting because we've been trying to get the kids off to school. Doing two jobs, exhausted at the end of the day, with a husband wondering why we are no longer interested in sex.

And if a woman decides to stay at home and raise the kids, the so called ideal, they are left in a state of financial servitude with nothing in their superannuation accounts and no financial autonomy. Often undervalued, with their partners questioning what is was that they actually did all day.

Then there are those mums without a partner, raising their kids on their own, who are considered to be damaging the well being of the fatherless generation. As if it's entirely the fault of the mother that the child's dad is not present. Or that the welfare dependent mother is the fiscal cancer eroding the very fabric of our society, not a woman just desperately trying to raise her kids in an almost impossible state of poverty.

Misogyny was endemic and my 'Escape Money' would give a new voice to a world that needed change. I was so angry at myself for pretending it was any other way. I didn't need rescuing or a man to make me whole.

Tomorrow I would be back. The tour would continue with me solely focused on publicising the book, building the brand that would protect and insulate me from the danger of dependency.

The Power of One Woman

Shauna arrived at seven the next morning. I had been up since dawn, looking over my schedule and shoved the timetable in her face before she could sit down.

'Looks a bit light on, I think we should make better use of the time. Lots of gaps I might as well fill while I'm in the States. Here, here and here. I have absolutely no need for down time and can catch up on sleep during the flight home,' I demanded, pointing to vacant spots on the planner.

'Wow, what's eating you?' said Shauna.

'Nineteen years of wasted time!'

'Jesus Tina, I'd been pushing you hard, I give you the weekend off, and you're more manic than when I left you. What's going on?'

'I've been such a fuckwit!'

'What do you mean? I thought you'd had a quiet weekend in? No reports of you in the papers. Paparazzi had nothing to show. In this town that means nothing happened.'

I blurted out the events of the last forty eight hours, relieved at being able to make my confession.

'There, there honey,' she said patting my hand, 'you're not the first person to fall for that story.'

'What, so the charming Mr Dan Raven isn't the man I read about in the press? Loving father, family man?'

CAPTURING the lost woman by Anna Buckley

‘He probably is, and he might also be the man he told you he was, the one you spent the weekend with. But Tina, this is Hollywood, you can be whoever you want. And darling girl, as your publicist, it’s my job to create the person we want the world to see. Nothing here is real.’

She was right. She sat me down and got us both a coffee.

‘And the reason there are gaps in your schedule is that we have to be flexible and, if you’d let me get a word in, I’ll tell you about the good news I received earlier this morning,’ she said grinning like a Cheshire cat.

‘Sorry, I didn’t mean to dump that on you first thing. Guess I was feeling a bit guilty, a bit stupid. Thanks for listening. Now what’s this news you have?’

‘A particular someone wants you on her show this afternoon,’ she replied rather cryptically.

‘Who?’

‘Aura Wainwright.’

‘You’re kidding! How did you pull that off? I thought it took weeks of negotiation to get on to her show?’

‘Normally it does, but when you’re the hottest ticket in town, even they find the time.’

Aura Wainwright had a daily show. It was watched by millions of people all over the world. She had become a kind of mother confessor to women everywhere. They would tune in everyday to hear her interview the most elusive, controversial and famous people on the planet. She had an uncanny ability to get people to open up to her. And unlike many celebrities was completely open about herself. We followed her battle

CAPTURING the lost woman

with weight, with relationships. She was like a dear friend, had the same problems and insecurities we all faced. She was just like us. Except that she wasn't. She was Americas richest media star, had created an empire, her wealth measured in the billions, her influence worldwide.

'So what happens next? What do they want me to do, to talk about?'

'They've got their money expert on today. Want to do a show about empowering women. Getting them to understand how to liberate themselves from debt, how to build financial freedom. They want you to talk about your own journey. It will be taped this afternoon and go to air tomorrow.'

What Shauna was saying was quickly sinking in. I could pull off the interview easily. What was really amazing was the realisation at what this might mean for my business. The Chris Brown brand, the books, the blog, the dresses and little old me, were about to go global. I rang Cindy and she, for the very first time, was speechless.

'Cindy, are you there? Hello Cindy?'

'Sorry boss, just trying to get my head around what this will mean. You know we could go into meltdown if we're not prepared?'

'Yeah, I know. Ring Chenda, warn her about what might happen, get her to make sure the co-suppliers are ready. Make sure the I.T. team are geared up. Call in whoever you think we might need, spend as much as necessary. This is a once in a lifetime opportunity, we can't fuck it up.'

We wrote lists of who and what would be needed to make this work. Extra staff would have to be hired to take calls, follow up on enquiries. A sales team would have to let our advertisers know what was coming and we would need to send out press releases alerting the traditional media outlets of tomorrow's show.

CAPTURING the lost woman by Anna Buckley

Shauna rang the publishers. They would handle the extra demand on book sales, printed copies of 'Escape Money' were being dispatched across the country immediately. Copies for the Christmas rush would be sent out early. The printers were called, warned that the demand for the book, after the interview, might exceed all expectations and that they needed to get their presses rolling if they too wanted to cash in on the interview.

The 'Aura Effect' was the term used when a book, a movie, a charity, any product featured on her show. Real rags to riches stories were told of the people whose lives changed dramatically after an endorsement by Aura Wainwright. It would be tough going, but I trusted Cindy and knew she would rise to the challenge.

Shauna spent the next hour making calls and sending emails, rearranging things to fit this change of plans.

The interview was scheduled for four in the afternoon. It would be done in the Seattle studios, headquarters of Aura Wainwright Enterprises, or AWE as it was colloquially known. It would be the final taping for the day. I hoped we had enough time to put everything in place.

We had been working solidly for three hours. I looked at my watch, it was ten in the morning. I Googled flight times, Los Angeles to Seattle, and was shocked to see that the flight could sometimes take almost three hours, depending on the time of day, wind speeds, airport traffic. For some reason I thought it was only a short flight, maybe one hour away. A moment of panic ensued.

'Fuck, Shauna, we're running out of time. Seattle can be almost a three hour flight. By the time we get through the traffic, we'll barely have enough time for make-up,' I cried frantically.

CAPTURING the lost woman

‘She of so little faith! I think we’ve both done about as much as we can do here. I noticed your bags were packed, I have a driver waiting. Trust me, we’ll get there on time. Take a deep breath, pack up your computer and let’s go.’

In her usual efficient manner Shauna had already called the driver, the car was running, the doors open. I didn’t recognise the route, Shauna told me we would be leaving from Van Nuys, not LAX.

‘How come?’

‘You’ll see.’

And see I did. Waiting on the tarmac was a private jet. Our bags were loaded and we climbed the stairs to be greeted by an impeccably groomed steward.

‘Welcome aboard Mrs Brown, Shauna, my name is Jason and I’ll be looking after you on this flight.’

Pale interior, soft leather seats. We sat down and Jason brought us a drink.

‘I like your style Shauna!’

‘I like yours even more Tina Maxwell, cheers!’

No long queues, no waiting at airports, not even sharing the flight. Shauna was right, she would get us there on time. How my life had changed.

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Finding the Lost Woman

(book three in the lost woman trilogy)

Christina returns to her family and friends after her ordeal in Tasmania. She tries to convince herself that all will be well and that the voices in her head can be silenced.

Originally Christina created her blog to tell the truth, but now feels disconnected to the massive empire she has created. After her lies are exposed she seeks a simpler life.

Christina discovers the truth about her family's past.

How do you break down the protective emotional barriers you have built up over the years and confront what is truth?

Will she find sanctuary, a place where she can be her true self. Can she ever find lasting love?

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