



*The
Broadmoor
Affairs*

JOAN
VOSS

The Broadmoor Affairs
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For Gary

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Chapter One

Victoria Robbins was having the mid-life crisis of a lifetime. After learning that her best friend, Sandra, eloped to the Bahamas, she rolled onto her side and curled her legs beneath her on her king-size bed. Although Sandra's postcard depicting a dazzling white beach sparked her jealousy, Victoria knew that it was useless to compete, and for a second, she considered changing into her jogging clothes and running around Lake Charles. The lake was just one of the amenities that she and her husband Jeff were lucky enough to enjoy while living in their historic Broadmoor neighborhood.

Broadmoor, a far northern suburb of Chicago, was considerably one of the most desirable locations in the entire state of Illinois with an average real estate value of one million dollars. People commonly visited the area to take advantage of White Deer Run, the area's award-winning golf course, and to frequent its chic boutiques and restaurants. However, after buying their seventy-five-year-old house from an elderly couple for much less than market value, Jeff and Victoria quickly learned that a renovation was necessary. And, with a full restoration underway, Victoria knew that an exotic vacation was simply out of the question.

Summer romances with boys from long ago danced in

her head as she stared up at the ceiling, wondering where the time had gone. Although she felt silly for thinking about former boyfriends, she couldn't help but recall how thrilling those days truly were. Not that she considered herself old (she was forty, and given the stares from men, still lovely), but she sensed that the world around her celebrated youth to a fault, disregarding people from her age group. However, it didn't stop her from daydreaming about those carefree days. There was her part-time job as a waitress at the popular Rizzo's Pizzeria in downtown Chicago, after-school adventures with her zany friends, and of course, dates with those proverbial 'boys of summer' who chased her as if she were the most desirable woman on earth, elevating her self-esteem.

Even Jeff treated her like a queen, hiring her immediately to assist him with his legal matters, although what she really wanted to do was write for a living. She had written extensively for her school paper, the Mundelein College Bulletin, and her commentaries were gaining attention in local newspapers, but she pushed her writing dreams aside. Practicality prevailed. She felt she had many years to accomplish her goals, and the fact that she was fresh out of college fed the illusion that time was on her side. She sought a well-paying job to repay her student loans and wound up in Jeff's office, wearing her red eighties-style power suit, hoping the gods would smile upon her and that he would offer her a job. He was seven years older than her, and she found him incredibly sexy but never thought that she would marry him. Being so young, she didn't want to get serious with anyone, but her conviction fell away, and after saying "I do" the boys of summer evaporated into the past where she felt they belonged. *Now*, she thought pragmatically, *they're*

men who probably take Viagra to keep their wives satisfied. But Jeff wasn't taking anything.

Damn him, thought Victoria. *How long can I drop hints about sex without feeling like a desperate fool?* There was something wrong with her marriage—for one thing, he didn't seem to recognize that they hadn't had sex for several years—and it didn't seem to bother him at all. This cocktail of unhappiness permitted her to daydream about all sorts of men, but it wasn't until the arrival of their contractor, Justin Sebring, that she began to actually take the fantasies seriously.

When Justin arrived on her doorstep over a month ago to begin the renovation, he appeared unable to hide his romantic interest in her despite her married status. She wondered if she had unconsciously given off a “vibe,” but when Jeff mentioned that Justin was divorced, she simply regarded him as a man on the prowl. But she would never let on that he drove her wild each time she caught him staring at her—she wouldn't permit it—but the level of sexual tension between them was rising by the day as he attempted to seek her affections.

She walked out of her bedroom and into the kitchen where she faced a terrible mess; the ceiling, formerly an expanse of cracked gold plastic, was gone, revealing the ugliest wallpaper she had ever seen. All of the dark brown cabinets were missing and the appliances were coated with a thick layer of dust and debris. The room, which felt like an eerie old warehouse, took her mind off of Justin for a moment as she imagined refurbished cabinets and clean, white walls. She knew the kitchen would have to look horrible at first, but what really concerned her most was the noise level. How would she ever finish the final draft of her book over the din

of power drills and saws? And it wasn't just the kitchen that needed a makeover; the horrid bathroom with its broken tile floor begged for attention as well as the exterior that was clearly overdue for a paintjob.

Writing was the only thing that kept her going now that her life had taken on a new direction. She took one last look at the postcard from Sandra before her cell phone began chirping and clicked the little green 'answer' button, hoping it wasn't Ruby, Jeff's legal assistant, who sounded too sultry for her own good. After saying hello, a voice that sounded vaguely familiar said gruffly, "Yeah, Jeff there?" She banged on the kitchen window until Jeff dropped his rake onto an enormous pile of leaves.

The next thing Victoria did was leave the room. She didn't like listening to Jeff's conversations any more than she enjoyed him eavesdropping on her. She descended the six steps into the basement where their cat, Watson, was sleeping, but he awakened when she approached, looking like a wise old owl in his cat bed. After petting his soft gray fur, she heard the back door slam and returned upstairs to look out the back window. Sure enough, Jeff was piling leaves onto their fire pit as the sun made its rapid descent. She pulled her sweater around her shoulders and went outdoors, banging the door behind her.

"Who was that on the phone?" she asked as a chilly wind descended on them.

But Jeff had obviously grown bored with his work and threw the rake down. "Justin. He'll be here with the plumber first thing tomorrow," he answered.

Victoria was shocked. Justin's voice was so unfriendly that it was unrecognizable. "Oh? It didn't sound like him."