

His Forbidden Submissive

By

Brandi Evans

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Prologue

His sub was quite spectacular when she came.

Brock Michaels stood between the splayed legs of the woman tied open to him. Her ample breasts quivered with each unsteady breath she raked in. Creamy thighs invited his attention, the invitation complemented by the dark thatch of curls surrounding her pussy, the spot where his fingers were currently shoved, thrusting into her, this pretty little sub who had willingly given herself to him for the night. But only ever for the night. Until the sun rose, she was his to use, to enjoy.

To control.

“Sir,” she said, and groaned through her fourth climax of the evening, the inner walls of her channel soaked and pulsating around his fingers.

Brock drank in every inch of her. “You are so animated when I make you come, little sub. It pleases me.”

But *she* didn’t please him. Not really. Not in any way that truly mattered. How could she? She wasn’t the woman he loved.

When her labored breaths transitioned into shallow puffs, he leaned close and examined her. Long brown curls clung to her sweat-glistened forehead, her cheeks. He drew a knuckle over her jaw.

“What do you think? Have I made you come enough for the night, sub? Or would you like more?”

As he waited for her response, he twisted and turned his fingers inside her. The sheer amount of honeyed heat sent lust rocketing straight to his groin, working his cock from aroused to rock-fucking-hard. Maybe tonight, if he tried really hard, he could get more than his cock to participate in their scene, but he wasn’t holding his breath.

His excitement hadn’t extended above waist level for the past year.

“I’d like more, Sir.” She lifted her head and stared at him through glassy eyes. “Please.”

“Good answer. But this time...” He withdrew his fingers from her body and grabbed one of the condoms littering the nearby table. “I’m going to fuck you to climax.”

“Oh, thank you, Sir. Thank you.”

He wasted no time freeing the erection straining his leathers and then rolling the rubber onto his length. He wasted even less time plunging deep into her ravished pussy and pounding like crazy.

“Sir!” she screamed as he fucked her, begging him to take her harder, and he did his best to keep her screaming as long as he could.

In no time, he had her teetering on the edge of another apex, but *his* climax was a totally different story. He still needed more, but what he needed he couldn’t get from the beauty on the end of his cock, or any of the random subs who had come before her. He needed the one woman in the cosmos he could never have.

No. Brock closed his eyes and forced down the sudden images threatening to overwhelm him. *No.* He couldn’t have her, and thinking about her would only cause him more heartache. But keeping her memory at bay was like trying to hold back a raging river with a bottle of Krazy Glue and a handful of popsicle sticks.

“Fuck!”

With the fury of a tsunami racing toward a coastline, images of the woman he loved bombarded him.

Vivian.

Emotions he hadn't been able to purge stampeded through him, infused him with a need that only sliding into her petite body would slake. Image after image filtered through his mind. Despite their separation, he still wanted her with every fucking breath he took.

What would it take to finally get her out from under his skin?

If gallivanting the globe, putting the finishing touches on the house he'd built, and launching his own brand-spanking-new BDSM club and BDSM-themed restaurant didn't do the trick, what the fuck would? He needed Viv like a Dom needed a sub, but he couldn't have her. Not unless—

He throttled the rest of the thought before it could fully manifest. He loved Viv, yes, but he couldn't have her. To claim her would be a betrayal, even if the man he'd be betraying didn't deserve his loyalty. And if by some miracle he ever could have Viv, he'd have to tell her about his BDSM lifestyle, which would probably send her screaming for the hills.

No two ways about it; fate had dealt him one shitty hand.

Pounding into his sub faster, harder, Brock let his frustrations fuel his moves. He pistoned into his sub's heat, but his near-frantic thrusts did jack shit to mend the gaping wound in his chest. Nothing, no one, would ever be able to heal that wound. No one except Vivian.

His forbidden submissive.

Chapter One

Her hands didn't quiver. Regret didn't slither in the pit of her stomach. Her breath remained as tranquil as the inner sanctum of a monastery. After all the lies, all the betrayals, and all the mistresses, Vivian Michaels was a free woman. Well, as close as she could get until everything was finalized.

But, damn, it was a fantastic start.

She'd needed out of her acidic marriage for a long time, but ending a ten-year partnership should leave something more than happiness reverberating in her soul, right? Obviously not. She couldn't stop smiling.

She set her pen on the table. "There. It's done."

Her longtime attorney, Anne, placed her hand on Viv's. Concern painted the other woman's face with the softest lines Vivian had ever seen on the tough-as-nails lawyer.

"Given your crazy smile," Anne said, "I almost feel stupid asking this, but you're *sure* you want to do this, right? Once Eugene's been served with—"

"I'm positive, Anne." Not even an ounce of hesitation weighed down Viv's words, and it took every ounce of willpower she possessed not to get up and dance around the restaurant like a drunken idiot. "Without a doubt. I should have done this years ago, after I caught him with his first mistress, but I was young and afraid. I didn't have a career to fall back on, but all that's changed. My design company's as strong as it's ever been."

"Very true. It's just—" Anne gave Vivian's hand a reassuring squeeze. "I'm just worried about you, sweetie. You've been through so much lately. I just want you to be sure—"

"I'm one hundred percent sure." Viv gave the other woman what she hoped was a convincing smile. "My divorce has been a long time coming."

And wasn't that an understatement? She'd been on the verge of filing for divorce two years before, but then she'd been diagnosed with—

Fear saturated her as thoroughly as an unexpected monsoon and kept *that* word from forming. Even now the mere thought of *that* word made her shiver. It was stupid. It was just a word. It held no power. But more importantly, she'd beaten it; she'd survived the nearly impossible odds. The word shouldn't scare her anymore.

She forced down the cloud of terror and made herself conjure the word.

Cancer.

She'd been in remission for almost a year, but even then, thinking back on that long, dark battle threw her emotions into a tailspin. Six painful months of being hooked to machines, which had killed the cancer cells in her uterus only slightly faster than the treatment had been killing her. And she probably would have died, surrendered to the pain, if it hadn't been for one man.

Her brother-in-law, Brock Michaels.

While her husband had been busy at the office, too busy to bother dealing with a dying wife, Brock had glued himself to her bedside. He'd sat with her during each chemo session, washed her face after each retching wave of nausea. He'd read to her, watched TV with her, held her hand—held *her* when the reality she might die overwhelmed her. He'd showed her love and compassion when she'd needed it most.

Was it any wonder she'd fallen head over heels in love with every sinewy, tattooed, pierced, motorcycle-riding six-foot-three inches of him?

Her heart fluttered as she recalled her sexy-as-sin savior. Brock was everything she'd never known she'd wanted. Or needed. He'd been her anchor, and over the course of her treatments, she'd fallen for him. He'd come to care deeply for her, too. Their incredible kiss at her remission party had proven that fact—at least she'd thought it had. But the morning after, without so much as a goodbye, Brock had abandoned her.

And she'd been left heartbroken.

Viv shook off the memory. “As I was saying, my divorce has been a long time coming. This isn't some knee-jerk reaction to beating cancer, I promise you. I'm sick and tired of Eugene's manipulations. I'm tired of him trying to control me every hour of every day. I'm—”

“Control you?” The other woman's laughter floated over the dull roar of the lunch crowd, mischief twinkling in her green eyes. “I'd like to meet a man who could actually put a collar on your feisty ass.”

Put a collar on her? Odd wording, but still effective. Collars spoke of control, something humans put on the animals they owned, and her bastard husband had always acted as if she were his damn possession. Yet another reason she was leaving his sorry ass.

“So, okay.” Anne took a quick sip of her chocolate martini. “You want out of your marriage. That's obvious. But what about the other part of your plan?”

Vivian shrugged. “What about it?”

“Are you sure it's the smartest way to test your feelings? Or Brock's?”

“Probably not.” Vivian's gaze dropped to her freshly manicured fingernails. *Hooker red*. That was what the nail tech had called the color. Somehow, considering what her plan actually involved, it seemed fitting. “What I felt for Brock was so strong. I can't believe he didn't feel it, too, but regardless, I can't be left wondering if what I felt was genuine or some warped form of hero worship.”

“I understand that, sweetie. I do. But there have got to be better ways of learning what you want. Have you considered, I don't know, being upfront with—”

“No.” Vivian shook her head, her earrings whacking her chin and neck with the jerky movement. “I don't want Brock to have any expectations. If I'm upfront with him, he could turn me down flat. He might take me up on my offer but then hold back. There are so many ways having expectations on his part could screw this up.”

“No expectations. I get that. I do. But your plan has its own set of expectations, too, sweetie, like making Brock think you see him as nothing more than a piece of meat. Is that what you want?”

“Of course not. It's just—” Hurting Brock was the last thing she wanted. She loved him too much for that, but the alternative was much worse. “If I simply waltz back into his life and proclaim I love him, he might shut me down right there, knowing I had feelings for him, feelings he didn't return.”

“But wouldn't *that* answer your question?”

Vivian bit her bottom lip. It'd answer it, all right, and in the most heartbreaking way possible. It'd mean Brock didn't love her. Almost as devastatingly, it'd mean she'd have to go the rest of her life sharing only one incredible kiss with him and wasn't *that* the greatest evil, never experiencing full-body contact with the man she loved?

Her body heated the way it always did when she imagined being naked in Brock's strong arms. She wanted to trace every line of every tat on his body, first with her fingertips, then with her tongue. She wanted to run her palms over his almost-shaved head as his lips explored her body; wanted to bury her face in the crevice of his neck and breathe in the musky scent that had refused

to leave her thoughts alone; wanted to feel his stubble scrape over her nipples, her belly, her clit; wanted to straddle him and ride his cock until—

She cut the thought off. She needed to know whether he returned her feelings, yes, but just as importantly, she needed to experience him, every hard, incredible inch of him. She needed to give in to the hormone-laced emotions that circumstances had forced her to keep bottled up, needed to experience one moment in time where she was submissive to her body's needs, to her heart's needs.

And her plan would give her the opportunity.

She patted Anne's hand. "I appreciate your concern, I do, but trust me, this way's best."

She hoped so anyway.

Anne sighed. "Since it seems I can't talk you out of this..." The other woman produced another legal document from her attaché. "Here ya go. The contract you asked me to draw up between you and Brock."

"Thank you."

Vivian took the papers, her hands finally starting to shake a bit, but she wasn't backing out now. She'd cleared her schedule for the next few weeks. One way or the other, with or without Brock at her side, she was making some major changes in her life.

Anne slipped a business card with a familiar logo onto the table in front of Viv. "Just in case things don't go well with Brock and you need a place to stay for the night, go to the Wynmore downtown. My brother's the manager. Just tell whoever's at the front desk you're a client of mine and they'll give you a room. No credit card or name required. Everything's billed straight to me, so there'll be no chance whatsoever of Eugene tracking you down—if he's got the notion in his head, anyway."

"Thank you *so* much." Hopefully, she wouldn't need it, but it was nice to know it was there. The thought that Brock might turn her away was a nagging annoyance in the back of her mind. "This is really going above and beyond. I don't know what I'd do without you."

Anne winked as she signaled for the waitress. "Be miserable, no doubt."

Viv couldn't help but smile. Anne Cooper was a godsend—and quickly becoming a very good friend.

As the waitress stopped to converse with Anne, Viv's gaze drifted to the contract in her hands, and a hint of regret finally slithered through her. She hated being less than honest with Brock, but a girl had to do what a girl had to do. She'd beaten cancer, gotten a second chance at life and, by god, she was taking it. But before plunging headlong into that shiny new life, she needed to know the answer to the one question still haunting her.

Was the love she felt for Brock true or nothing more than a chemo-induced illusion?

It was official. His muse had abandoned him.

That heartless bitch.

Brock ripped yet another sketch from his drafting table and chucked it at the overflowing wastebasket in the corner of his home office. If Her Royal Fickleness didn't get back soon, he'd be fucked. The design meeting for the new McDonald Executive Complex was less than a week away—a design meeting that could break him into a mainstream line of architecture—and he hadn't even penned a viable sketch, let alone a working model.

All thanks to his fucking muse.

She'd always been a bit elusive. What muse wasn't? But for the past year, she'd been particularly spacey. More often than not, he'd had to drag her kicking and screaming from the

depths of his creativity. Distraction, on the other hand, had no problem coming out to play at every opportunity.

But he had to get it together or he'd have to cancel his interview, which, all things considered, might be for the best. His heart wasn't in this design. Then again, his heart hadn't really been into much, as of late. Then, if he coupled his don't-really-give-a-shit attitude with the fact his biggest business competition for the exec suite was owned by his fucking half-brother, it was almost enough to have Brock throwing up his hands and running for the nearest bottle of Jack—or perhaps the brand-spanking-new BDSM club he co-owned.

At best, he had an uphill battle in front of him, but Brock Michaels wasn't one to bend over and take it up the ass for anyone or anything. He'd committed to this project and, by god, he'd give the design his all. Well, he'd give it as much as he'd been able to give anything else since he'd walked away from the woman he loved.

Vivian...

And with nothing more than the thought of her name, illicit thoughts of his sister-in-law filled his mind. Viv was everything he'd ever desired in a partner—kind, strong-willed, vivacious and so full of life her smile could light Times Square for a year. And it still pissed him off his uptight brother had found her first.

The fucking prick.

How the hell was it possible to love someone and yet hate his lying, slimy, good-for-nothing ass at the same time? Life would have been so much simpler if Brock could just hate the bastard, none of this wishy-washy, namby-pamby bullshit. But try as he might, Brock couldn't sever the few, lingering positive emotions he still harbored for his big brother, despite the plethora of reasons he had to hate the man, reasons that didn't all revolve around his sister-in-law.

Although, Viv was at the center of quite a few of them.

“Fuck.”

Frustration forced Brock to his feet. That was the last straw, the final distraction. He needed out of there for a while, and he needed out *now*. He needed to find a place to refuel and get his fucking head on straight, and he knew the perfect place.

Restrained Fantasies.

Making an appearance at the club he co-owned with his buddy Stephen—or “The sub Maker,” to those who *really* knew him—was just what the doctor ordered. Sustenance and sex. Yes, the duo might be enough to banish thoughts of Viv for an hour or two.

But he wasn't holding his breath.

He made a beeline for his trusty Harley. On the way through his mud room, he grabbed his leather riding jacket from a coat hook. Leather wasn't a fashion statement saved for the club. For him, it was practically a second skin—well, third, if he added his tats to the equation.

His hog sat nose first toward the garage door, right alongside the ridiculously expensive Ferrari he'd purchased in Italy eight months before, then thoroughly tested on the German autobahns. Yet another move on his part to nurse a broken heart, but sports cars and absurd speeds were poor replacements for the woman he loved.

“Damn it.”

He yanked on his jacket. He had to stop thinking about her. He and Viv weren't meant to be. End of fucking story. It was past time he accepted that fact and found a permanent way to purge her from his memory.

Once and for all.

He straddled his ride, squeezed the clutch with his left hand and hit the start button with his right. With that familiar growl that always made him feel alive, his baby rumbled to life. A quick cycling of the bike's high beams sent the garage door lurching up. Best damn garage door opener ever. He grabbed his helmet from—

Holy motherfucking shit.

Vivian?

His heart lurched and stuttered. He slammed his eyelids shut. No fucking way. Vivian Michaels was *not* standing in his driveway. His mind was playing tricks on him. Was visually conjuring her the next logical progression in his insanity?

He opened his eyes again, but she was still there, standing next to a Cadillac SUV, which didn't look a tenth as sleek as its owner. A dark-blue dress clung to her toned, lithe body like a second skin. Her treatments had taken their toll on all her luscious curves, but she was well on her way to getting them all back. Her dress had no sleeves, not much of a skirt, either, just a swatch of material covering all the good parts.

What a damn shame.

A dark-red satchel hung from her shoulder. Ultra-short black hair framed a slender face with high cheekbones, plump lips, and the most arresting violet eyes he'd ever seen. He loved the bizarre color, so unique, just like Viv.

In other words, she was as wet-dream sexy as ever.

His groin tightened faster than a bullet exploding from the barrel of a gun. She was every one of his fantasies wrapped up in one perfect little package.

A package who belongs to your brother, asshole.

And speaking of assholes, apprehension tingled Brock's spine. Was Eugene the reason for Viv's visit? Had his brother sent his irresistibly sexy wife to spy on the competition? Brock wouldn't put the below-the-belt act past the bastard. But not Viv. She might be a lot of things—larger than life, able to sway men's minds with a single smile—but she wasn't underhanded.

He cut the Harley's engine, dismounted, and walked to her without hesitation. Well, maybe with a tad bit of hesitation. After all, when he reached her, he might not be able to control the urges scratching at his chest for freedom.

With each step closer to her, the soft scent of something spicy and floral bounced around the spring breeze, teasing the pistons of his already misfiring psyche. He breathed in the heady aroma and held it in his lungs.

A nervous smile split her lips. "Hello, Brock."

"Hello, Vivi—" The rest of her name caught in the mass of emotions clogging the back of his throat. Had her voice always sounded as if her vocal cords were wrapped in velvet? "Hello, Vivian. It's been awhile."

"Yes, it most certainly has been."

A tiny diamond nose ring sparkled in the sun. That was new. He liked it; the delicate stud complemented her new hairstyle.

"At your remission party," he said. "I remember." And all too well.

A grin played with the corners of her lips. "The beach was so hot that night."

And so were you.

Even bald, cheeks sunken from chemotherapy, lingering abdominal scars from surgery, Vivian in a bikini was enough to drive a eunuch into a lust-filled rage. She'd certainly driven him to the outer edge of Lustville. But as much as he'd wanted to throw her on one of the nearby beach tables and pound into her until she screamed *his* name, her husband was his brother.

He forced his mind to more mundane topics. “I, um, like your hair. It’s edgy.”

“Thanks.” She feathered her fingers through the spiky locks. “As it started growing back in, I discovered I liked it short. I thought it made me look—”

“Sassy.”

Her smile shone a few shades brighter. “I was going to say younger, but I like sassy better.” And just like that, he was lost in her smile, in her incredible eyes.

In her.

God he wanted her more than he wanted his next breath, wanted to take her in his arms and kiss her for a year, to carry her to his bed, to chain her to the metal bed frame and make love to her until the pain of the last year evaporated in the heat of their fucking.

“May I come inside?” she finally asked, breaking his trance.

“Oh, hell. Yeah. Sorry.” He stepped aside and motioned her through the garage. “*Mi casa es su casa* and all that.”

“Thanks.” She flashed one last sexy smile then sauntered toward the door.

Her pointy heels clicked against the painted concrete, her round ass swaying with each step, and he was helpless to stop his gaze from drinking in each amazing move. Each step mesmerized him. She had the kind of hips that made him conjure images of him bending her over any available surface and taking her from behind, cramming his cock into her until reality and fantasy merged.

Vivian stopped at the hood of his Ferrari and ran her palm over the black paint. “Since when do you drive things on four wheels?” she asked over her shoulder.

“Oh, that.” He shrugged.

She must have sensed she’d get no further info out of him and kept going. When she reached the foyer, she spun in a slow circle, once, twice, before stopping to face him.

“I like what you’ve done with the place, Brock. It’s a perfect blend of masculine strength and natural beauty.” She leveled her gaze on his. “Who was your decorator?”

Amusement tugged at the corners of his lips. “What makes you think I hired one?”

She rolled her eyes. “Don’t insult my decorating intelligence.”

He held his hands up in mock surrender. “What gave me away?”

“Plenty.” She moved to the living room. “Take this space for example. You’ve got beautiful earth tones working in here. The soft colors are accompanied by sleek, neutral woodwork. Now, knowing your panache for design and architecture, I can buy you’d picked all that out, but the throw pillows on your couch are green with *pink* accents.” She winked at him. “And pink’s not exactly a color men pick out on their own—especially when that man is *you*.”

Busted. He fought to keep his lips from turning up in a smile but failed miserably. “I hired Jenny Bishop over at Home & Hearth Interiors.”

As quick and deadly as a streak of lightning cutting across a dark, stormy sky, anger illuminated Vivian’s eyes. The violet hue turned almost black.

He put a few steps of distance between them so he could better examine her reaction.

Just what’s this all about, sweetheart?

Did a massive business rivalry exist between the two women? He doubted it. Jenny was good, but she wasn’t Vivian Michaels good and never would be. They weren’t even in the same league. He wouldn’t have chosen her over Viv had he not been trying to avoid the latter.

But why did Viv so obviously despise the woman?

Judging by the hatred carving harsh lines on Vivian’s face, it was personal, *really* personal, something greater than stealing a client or two. But what?

He tried to lighten the mood. “Jenny’s work isn’t as good as yours, not by a long shot.”
Regret overtook the anger swarming in her eyes. “Then why didn’t you come to me?”
Well, shit. *Walked right into that one, dumbass.*

He shrugged, praying his emotions didn’t show through too much. “To be honest, I figured you wouldn’t talk to me after your remission party, let alone step foot inside my house.”

“And why would I do that?”

“I kissed you.” And, god help him, he’d wanted to do so much more, which was why he’d run. Loving a married woman was bad enough, but when said woman was married to his brother—

She took a step toward him. “And if I remember correctly, I kissed you right back. Then we stopped.”

“Regardless, I thought it’d be better to distance myself.”

“But for an entire year?” She moved even closer, and when she spoke again, her voice was barely above a whisper. “I’ve missed you so much.”

I’ve missed you, too. But the words got stuck in his throat.

A wistfulness seized her features. “I haven’t had anyone to watch reruns of *Stargate* with since you left.”

He laughed through his guilt. He’d introduced her to that show while she’d been undergoing chemo. They’d watched all ten seasons and three movies over the course of her treatment. They’d even started watching *Stargate Atlantis* but hadn’t made it past season two before she’d gone into remission.

Joy and pain lodged in his chest like the blunt blade of a butter knife. The memory of that time, of Vivian’s uterus riddled with cancer, brought back dark memories.

Oh, god, no. The cancer! Was that why she was there?

He grabbed her by the arms. “Is it the cancer? Is it back? Has it spread?” He’d shake the damn truth out of her if he had to.

“No, Brock,” she whispered, her voice so soft, her smile reassuring. “I’m not here because the cancer’s back.”

“No cancer?” He just had to make sure.

“None whatsoever.”

“Oh, thank god.”

Relief practically leveled him, and he crushed her against him, clung to her, partly to feel close to her, but mostly to keep from falling flat on his ass. Holding her felt as damn natural as breathing. Her petite body fit perfectly against his. He never wanted to let her go.

As if he needed another sign he was screwed.

He tightened his arms around her, bent close, and buried his nose in the crevice of her neck. Her spicy, floral scent combined with the sensation of having her in his arms again. The dual stimuli rocked his resolve, threatened to overwhelm his better judgment.

“Brock,” she whispered. “Brock.”

Deep. Husky. Wanton. Seductive. Each word described the timbre of her voice. Each word doused gasoline on the fire raging below his belt.

Christ.

He pulled back, pushed her to arm’s length. Time to move their reunion along before he did something he’d regret.

Like her.

“So, okay, if it’s not the, the, ya know, then what brings you by?”

Crimson tinged her cheeks. Embarrassment maybe? Confusion? Desire? Before he could discern the subtlety, her response to his question set every nerve ending in his body on red alert.

“Unfortunately, I’m here because of your brother.”

So Eugene *was* the reason she was there. That bastard. Shit. Just shit.

“What, exactly, does that mean?” he asked.

She didn’t answer. Instead, she turned on her heel and sauntered to the kitchen.

His gaze followed her every movement. Sunlight shown through the bay window in the breakfast nook, illuminating her petite form. The pixie-short hair, the creamy skin, the soft glow from the sun, all worked together to give her an ethereal look. Normally, the sight would be as arousing as hell, but not after her last statement.

“Damn it, Vivian. Tell me what’s going on.”

She waved him off. “We’ve been through this before. Call me Viv. My name’s bad enough without having to draw it out to three syllables.”

Anxiety twisted his intestines into pretzels. She was being evasive. That was never a good sign.

“Okay, *Viv*, what’s going on?”

Finally, she squared her shoulders and turned to face him. “I have a business proposition for you, Brock.”

“A business proposition?”

“Yes.” She laid her satchel on the breakfast table and dug inside. Eventually, she pulled out a burgundy presentation binder and held it out to him. The top page sported the words Richard D. McDonald Executive Suites: Interior Design and Landscaping. “You’re interviewing for this project, aren’t you?”

“Yeah.” If he could get his Muse to stop being a bitch, anyway.

“Good.” She stepped closer, thrust her portfolio into his hands. “If you’re interested, I have some beautiful ideas I’d like to show you, and if any speak to you, maybe we could incorporate them into something new, our own unique design.”

Our own unique design.

“Wait, wait, wait.” He scrubbed a palm over his head. “Are you saying you want to partner with *me* for this project?”

“That’s exactly what I’m saying.”

He shook his head. No way in hell the biggest gun in his brother’s arsenal would walk up and offer to partner with him. This had to be a trick. He hated thinking of Viv as being deceptive but—

“Your landscaping company’s part of Eugene’s company. Michaels Architectural Design *and* Landscaping—”

“Actually—” She held up a manicured hand to silence him. “Eugene’s company is Michaels Architectural Design. Mine’s Michaels Interior Decorating & Landscaping. We’re lumped together so often people mistake us for a joint firm, but I assure you, we’re not. We don’t even share an office, anymore. And we haven’t for the past year. I only sign my designs over to him when we accept a contract.”

Shit. He didn’t know that, but the distinction didn’t answer the big question. “And why aren’t you partnering with your dear husband’s company for this venture?”

Her lips tightened into thin lines, and she crossed her arms beneath her luscious tits. “You want the unadulterated truth, emphasis on *unadulterated*.”

Unadulterated.

Adultery.

Shit.

He looked heavenward. *Eugene, you fucking, fucking moron.*

“Damn, Viv. I’m so sorry.”

She shrugged, as if Eugene’s betrayal didn’t burn. “It’s not your fault your brother’s a dirtbag.”

True. Brock tightened his grip on Viv’s portfolio to keep from throwing it. “Let me guess. He was having an affair with Jenny Bishop.”

“Among others.” Her gaze slid to the floor. “Let’s just suffice it to say I’ve caught your brother with one too many blonde bimbos and I’ve had enough.”

Anger and understanding simmered in Brock’s gut. “So you’ve come to me because you want to use me and my architectural design firm to get back at him.”

She flashed him a smile. “If you’re willing. I mean—”

She took two steps closer, and for a second, Brock wondered if she’d take hold of his hand. At the last second, however, she pulled back.

“I don’t want you to do anything that makes you uncomfortable,” she said. “I just thought maybe we could help each other out.”

“Help each other out?”

She nodded. “In about ten minutes, Eugene should be receiving my petition for divorce.”

Petition for divorce?

Holy shit.

At long last, the woman he loved was available. If he wanted, he could take her into his arms, kiss her for the next decade, all without the slightest twinge of regret.

Well, with very little regret, anyway.

He wanted to scream to the heavens, but somehow he managed to rein in his excitement. So much still needed to happen before he could even *think* of having a relationship with Viv, let alone act on it.

“And with the end of our marriage,” she continued, “comes the end of our business dealings, which means all my ideas for the new executive suite are just that. Mine.”

“A court might not see it that way,” he said, playing devil’s advocate. “Implied contract and all that.”

“True. But even if he did take me to court and win, the design meeting would long be over. Besides, everyone knows Eugene’s weakest skills are his presentation abilities. Even if I left him all my designs, without me to sell the idea, he’s screwed. So as you can see, no matter what, I win. And Eugene loses out on a contract that could have taken his business to the next level.”

Brock fought to keep the corners of his lips from turning up in naughty delight. *Note to self: Never cheat on Viv.*

“Not that your offer isn’t tempting, because it is, but why me? There are any number of companies who can bring more to the table than I can.”

Especially in those days. He spent way more time running *Restrained Fantasies* and its companion restaurant, *Ravenous*, than he did on architecture.

“Because you’re Eugene’s brother and he hates you.”

Her matter-of-fact delivery turned his blood cold. Nice to finally know what his big brother thought about him.

“I see,” Brock said.

“I’m sorry, Brock.” She reached for him. “I shouldn’t have put it so—”

“I’m not a sixteen-year-old boy looking for my big brother’s approval, anymore. I’ll be fine.”

Her eyebrows scrunched closer together. “Anymore?”

“Don’t go there, Viv.”

He put a little more distance between them, rage suddenly simmering in his gut. He didn’t give a damn what his bastard brother thought about him. And the sooner he accepted the reality, the better off he’d be.

“Okay.” She crossed her arms in a way that really made her voluptuous breasts pop. “Partner with me, Brock. It’s a win-win situation for both of us. You want to be the biggest name in architectural design—I want to ruin Eugene. Our partnership’s a match made in heaven.”

“More like the seventh layer of hell.”

She shrugged. “Why quibble on semantics?”

He couldn’t stop the grin tugging at the corners of his lips any more than he could stop his gaze from getting caught in the gravitational pull of her breasts. No doubt that was just as she’d planned.

The wicked temptress.

“Okay, for the sake of argument, let’s say I said yes. Would this be a long-term partnership? Or simply a one-contract affair?”

Without warning, images of them signing a different sort of contract sprang to the forefront of his mind. The kind a Dom and sub might sign before “partnering up”.

“Initially, only for this contract.” She winked. “But if we enjoy each other, who knows?”

Enjoy each other? Hello, double entendre.

“Okay, Viv. I’m in.” He tossed out a double entendre of his own. “Let’s get it on.”

“Good.” She dug into her bag again. “I already took the liberty of having my attorney draw up our contract.”

He snorted a laugh. “You knew I’d say yes, didn’t you?”

She pulled her shoulders back and put her breasts on display. “Well, the girls and I can be pretty persuasive.”

“Yeah.” Especially in that dress.

She held the contract out, facedown, but immediately pulled it back. “Oh, and speaking of getting it on, there’s one *tiny* stipulation to the contract.”

Of course there was. “And that is?”

“I want you to fuck me, Brock. Right here, right now.”