

Dirty Deceptions - Chapter One

Lauren stared at the time on her cell phone. Jake was half an hour late. He wasn't coming. She knew the feeling of being dumped, too well. The chipper little notification chime confirmed her suspicions.

SORRY, L. IT'S NOT GOING TO WORK OUT BETWEEN US. CONGRATS ON THE PROMO.

"Asshole," she muttered, slamming her phone onto the bar top.

"Not the news you were expecting, I take it?"

It wasn't so much the words that got her, but the deep, gruff tone. Lauren glanced to her left. Pale blue eyes watched her with enough heat to have her wondering if her deodorant was going to be able to withstand that sexy stare. Holy Jesus, the man was gorgeous with his closely cropped black hair and facial scruff. A suit-wearing type, but somehow not. His thick biceps and massive chest strained the white dress shirt to the point where it was anyone's guess how long it'd take before he popped a button or ripped a stitch. He'd rolled his sleeves up, showing off the smallest bit of a tattoo. She wanted to see the rest of it. And did he have more of them?

She cleared her throat and sat up a little straighter. "Excuse me?" *Ah-ha, not a single stammer.*

He jerked his head toward her phone. "Your expletive sort of caught my attention."

She cringed. "Oh, right. Sorry."

"No need to apologize. Want to talk about it?"

She sighed and stuck out her hand. "Lauren."

"Alex," he offered as he took her hand in a firm but gentle hold. A few heart-pounding seconds ticked by before he released her. "Tell me to butt out if you want, but did some idiot just dump you?"

She took a sip of her white wine before replying, "I should've seen it coming. It's always the ones that are uber-romantic. First date he had two dozen red roses delivered. Second date he took me to that restaurant across town that serves that amazing sushi. You know, the new one?"

He sat back a little and watched her. "I hear it's tough to get reservations."

"Yep." She sighed. "He went above and beyond to impress. So, there it is."

"I'm confused." He tilted his head to one side. "He romanced you and that means he's a jerk?"

She tsked. "No, he tried too hard. Went to great lengths. I should've known he'd have a sell-by date."

He chuckled. "Sell-by date, huh?"

She found her lips curving upward. "That's awful, right?"

He shrugged as he took a swig of his dark beer. "Not at all. What's awful is leaving you here alone on a Friday night."

"And I just got the best news too. Asshole," she muttered.

"Yeah?"

What harm was there in telling a stranger? "I landed a job that I've been wanting," she explained, as she stared at her long-stemmed glass. "I was hoping to celebrate with him." God, she'd been so happy before Jake's text. For one moment in time, she'd been on top of the world. He just had to go and ruin it.

"So, celebrate with me instead."

Her head jerked his way and she could see the sincerity in those gorgeous blues. "You're serious," she guessed.

He grinned and tossed back the last of his beer. "I am. A beautiful woman should never celebrate alone. That's a terrible crime."

Electricity sizzled along her nerve endings, but her brain was firing warning shots at her. “I don’t even know you.”

He held up both hands as if in surrender. “I’m harmless and we don’t need to do anything crazy. We don’t even need to leave this bar.”

“Harmless? No way do I believe that.” She paused then added, “You don’t expect sex? Most guys expect sex if they buy drinks for a woman.”

He pointed to his empty bottle. “You can buy me drinks then,” he said, his voice softer now as he leaned a little closer. “After all, you’re the bigshot with the new job.”

She couldn’t help the laugh that bubbled forth. “Maybe this night isn’t a total loss, after all.”

He winked, then tapped her nose. “That’s the spirit.”

Damn, the man was cute and she was a sinking ship. Lauren knew it. Could see the writing on the wall. Did she care? Nope. Should she get up and walk out now? Sure. Was she going to? Not a freaking chance.

I’m a horrible person and yet... “Another white wine?”

She tapped at the bar top with the fingers of her right hand while biting her bottom lip. Goddamn that was sexy as fuck. She took time to consider her answer. Alexander approved. She was smart to think it through. Not allow herself to be led by her hormones. And she was prettier than he’d thought. He’d seen her picture on her social media page. He always skimmed the internet when his company hired new employees. Lauren’s online profile didn’t do her justice. She had shiny red hair that hung in a mass of wild ringlets down past her shoulders. Freckles littered her nose and cheeks and he wondered if they were sprinkled elsewhere as well. Her

stretchy emerald-green V-neck shirt wasn't anything overt, but still gave him a nice view of full c-cup breasts. She wore black slacks. She'd intended to celebrate with her boyfriend and yet she hadn't gone overboard to impress. His respect for her went up a thousand notches. He liked her confidence. That in itself was a turn-on to him.

“Okay, another white, but I'm buying my own drinks.”

Her intelligence sent his excitement soaring. “No expectations, I swear.”

She motioned to the bartender. After they both ordered another drink, Lauren turned his way and asked, “So, you know why I'm here. What's your story?”

Her voice had a husky, bedroom quality. The sound did it for him. He'd enjoy it more if she were naked and they were alone. “Honestly, it's Friday night and it's been a long day. A cold beer seemed like a good idea.”

She propped her chin on her hand and narrowed her light-green gaze on him. “You married? No way a guy like you is single.”

He tensed. Did she know who he was? “A guy like me?”

She smiled. “Easy there, big guy. I just meant that you're way too nice and entirely too good-looking. Most of those are taken. Just saying.”

He relaxed, accepting the compliment. “I'm single. I've been wrapped up in my work and that left little room for a love life.”

“But most guys can handle both.”

How much to tell her? “My father was married to his work,” he explained, keeping it vague. “I watched it slowly destroy his marriage. And a whole lot of evenings watching my mom cry. I was determined never to do that to a woman.”

“My dad worked his entire life at a paper factory, then retired recently. He and Mom bought an RV and headed west. I get pictures and texts daily. They're having such a great time, but I feel bad that he had to wait so long just to enjoy a decent vacation.”

“And you’re determined not to let that happen to you,” he wondered aloud. He admired her determination. Lauren Clark wasn’t just a pretty face.

“I suppose I am. I wanted to put enough money away to maybe retire early, you know? Live a little, while I can still walk without a cane.”

Alexander grabbed a handful of peanuts from a bowl before saying, “Parents can sure leave an impression, huh?”

“How’d we get on this topic?”

“I’m not sure.” He lifted his beer and held it in the air between them. “How about a toast?” Alexander watched as Lauren brought her glass up. “To your new job,” he declared. “May it be all that you imagine.”

She grinned. “I’ll drink to that.”

After they each took a sip, Alexander heard a slow, blues tune come over the speakers. He placed his drink down and pointed at the small dancefloor. “How about it?”

She snorted. “Dancing? I *so* can’t dance. Two left feet here. Trust me, you’re going to want to save your toes from that torture.”

He chuckled and stood, then held a hand out for her. “It’s a slow tune, Lauren. All you do is sway and let me hold you real close. Are you game?”

She blushed and it made her freckles stand out more prominently. Ah, hell. He wanted to see so much more of that blush. When she put her hand trustingly in his, Alexander’s blood heated to boiling point. She didn’t know it yet, but she was sure as hell going home with him tonight. He would move heaven and earth to have her beneath him. For the next twenty-four hours if he had his way.

As they stepped onto the dance floor, Lauren wrapped her arms around his neck. Delicate fingers clutched onto the back of his head. “I hope you don’t regret this later,” she whispered against his ear.

He let his arms slide around her waist, pulling her in close. Her full hips snuggled up against him. Her breasts pressed to his chest. Damn, there went his cock. A big, happy salute to the sweet redhead. “Trust me,” he groaned, “I’m not experiencing a single regret here.”

She let out a heavy breath, then rested her cheek against him. *Yeah, like that.* He wanted her there. He knew when he’d seen her online profile that she’d have him by the short hairs. The only question, would it matter to Lauren when she found out his real identity?

Dirty Deceptions by Anne Rainey