



Seducing Lauren (Love Under the Big Sky)

By Kristen Proby

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Editorial Review

Review

"Sizzling...Kristen Proby's enthralling novel is filled to the brim with one hardworking family's triumphs and challenges, all the wild adventure of the modern West, and a whole lot of titillating fun."

(*Bookreporter.com*)

"Absolutely captivating...a delightfully entertaining romance packed with passion and emotion.

LOVING CARA is romantic realism at its best, and Kristen Proby makes you want to believe. - See more at: <http://singletitles.com/?p=9568#sthash.4VB5CwQH.dpuf>

LOVING CARA is romantic realism at its best, and Kristen Proby makes you want to believe." (*Single Titles*)

"The debut of Proby's Love Under the Big Sky series is a searing, multilayered and utterly charming novel that is sure to win a number of new fans for her growing legions." (RT)

About the Author

Kristen Proby is the *New York Times* bestselling author of the Love Under the Big Sky trilogy and the self-published With Me in Seattle and Boudreaux series. She lives in the Pacific Northwest.

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Seducing Lauren

CHAPTER

One

LAUREN

"Hey, Lauren."

"Hi, Jacob, what can I do for you?" I ask with a smile, and open my front door wider for the friendly county sheriff's deputy.

"Well, I'm serving you." He offers me an embarrassed smile and hands me a large envelope, then backs away. "Have a good day."

I move back inside, shut the door, and stare down at the envelope in surprise.

Served?

I rip open the envelope and see bright, flaming inferno red as I read the court document. And read it again.

"The fucker is suing me?" I exclaim to an empty room, and read the letter clutched in my now trembling hands for the third time. "Hell no!"

I grab my handbag and slide my feet into flip-flops, barely managing not to fall down the porch steps as I

tear out of my house to my Mercedes and pull out of the circular driveway.

I live at the edge of Cunningham Falls, Montana. The small town was named after my great-grandfather Albert Cunningham. Ours is a tourist town that boasts a five-star ski resort and a plethora of outdoor activities for any season. Thankfully, summer tourist season is over, and ski season is still a few months away, so traffic into town is light.

I zoom past the post office and into the heart of downtown, where my lawyer's office is. Without paying any attention to the yellow curb, I park quickly and march into the old building.

The receptionist's head jerks up in surprise as I approach her and slam the letter still clutched in my hand on her desk.

"This," I say between clenched teeth, "isn't going to happen."

"Ms. Cunningham, do you have an appointment?"

"No, I don't have an appointment, but someone had better have time to see me." I am seething; my breath is coming in harsh pants.

"Lauren." My head whips up at the sound of my name and I find Ty Sullivan frowning at me from his office doorway. "I can see you. Come in."

I turn my narrowed eyes on Ty and follow him into his office, too agitated to sit while I wait for him to shut the door and walk behind his desk.

"What's going on?"

"I need a new lawyer."

"What's going on?" he asks again, and calmly leans against the windowsill behind his desk. He crosses his arms over his chest. The sleeves of his white button-down are rolled, giving me a great view of the colorful tattoo on his right arm.

"This is what's going on!" I thrust the letter at him. "Jack is trying to sue me for half of a trust fund that he has no right to."

Ty's handsome face frowns as he skims the letter. "You came into the trust while you were still married?"

"Yes," I confirm warily.

"And you didn't tell him about it?" he asks with raised brows.

"I didn't even know the damn thing existed until after my parents died, Ty. Until after I kicked Jack out." I turn and pace away, breathing deeply, trying to calm down. "He doesn't deserve a dime of my inheritance. This isn't about money, it's about principle."

"I agree." Ty shrugs. "Have you talked with Cary?"

“I was just served with the letter,” I mumble, and sink into a leather chair in defeat. “Cary’s a nice guy, but I just don’t think he’s the right lawyer for this job.” I glance up at Ty and my heart skips a beat as I take him in now that I’m calming down. He’s tall, much taller than me—which is saying something, given that I stand higher than five foot eight. He has broad shoulders and lean hips, and holy hell, the things this man does to a suit should be illegal in all fifty states.

But more than that, he’s kind and funny and has a bit of a bad-boy side to him too, hence the tattoos.

He’s been front and center in many of my fantasies for most of my life.

I bite my lips and glance down as his eyes narrow on my face.

“Why do you say that?” he asks calmly.

“It took two freaking years for the divorce to be final, Ty. I don’t want Cary to drag this out too.”

“It wasn’t necessarily Cary’s fault that the divorce took so long, Lauren. Jack had a good lawyer and your divorce was a mess.”

That’s the fucking understatement of the year. “Will you take my case?”

“No,” he replies quickly.

“What?” My dazed eyes return to his. “Why?”

He shakes his head and sighs as he takes a seat behind his desk. “I have a full load as it is, Lo.”

“You’re more aggressive than Cary,” I begin, but halt when he scowls.

“I really don’t think I can help you.”

I sit back and stare at him, stunned. “You mean you won’t.” I hate the hurt I hear in my voice, but I can’t hide it. I know Ty and I aren’t superclose, but I’ve considered him a friend. I can’t believe he’s shooting me down.

He folds the letter and hands it back to me, his mouth set in a firm line and blue-gray eyes sober. “No, I won’t. Make an appointment with Cary and talk it over with him.”

My hand automatically reaches out and takes the letter from Ty, and I’m just deeply embarrassed.

“Of course,” I whisper, and rise quickly, ready to escape this office. “I’m sorry for intruding.”

“Lo . . .”

“No, you’re right. It was unprofessional for me to just show up like this. I apologize.” I clear my throat and offer him a bright, fake smile, then beeline it for the door. “Thanks anyway.”

“Did you want to make an appointment, Lauren?” Sylvia, the receptionist, asks as I hurry past her desk.

“No, I’ll call. Thanks.”

I can’t get to my car fast enough. Why did I think Ty would help me? No one will help me.

All the connections I have in this town, all the money I have, and that asshole is still making my life a living hell.

I drive home in a daze, and when I pull up behind a shiny black Jaguar, my heart sinks further.

Today fucking sucks.

I pull my cell phone out of my bag, prepared to call for help if need be, and climb out of my car. I walk briskly past him and up the steps to the front door.

“Hey, gorgeous.”

“I told you not to come here, Jack. I don’t want to see you.” How can he still make me so damn nervous?

“Aww, don’t be like that, baby. You’re making this so much harder than it needs to be.”

I round on him, shocked and pissed all over again. “I’m the one making this hard?” I shake my head and laugh at the lunacy of this situation. “I don’t want you here. The divorce has been final for weeks now, and you have no business being here. And now you’re going to fucking sue me?”

He loses his smug smile and his mouth tightens as his brown eyes narrow. “No, I’ll tell you what will make it easy, Lauren. You paying me what’s rightfully mine is what will make it easy. You hid that money from me, and I’m entitled to half.”

“I’ll never pay you off, you sonofabitch.” I’m panting and glaring, so fucking angry.

“Oh, honey, I think you will.” He moves in close and drags his knuckles down my cheek. I jerk my head away, but he grabs my chin in his hand, squeezing until there’s just a bit of pain. “Or maybe I’ll just come back here and claim what’s mine. You are still mine, you know.”

My stomach rolls as he runs his nose up my neck, sniffing deeply. Every part of me stills. What the fuck is this?

“A man has the right to fuck his wife whenever he pleases.”

“I’m not your wife,” I grind out, glaring at him as he pulls back and stares me in the face.

He flashes an evil grin and presses harder against me. “You’ll always be mine. No piece of paper can change that.”

I don’t answer, but instead just continue to glare at him in hatred.

“Maybe you should just go ahead and write that check.”

He pushes away from me and backs down the stairs toward his flashy car, a car he bought with my parents’

money, and snickers as he looks me up and down. “You’ve kept that hot body of yours in shape, Lo. It’s mighty tempting.”

I swear I’m going to throw up.

I can’t answer him. I can only stand here and glower, shaking in rage and fear, as he winks again and hops in his Jag and drives away.

Jesus Christ, he just threatened to rape me. I might not be able to prove it, but I knew what his words meant.

I let myself into the house and reset the alarm with shaking fingers. I take off in a sprint to the back of the house and heave into the toilet, over and over until there’s nothing left and my body shivers and convulses in revulsion.

How can someone who once claimed to love me be so damn evil?

When the vomiting has passed, I rinse my mouth and head to the indoor pool that my parents had built when I was on the swim team in high school. I strip out of my clothes, but before I pull my swim cap on, I dial a familiar number on my phone and wait for an answer.

“Hull.” Brad is a police detective in town, and someone I trust implicitly.

“It’s Lauren.”

“Hey, sugar, what’s up?”

“Jack just left.”

“What did that son of a bitch want?” Brad’s voice is steel.

“He threatened me.” My voice is shaky and I hate myself for sounding so vulnerable. “I want it documented that he was here.”

“Did you record it, Lo?”

“No. I wasn’t expecting it. He’s been an asshole in the past, but this is the first time he’s come out and threatened me since he . . .” I pace beside the pool, unable to finish the sentence.

“That’s because I put the fear of God and jail time in him.” Brad is quiet for a moment. “Is there anything you need?”

I laugh humorlessly and shake my head. “Yeah, I need my asshole ex to go away. But for now I’ll settle for a swim.”

“Keep your alarm on. Call me if you need me.”

“I will. Thanks, Brad.”

“Anytime, sugar.”

We ring off. I tuck my long, auburn hair into my swim cap and then dive into the Olympic-size lap pool. The warm water glides over my naked skin, and I begin the first of countless laps, back and forth, across the pool. Swimming is one of two things in this world I do well, and it clears my head.

I do some of my best thinking in the pool.

Is all of this worth it? I ask myself. When I married Jack almost five years ago, I was convinced that he was in love with me and that we'd be together forever. He'd been on my swim team in college. He was handsome and charming.

And unbeknownst to me, he'd been after my money all along.

My parents were still alive then, and even they had fallen for his charms. My father had been a brilliant businessman and had done all he could to convince me to have Jack sign a prenuptial agreement so in the event of a divorce, Jack couldn't stake any claim to my sizable trust fund.

But I stood my ground, blind with love and promises of forever, insistent that a prenup was unnecessary.

My dad would lose his mind if he knew what was happening now. If only I'd listened to him!

I tuck and roll, then push off the wall, turning into a backstroke.

The small amount of money that Jack is trying to lay claim to is nothing compared to the money I have that Jack knows nothing about. Since our legal separation, I've become very successful in my career, but I wasn't lying when I told Ty that it's not about the money.

This is my heritage. My family worked hard for this land, for the wealth they amassed, and Jack doesn't deserve another fucking dime of it. That's why the divorce took so long. I fought him with everything in me to assure that he didn't get his greedy hands on my family's money.

In the end he won a sizable settlement that all of the lawyers talked me into.

Jack wasn't happy. He wanted more.

I push off the edge of the pool and glide underwater until I reach the surface and then move into a front crawl.

After my parents died in a winter car accident just over two years ago, Jack made it clear that he didn't love me, had been sleeping around since we were dating, but expected me to keep him in his comfortable lifestyle.

When I threw a fit and kicked him out, he slammed me against the wall and landed a punch to my stomach, certain to avoid bruising me, before he left.

Thanks to threats from Brad, and Jack's knowing how well-known I am in this town, he's not bothered me since. Until now.

And now he's threatening me.

It's not worth it. Living in constant fear of seeing Jack around town, of finding myself in the middle of another humiliating scene. Seeing the pity in the eyes of people I've known my whole life.

And now, coming home to an ambush because he's feeling desperate?

I'm done.

I pull myself out of the water, exhausted and panting, and resigned to see Cary in the morning to agree to a settlement.

It's time to move on.

* * *

It's early when I leave the house and drive to the lawyer's office. I don't have an appointment, and I don't even know for sure if anyone is there yet, but I couldn't sleep last night. I couldn't lose myself in work.

I need to get this over with.

When I stride to the front door, I'm surprised to find it unlocked. Sylvia isn't in yet, but I hear voices back in Cary's office.

I step through his door like I belong there, and both Cary's and Ty's faces register surprise when they see me in the doorway.

"You know, Lo, we have these things called phones, where you call and make what's called an appointment." Ty's gray eyes are narrowed, but his lips are quirked in a smile. He's in a power suit today, making my mouth immediately water. His shoulders look even broader in the black jacket, and the blue tie makes his eyes shine.

"Ha ha." I sit heavily in the seat before Cary's desk. "I'm sick of this shit."

"Ty told me you came by yesterday." Cary leans back in his chair.

"I was fucking served papers," I mutter, and push my hands through my hair. "But I think I want to settle."

Ty's eyebrows climb into his hairline. "I'll leave you two alone."

"You can stay," I mutter. "I could use both of your opinions. I'll pay double for the hour."

"That's not necessary." Ty's voice is clipped and he frowns as he gazes at me. "Why the change of heart?"

I lean back in the chair and tilt my head back, looking at the tin tiles on the ceiling. "Because Jack's an asshole. Because now he's decided to threaten me." I shake my head and look Cary in the eye. "But no payments. It's going to be in one lump sum and he needs to sign a contract stating that he'll never ask for another dime."

"Wait, back up." Ty pushes away from the desk and glowers down at me. "What do you mean he threatened you?"

“It doesn’t matter.”

“Lauren,” Cary interrupts, “it does matter. What the hell happened?”

“When I returned home, Jack was at the house.”

“Does he still have a key?” Ty asks.

“No.” I shake my head adamantly. “I changed all the locks and installed a new alarm system the day he left.”

“So he was waiting outside,” Cary clarifies.

“Yes. I told him to leave, that I didn’t want to see him and he isn’t welcome at the house. He said I was making things harder than they need to be.” I laugh humorlessly as Cary’s eyebrows climb toward his blond hairline. “I reminded him that there’s nothing difficult about this at all. We’re divorced. It’s over, and he can just go away.” I shrug and look away, not wanting to continue.

“What did he threaten you with?” Ty asks softly.

I raise my eyes to his and suddenly my stomach rolls. “I’m going to be sick.”

I bolt from the room and run to the restroom in the hallway, barely making it in time to lose the half gallon of coffee I consumed this morning. When the dry-heaving stops, I rinse my mouth and open the door, finding Ty on the other side.

“Are you okay?” he asks quietly.

I nod, embarrassed.

He reaches up and gently tucks a stray piece of my hair behind my ear. “What did he threaten you with?” He leads me back to Cary’s office.

I swallow and cross my arms over my chest. I don’t want to say it aloud. “He just threatened to be a dick.”

“Bullshit,” Cary responds, leaning forward in his chair. “Lo, the man wasn’t afraid to put his hands on you when you told him to leave—”

“What?” Ty exclaims.

“—so you need to tell me what he threatened to do to you if you don’t give him what he wants.”

I shake my head and close my eyes, remembering the feel of Jack’s nose pressed to my neck and the crazy look in his eyes when he wasn’t getting what he wanted.

“Excuse us for a minute, Cary.” Ty takes my hand in his and leads me toward the door.

“Uh, my client, Ty, remember?”

“We’ll be right back,” Ty assures him, and leads me into his office and shuts the door behind us.

“What did the asshole threaten to do to you, Lauren?”

“You said no yesterday, Ty. This isn’t your case.”

He shrugs, as if what I just said is of no consequence. “Answer me.”

I simply shake my head. “It doesn’t matter. Cary and I will figure it out. You don’t have to stay in there with us.”

I try to walk past him but he catches my hand in his, keeping me in place.

“Lauren . . .”

“Stop, Ty. You don’t want me, I get it.”

“Are you fucking kidding me?” His voice is deceptively calm. “Do you know why I turned you down yesterday, Lauren?”

I shake my head, my eyes wide and pinned to his.

“Because it would be a conflict of interest. I can’t be your lawyer because I’m your friend, and I want to be a whole lot more than that.”

If I thought I was stunned before, it’s nothing compared to this. My jaw drops as he closes the gap between us. He doesn’t touch me, but his face is mere inches from mine. His eyes are on my lips as I bite them and watch him, completely thrown by this turn of events.

“You have the most beautiful lips, Lo.”

“What?” I whisper.

He takes a deep breath as he lays his thumb gently on my lower lip and pulls it from my teeth. I can’t tear my gaze away from his mouth and I take a deep breath, inhaling the musky scent of him.

I’ve forgotten Jack and his threats, the lawsuit.

Everything.

Ty clears his throat and backs away, watching me carefully. “Cary will remain your lawyer, but I want to know what the hell is going on, Lo. I can help.”

I blink and continue to stare at him, completely dumbstruck. He wants me?

“And another thing, Lauren. You’re not settling. Fuck Jack and his lawyer.”

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Thelma Davis:

Reading can be called mind hangout, why? Because if you find yourself reading a book especially a book entitled *Seducing Lauren (Love Under the Big Sky)* your mind will drift away through every dimension, wandering in each aspect that maybe not known for but surely will end up your mind friends. Imaging each and every word written in a publication then become one type conclusion and explanation in which maybe you never get previous to. The *Seducing Lauren (Love Under the Big Sky)* giving you another experience more than blown away the mind but also giving you useful facts for your better life in this particular era. So now let us show you the relaxing pattern is your body and mind will likely be pleased when you are finished looking at it, like winning a. Do you want to try this extraordinary spending spare time activity?

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