

A Deceptive Match

By Kelli A. Wilkins

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A Deceptive Match

Falling for the wrestler she had been assigned to interview wasn't part of Danni's plan, until Vinnie Valentine pinned her heart in a flash.

Disgruntled with her job as the office assistant for a national sports magazine, Danni Stone impersonates a reporter to prove herself to her boss. Her assignment? Spend thirty days on the road with Vinnie Valentine, a sexy professional wrestler.

Life isn't going well for the Heavyweight Champ. Vinnie is struggling with a manipulative boss, prepping for the most important match of his career, and feuding with his arch-enemy, Thorn. The last thing he needs is a nosy reporter following him around—even if she is hot.

Thrown together in close quarters, Danni can't help falling for Vinnie, and she unwittingly becomes a key player in his title match. Their mutual attraction grows, and late one night, they give in to the lustful feelings they've been fighting.

As their relationship deepens, Danni considers telling Vinnie her secret. But before she can confess the truth, Vinnie discovers she isn't the reporter she claims to be. Her lie threatens to ruin everything between them. Will their relationship be destroyed by her deception or will their love win out?

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* *A Deceptive Match* and *A Secret Match* are related titles with shared characters. However, each novel can be read separately.

** These titles make up the *Royal Desires* series. Although connected, each book stands alone as an individual read.

*** These novellas complete the *Naughty Nobles* trilogy. It is recommended that they are read in sequence.

Visit Kelli's website: www.KelliWilkins.com for additional titles as they become available.

CHAPTER 1

“No need to be nervous. He’s not gonna fire ya,” Vin whispered to himself. He squared his shoulders and reached down for the brass doorknob. The metal felt icy cold in his sweaty hand.

He dreaded meeting with the boss under normal circumstances, but being summoned to Nick’s private Westchester County office the day before a road trip wasn’t good. He said a silent prayer as he opened the door.

Nick August sat behind his black lacquer desk. His gray eyes matched the carpet, and his three-thousand-dollar navy blue suit was the same shade as the company logo emblazoned on the wall behind him. Vin glanced around the room and was relieved to see they were alone.

“Come in, come in. I’ve been waiting.” Nick flashed him a capped-tooth smile.

He entered the lion’s den and closed the door behind him. The overpowering stench of Nick’s musky cologne made his eyes water. Nick drowned himself in it because he thought women loved it. So far, nobody had dared to tell him he stank like a skunk.

“Hey, Nick. Good to see you,” he lied.

Vin crushed the thick carpet under his size eighteen boots as he approached the desk. Nick stood and extended his hand.

Vin shook it and stared down at his multi-millionaire boss. He towered eight inches above Nick's six-foot-two frame and could mangle him without thinking twice.

He made brief eye contact, then stepped back. Nick never liked his wrestlers to get too close. He wasn't sure if it was because their size made Nick feel inadequate, or if Nick feared someone might pop him for real.

"How was your time off?" Nick asked.

"Great. I feel a lot better. We've got a long stretch coming up and I want to be a hundred-percent for the pay-per-view," he said, testing the waters. Despite Nick's seemingly friendly attitude, he couldn't shake the sick feeling in his gut. The phrase "Never Trust Nick August" wasn't coined by accident. Nick was famous for manipulating people and situations to his advantage.

Experience told him trouble brewed behind Nick's toothy grin. If Nick planned to yank him from the main event at August Aggression as punishment for what happened in Houston, he'd probably tell him now.

"Good, good." Nick motioned for him to sit in one of the black leather chairs across from the desk.

"So, what's on your mind?"

Only two weeks had passed since he'd last seen Nick. How much could have changed since then? Nick hadn't seemed annoyed with him when he'd asked for a break to rest, have his knee checked out, and get full doctor's clearance

before returning to the ring. Besides, it added credibility to the storyline if the champ vanished now and then. Everyone in the locker room did it to recoup from ring weariness.

“We both know wrestling has never been accepted by the mainstream. For all the marketing, promotion, and crossover work we’ve done, we’ve never been given a serious chance in the media.”

Vin nodded. Everyone thought wrestling was completely fake and required no talent or training. But everyone was wrong. “Is this about an ad campaign?”

“No.” Nick took a folder off his desk. “I received a proposal from a writer at *SportsWorld*. Danny Stone wants to do a feature, an exposé, a day in the life.”

“You want me to talk to him? Sure, no prob—”

“No. It’s more than that. He’s going on the road with you.”

“Are you kidding? You want him to ride with me to matches and follow me around?” He struggled to keep his voice even. “For how long?”

Nick smirked and leaned back in his red leather chair. “A month, starting tomorrow.”

“A month? But that goes right up ’til the pay-per-view. You want me to babysit a reporter for a month?” He shook his head, and his ponytail swished from side to side. Of all the crap Nick had put him through, this was the living end.

Traveling with a reporter would make his life hell. He would have to justify his every move, and he'd be spied on constantly. This was Nick's not-so-subtle way of taking him down a notch. It was fine for Vinnie Valentine to strut around and act egotistical inside the ring, but outside the squared circle Nick always let his wrestlers know he was the alpha dog.

"The guys'll call me a mole. What am I supposed to do, tell this reporter everything?"

"What the *guys* think doesn't matter. What *I* think does," Nick growled. "I want the publicity. We need recognition by a major sports magazine." He arched his black eyebrows. "Hell, I thought you'd welcome it, Champ."

His stomach dropped, and he balled his fists. Champ. Yeah, for how much longer?

"You're in no position to argue with me after what happened in Houston. I haven't decided on the finish for Aggression yet. I think how you handle this reporter will influence that."

Vin stared at his clenched fists. Here he was, thirty-two years old, and being treated like a first grader who had been sent to the principal's office. He gave in. There was no way to win against Nick.

"What do you want me to tell this guy? I mean, how much is enough?"

“He’ll ride with you and do interviews. We’re giving him full access to the locker rooms, the backstage area at house shows and tapings, the works. Treat him like one of the guys.”

“What if he sees something he shouldn’t? You’re taking a big risk here, Nick.” Nick’s expression hardened, and he eased off. “But if that’s what you want me to do, I’m fine with it,” he lied. “When do I meet this guy?”

The black phone on the desk rang once. “In about eight seconds,” Nick replied. “Remember, he’s one of the guys. No problems, no complications.”

“Don’t worry, boss. It’ll be a piece of cake.” Vin stood and turned as the office door swung open. He did a double-take as Danny Stone stepped inside.

* * *

Danni entered the office and headed straight for the black desk. “Hello, Mister August. It’s nice to meet you.”

She focused on Nick’s steel-gray eyes as she crossed the room. She had to assert herself now, before it was too late. Her surprise advantage would only last a minute or two.

“And you are?” Nick asked.

Danni wrinkled her nose. What was that awful smell? She cleared her throat and fought the urge to fan the air in front of her. Someone had showered in the worst-smelling cologne in the world. Then, with a start, she realized that she wasn’t alone with Nick.

A blond behemoth stood near the window, gaping at her. He was almost a foot taller than her, and his shoulders were about four feet wide. He wore tan dress pants and a green polo shirt that bulged across his biceps. Obviously, he was one of Nick's wrestlers.

"Danni Stone, from *SportsWorld*. Your secretary sent me in."

Nick flopped into his chair. "You? You're the reporter? But I thought—"

"I was a man?" Danni clutched her vinyl portfolio in her sweaty left hand. Pulling this off would be harder than she'd expected. Her knees felt like they were made of jelly, and her heart raced a mile a minute. She willed herself to be strong. Her plan would backfire if Nick caught the first hint of fear.

"I get that a lot, at first. Is there a problem?" She wanted Nick to make the first move. If he threw her out, then she could leave in a huff and cancel this crazy adventure before she got in way over her head.

She glanced at the massive wrestler and caught him checking out her legs. Great, that was all she needed right now, a Cro-Magnon man ogling her.

After a second, Nick answered. "No. Have a seat."

She sat before her knees buckled. No matter what happened, she had to be convincing and make it through this meeting. There was no other option.

“I’ll admit, with a name like Danny, I naturally assumed...” Nick chuckled.

She crossed her legs and smoothed her powder-blue skirt. She had heard Nick’s fake laugh hundreds of times on television. Did he think she was stupid? She remained expressionless and waited for Nick to continue.

“I assumed you’d be a man. I mean, sports writing, wrestling... It’s not really a—”

“It’s short for Danielle,” she interrupted. “My editor decided our male readers might be more receptive if they thought I was a man.” She let her words hang in the air for a moment.

“Is this going to be a problem? You’ve read my proposal and have already agreed to let me ride with one of the wrestlers. If you doubt my abilities, I assure you I can handle the assignment.” She started to unzip the portfolio she’d scrambled to create last night. “My work speaks for itself. I have clips—”

“No, that’s okay, dear.”

She pursed her lips. This was the same dismissive treatment she got from her uncle and the male editors at work. She’d had enough of it there, and she’d be damned if she would let Nick August treat her like a helpless female.

“I don’t mean to be rude, Mister August, but if you don’t want me to write the article, tell me now. I’ll call my editor

and let him know the story is off. I don't want to waste my time or yours."

She was shocked at how harsh her words came out, but deep down, she felt a surge of pride. For the last fourteen years she'd been a "good little girl" and did what everyone expected of her. It was about time she started calling the shots.

"That won't be necessary." Nick's voice sounded smooth and velvety. "I'm very interested in the article. So let me introduce you to our champion, Vinnie Valentine." Nick gestured at the skyscraper of a man standing next to the window. "You'll ride with him for a month. He'll show you the ropes, so to speak," he joked.

She stood and looked at Vinnie. His honey-blond ponytail hung to his huge shoulders. He was clean-shaven, with high cheekbones and an angular, but not too big nose. What struck her most were his sparkling green eyes framed by long lashes.

After a second, she realized she had seen him before. He had been featured on the wrestling shows she watched last week. The seven-foot champ swaggered around the ring like he owned it. He was known for being a cocky, egotistical ladies' man. Wonderful. Of all the people to be teamed up with...

"Nice to meet you." He held out his giant hand.

His rumbling voice sent a shiver up her spine, and she gazed into his green eyes as she shook his paw. Her body tingled as Vinnie gave her hand a light squeeze.

“Likewise.” The word came out as a breathy whisper.

Nick cleared his throat. “Here’s everything you’ll need for this assignment.” He handed her a thick envelope. The packet reeked of his cologne. “You’ve got bio sheets, stats, backstage passes, and the itinerary. Our photographers will give you any pictures you need.”

Danni held her excitement in check. She had gotten in, and now there was no turning back. “Thank you, Mister August.”

She caught Vinnie checking out her legs again and ignored it. After all, wrestlers were trained to maim people and they benched more than she weighed. Manners were beyond them. She had to be insane to ride in the same car with this guy for a month, but now she had no choice. “I’m at the Redwood Inn. What time will you be ready to leave?”

Vinnie shrugged. “I’ll pick you up out front around eleven.”

“Fine. I’ll see you tomorrow.” She nodded at Nick. “Thanks again. I’ll let you know if I need anything else,” she said as she left the office.

Danni closed the door behind her and breathed a sigh of relief. She had survived phase one of her plan and hadn’t slipped up. Now she had twenty-four hours to figure out how the hell to handle her so-called “assignment.” She took a deep breath and let it out slowly. Calm, cool, and collected, that’s how she’d play it for the next month. Thirty days wasn’t so long, but then again, the hard part was still to come.

She cocked her head toward the door as she heard Vinnie's deep voice.

“One of the guys, yeah right.”

* * *

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If you liked the characters in *A Deceptive Match*, don't miss the follow-up book, *A Secret Match*.

A Secret Match

This time, it's all about Everett... and he's got a big problem

Everett Kinkade is a world-famous professional wrestler and the sexy heartthrob of millions of adoring female fans. But Ev has a secret he doesn't dare share with anyone. He's gay.

After years of being Ev's secret lover, Josh is tired of hiding in the shadows and wants Ev to openly acknowledge their relationship. Coming out is the last thing Ev wants and fears it will ruin his career.

One night in a moment of truth, Everett outs himself on live TV. There's no going back, and his announcement sparks a firestorm of problems – both personally and professionally. He's forced to come to grips with who he really is while facing down a tag-team out to destroy him.

Torn between living a lie and losing the man he loves, Ev has risked everything... can he find a balance between his career and his heart?

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Trust with Hearts

After a bitter breakup, Sherrie Parker seeks refuge at her cousin Dave's house in rural West Virginia. Early one morning, she runs into Dave's other houseguest, a singer named Curtis Taylor.

The last thing Sherrie wants is to share living quarters with a country music crooner – even if he is sexy, in a cowboy sort of way.

Thrown together by circumstances, Sherrie and Curtis get off to a rocky start, but soon discover they have more in common than they ever imagined. Unable to fight their growing attraction, they give in to their desires and start a sizzling summer romance.

Everything is perfect between them until Sherrie discovers that Curtis is keeping secrets from her – and his biggest secret of all will change everything. Can their newfound love survive, or will destiny keep them apart forever?

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kelli A. Wilkins is an award-winning author who has published more than 100 short stories, 19 romance novels, and 5 non-fiction books. Her romances span many genres and heat levels.

Beauty & the Bigfoot, a paranormal-comedy, was published in September 2017.

Kelli released ***Trust with Hearts***, a contemporary romance, in July 2017. Her third gay romance, ***Four Days with Jack***, was released in June 2017. Kelli's trilogy of erotic romance novellas, ***Midsummer Night's Delights***, ***Midwinter Night's Delights***, and ***Ultimate Night's Delights*** was published in spring 2017.

Loving a Wild Stranger was published in January 2017. This historical/pioneer romance is set in the wilds of the Michigan Territory and blends tender romance with adventure.

Kelli's third Medallion Press romance, ***Lies, Love & Redemption*** was released in September 2016. This spicy historical western is set on the Nebraska prairie in 1877.

Her writing book, ***You Can Write—Really! A Beginner's Guide to Writing Fiction*** is a fun and informative guide filled with writing exercises and helpful tips all authors can use.

Kelli posts on her Facebook author page:
<https://www.facebook.com/AuthorKelliWilkins> and Twitter:
www.Twitter.com/KWilkinsauthor.

She also writes a weekly blog:

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