



*Uncovered*

COLOURS  
*of*  
LOVE



KATHRYN  
TAYLOR



## 4

“Good, so we’re all agreed then,” says Jason Leibowitz. Jason is from the new construction company which has stepped in to replace the old, unreliable one. To my relief, most people nod. The only person who doesn’t look happy is Frank Howard, the chubby lawyer who represents the Hackney shopping mall’s main anchor tenant. “But what if things don’t run to schedule?” he quibbles.

“They will,” I assure him, smiling at him in what is hopefully a professional but friendly way. Something I’ve been doing for more than an hour now, in response to all his objections — and he has a lot of them. Ever since he found out that I was going to run the meeting, and not Jonathan, he’s been displaying extreme hostility toward me. Clearly, he has a problem not only with the fact that I’m a woman, but also that I am young, too.

“And if they don’t? Will Huntington Ventures assume responsibility for the financial risks?” This time he looks pointedly at Alexander, probably because he doesn’t think I’m authorised to decide on matters concerning company money.

Alexander doesn’t respond to the lawyer directly. He looks over at me instead. He nods at me, which probably means that he wants me to answer the question. He’s been doing that the whole time, which makes me wonder why he joined us in the first place. I’m happy I’m not completely on my own, but he certainly hasn’t given me much active assistance.

I take a deep breath and consider what Jonathan would say in this situation. And suddenly the answer isn’t difficult at all.

“As I said, I don’t think there will be any delays,” I reply, in as calm a voice as possible. “But if there are, the contract very precisely stipulates how the costs will be divided up. Huntington Ventures will, of course, contribute their part which, as you know, is not insignificant. Bearing that in mind, it should be a manageable risk for all concerned.” I’m not looking at Frank Howard anymore; I’m letting my gaze wander over the entire circle of people. “Don’t forget how important this project is for Hackney and the neighbouring districts. Not only is this project economically important, but we’re making an important social contribution to the area — a contribution whose long-term effects shouldn’t be underestimated. This fact will also go down very well with the public, as we make it known. At the end of the day, everyone will benefit.” Alexander smiles almost imperceptibly, while the other representatives of the parties to the project nod in unison. And now even Frank Howard is nodding, too.

“Let’s hope you’re right,” he says, still sceptical. But he obviously can’t think of any more counterarguments. At last!

Alexander seems to feel the same way, because he seizes this opportunity to wrap things up.

“I think we can end the meeting here. We’ll inform you of the date of our next meeting in due course,” he says, people begin to get up and start talking to their neighbours.

“Will Mr. Huntington be there again?” Sophie Reardon from the local council asks me over the growing buzz of talk, looking at me hopefully. The pretty blonde’s reasons for wanting to know are different from Frank Howard’s. Clearly, she’s one of the many women who think Jonathan Huntington is pretty great, and will therefore try to get close to him. I can fully understand that, but I still feel too jealous to be friendly toward her.

“Yes, I think so,” I answer curtly, just managing to push my papers together before the first people start saying their goodbyes to me.

Once everyone has left, Alexander and I leave the big conference room, too. We’re about to go back up to the management floor, but while we’re standing in front of the elevator he gets a call.

“Go on ahead,” he says, and goes back through the hallway.

He obviously doesn’t want anyone listening in on his conversation and, judging by his expression, the caller is probably Sarah again.

So I go up to the top floor on my own, where Jonathan and Alexander have their office. Catherine Shepard, the beautiful, black-haired secretary, is looking in my direction from her desk in the foyer. Her smile looks like a mask, painted on, and there’s a cold look in her eyes.

I still haven’t found out whether she can’t stand me because she’s a member of the Jonathan fan club, or if she’s just annoyed because he made me his assistant over her head, as it were. In any case, she always manages to make me uneasy when she looks at me like that. I was on a high coming up here, but she brought me back down to earth.

“So, how did it go?,” she asks me in a clumsy attempt at friendliness. I’m almost certain I can hear a note of scorn in her voice.

“So far so good,” I reply succinctly. “When Mr. Norton arrives please tell him I’m waiting for him.” Without paying any more attention to her, I go past her to my office, which is right next to Jonathan’s.

The room is decorated very much like Jonathan’s — it’s light, with simple, designer furniture — but it’s much smaller. Like almost all the other rooms, it’s got an outer wall made of glass that provides an amazing view of the London skyline — at least from up here. I go up to the window to enjoy the view, looking out over the city.

A sigh escapes before I can stop myself. For one thing, I’m very happy that the meeting is over and everything’s gone well so far — apart from Frank Howard’s constant questions — and, for another, it’s an uplifting feeling to be standing here knowing that I did it. It was hard work — but it showed me that I really do enjoy doing the kinds of things I’m getting to try out here. This is exactly the sort of thing I’d like to do: oversee projects like the planned construction work in Hackney, watch the pieces coming together, the calculations working out, and, finally, something new emerging, something I made a decisive contribution toward ...

A knock at the door rouses me from my musings and I shout “Come in,” assuming it’s Alexander. But when I turn around, my friend Annie is poking her head in the door.

She's wearing a colourful, vintage dress which is unsuitable for work, strictly speaking. But, with the high black boots she's wearing, it passes as office wear — at least, in Annie's case. I don't know how she does it, but she has her very own style, something I really envy.

„May I come in?“

“Silly question, of course you can,” I say, impatient because she sounds so unusually hesitant. I run up to her and give her a big hug.

“What are you doing here?“

Annie actually works downstairs in the investment department, as I did too, right at the beginning, and she doesn't come up here very often. She grins and her eyes are sparkling.

“Officially or unofficially?“

“There are two versions?,” I ask, amused.

“Of course. Officially, I'm bringing you these very important papers,” she says, indicating the folder in her hand. “I thought it up as an excuse, so that I could get past the gorgon out there.” The moniker fits Catherine so well that I find myself grinning. “Because actually I just wanted to stop by briefly because I heard you were in the building. We hardly get to see you nowadays.”

She sounds a bit reproachful and I have to admit, guiltily, that she's right. Ever since the photo appeared in the press, prompting Jonathan to officially acknowledge our affair, I've been more or less living with him. I've hardly spent any time with Annie and the others, back at the Islington apartment, where I still have a room. “Where's the head honcho then?” Annie asks. „I heard he's not coming in today.“

“No, he isn't,” I answer truthfully, considering for a moment whether I should tell her about last night and about the fact that Jonathan is now willing to go one step further. But I decide against it. In the short time we've known each other, Annie's become a really good friend, but she's always been opposed to my relationship with Jonathan. She thinks he's commitment-phobic, and she's afraid he's going to hurt me. So she'd probably be pretty negative about it all, and put a very different slant on it for me. And I would rather enjoy the happiness I'm feeling right now — for a bit longer, at least.

But she's obviously not interested in the details.

“Marcus asked about you, by the way,” she says. „I think he still hasn't gotten over the fact that Jonathan Huntington stole you away from him.“

“He didn't,” I protest. “It wasn't a question of choosing between them.” I liked our American roommate, but Marcus never stood a chance against Jonathan. And Annie knows it, because she's grinning.

“You could at least show your face at our place from time to time, he's right about that. How's your weekend looking? Ian's going to make one of his famous curries on Saturday and he's invited a few friends. Why don't you come — it'll be fun!”

Ian owns a tattoo parlour in Islington. He's not just one of our roommates, he's also Annie's boyfriend. And he really does make legendary curries, so I'm sorry to have to turn down the invitation. But I need to be with Jonathan this weekend.

“I can't,” I say, unhappy at disappointing her yet again. And she is disappointed, I can tell. But, before I can explain myself or Annie can protest, Alexander comes in.

“Oh, I'm sorry. I thought you were alone, Grace,” he apologises.

“I was just leaving,” Annie says, winking at me. When she reaches the door, she turns around once more. “But let’s meet up again next week, OK?” She gives me a pointed look.

“I promise,” I say, hoping I can keep my word. I really don’t want to lose her as a friend.

Once she’s gone, Alexander grins at me. He looks younger than Jonathan when he does that, I think, suddenly. More relaxed. Less stressed . . .

“So — were you satisfied with your first meeting?,” he asks. I hesitate before answering. Is it a trick question?

“I think it went rather well,” I say finally. He observes me, amused.

“Rather well? Grace, you put on quite a show out there. Jonathan will be very happy. You represented him very well.”

His praise goes down like butter. I beam at him. “I’ve learned a lot from him in the past few weeks,” I say. The moment I say it out loud, I realise it’s true: Jonathan Huntington has been a very good teacher — and not only in bed. The thought makes my smile even wider. Being with him is clearly not all bad for me. I must tell Annie that when we see each other next.

“And he’s learned a lot from you,” Alexander says.

I look at him in surprise, my eyes expressing a silent question, and he smiles.

“You’ve changed him, Grace. And I like the new Jonathan better than the old one,” he says.

Just as I’m considering whether I should ask him for advice, his mobile rings at almost the same time as the phone on my desk, which starts up half a second afterward. He takes up his device and makes a sign to me that he’s going back over to his office. I smile and run to my phone.

It’s Jonathan.

“Ready?” His deep voice is like a caress and I forget everything else right away. All I want is to be with him again as quickly as possible.

“Yes, I’m ready,” I breathe. „Steven can pick me up now.”

“We’re already waiting at the door,” he says.

A jolt of happiness pulses through me.

“You came with him? But I thought . . .”

“Just come here, Grace.” I can hear the familiar note of command in his voice, but there’s desire in there too, and I hang up right away, gather my things together, and run to the elevator. I call out to Catherine to let Alexander know I’ve left — he knows I only came in to go to the meeting, so I’m sure it will be fine. And, besides, I’m just following the company director’s orders, I think, with a smile.

The black limousine with its tinted windows really is parked at the curb and, as I push open the glass door of the building, Steven gets out and walks round the car. He opens the back door for me and I beam at him as I get in.

Jonathan is waiting in the back. That makes my heart miss a beat and sets off a rollercoaster in my stomach. I have to kiss him briefly, before sitting down next to him, I can’t help myself.

“You got here in record time,” he says, amused. “I thought you would need a lot longer.”

“The first thing I learned at Huntington Ventures was that the boss really doesn’t like to be kept waiting,” I tell him and he laughs.

“Good girl.”

I observe him more carefully, as the car starts moving off. His pants, jacket, and shoes are black, as always, but this time he’s not wearing a black shirt, as he usually does, he’s wearing a very dark purple one. By his standards, it’s almost colourful, I think. You can still see the swelling on his cheek and lip, but otherwise he looks quite normal.

„How’re your ribs doing?” I ask him, because I can still see yesterday’s fight quite clearly in my mind’s eye. I won’t forget that in a hurry.

“Much better. Yuuto clearly isn’t as powerful as I thought,” Jonathan says. Well, hopefully that’s true in a metaphorical sense, too, I think worriedly. I still can’t quite believe it.

“How was the meeting?,” he asks, and I give him a full report, as we drive through London.

I assumed we were on our way back to Knightsbridge, but at some point I notice that our surroundings look completely unfamiliar.

“Where are we going?,” I ask, confused.

“Biggin Hill.” When I look at him blankly, he adds: „It’s a private airport.”

My head is spinning. “OK. And what are we going to do there?”

Jonathan leans back against the cushions. “I’ve decided to take Alexander’s advice. It’s better if I don’t get in the way of some paparazzo’s zoom lens, while they can still see I’ve been in a fight. So we’re flying off for a weekend break.”

“Right now?” I’m completely taken aback. And rather horrified as well. “But ... I don’t have my things with me!”

“I had Mrs. Matthews pack a few things for you,” Jonathan explains, without batting an eye. “And should you need anything else, we can get it for you.” Of course, I think. Money isn’t an issue, not in Jonathan’s world. Sometimes I find it hard to think on his terms. But the fact that he just decides on things like this, without informing me beforehand, makes me mad.

“And you didn’t feel the need to inform me of your plans?” I hope I’m looking at him sternly enough to give him a guilty conscience. But it doesn’t, since he just shrugs his shoulders. “Jonathan, you can’t just decide something like this over my head.”

He puts an arm around my shoulders and smiles that smile again, the one I find so unbelievably hard to resist. As he probably knows full well.

“Don’t you like surprises?”

That’s a really unfair question. It’s all totally unfair. Because how can I be mad at him? Now that I’ve had a moment to think about it I’m really excited at the thought of going away with him for the weekend.

“Yes, I do. But ... it’s so sudden. And, besides, I would have liked to have done my own packing.”