

Gabrielle Queen

translator: Martyn Fogg

I REALLY
LIKE YOU



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Аннотация

On the outside, it is the boss who is ruthless and the female employee who is beautiful, fascinating and a bit distracted, a bit resigned to what life still has to offer. Deep down inside, instead, they hide two hurricanes – or rather, two big hearts always in search of something different... perhaps deep down – in search of themselves. Milena is the young assistant to the feared Richard Bredson, one of the top tycoons in Italy. There blossoms between them an office romance, an extraordinary attraction at the edge of any human reason, which devours them until they are left stripped of any prejudice and at the same time helps them to rediscover their self-esteem and courage and to finally rediscover themselves like they would never have believed possible. Through this fantastic, marvellous, sudden Love, Richard and Milena simply rediscover themselves. To no longer lose themselves. Because love is also a voyage... marvellous, when made with the right person.

“His sweet mouth searches for mine, I moan in surprise, I cling to him tightly opening myself up like a flower, now I’m ready to give him all the purity and sweetness that I have kept for years in search of the right person. I have never kissed anyone under the Autumn rain...try

it, it's very beautiful. – Mr. Bredson, the cold one – I whisper with my tongue glued to his, I have discovered that it is my new favourite taste, I could spend hours just enjoying it. Oh, my God, so much emotion! If it wasn't for the rain that is refreshing my body and soul I would burst into thousands of pieces with joy, bathing the universe with all the colours of love... Richard kisses me and kisses me as if he can't stop... our mouths that have only recently become acquainted take up again the dance interrupted by my absurd fears. We bite each other with our teeth and with our lips, we lick the saliva and drops of slightly salty water that flood our faces, we kiss each other on our cheeks, our eyelids, our foreheads, our chins, our tongues and our teeth.

We are one, one being of light, desire, love and above all – infinite, unexpressed need for love...”

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1.

I would never have imagined meeting you, out of all the boys in my life.

You're different - special, I would dare to say. I never noticed you, not as a man.

I have never loved kissing. The first time someone tried to insert his tongue in my mouth, I kicked him between his legs.

When another tried the same thing, I dropped him even before starting a relationship. I couldn't stand French kissing. But you arrived. At the start, we didn't even like each other. Or rather – I didn't like you at all. I thought you were a bullying prick who only loves to be in charge. Ruthless. You wanted money, to earn money, you didn't care if the people working for you killed themselves doing it, almost ignoring their rights. You were hard-headed, but you also tried to be honest and fair with us. I have worked so hard that I have almost ruined my health. But I coped. I tried to look beyond your bullying and all-powerful aspect, beyond the continuous mistaken interpretation of my actions, sometimes. I knew that you had a lot to do – perhaps if you were like you were it was not completely your fault, after all you Italian men are so much led by women that sometimes it seems to me that you are losing your true personality and identity in order to please and indulge them. I wanted that work at all costs, therefore I held on, with clenched teeth. I put up with shouting and criticism – fair and unfair. In the end, I earned your respect, perhaps also a bit of affection and admiration. I had really given my all, the success of your firm was intermingled with my sweat, with a piece of my heart. Until that day, the lift was stuck for an hour, with the two of us inside. What a fright! Me and the boss, suspended between the tenth and eleventh floors of the building! I was shaking in front of you, I respected you but you were my little personal nightmare. I wanted to spend the least time possible in your presence; imagine what a pain in the ass!

You did everything to calm me down - luckily, I don't suffer from claustrophobia. Waiting for help I lay down on the floor - I was so tired and couldn't bear wearing my high heels any longer. You told me to take off my sandals, but I couldn't, not in front of you. In the end, after having chatted about this and that, you sat down beside me, our knees touching in that small space. Goodness! just on that day I had chosen a miniskirt and sheer stockings! Sometimes he looked at my legs - I wanted to die of shame and embarrassment. Good heavens! I didn't even know if you were engaged or not - at times there was some gossip circulating about your colourful love life, but, honestly, I had never seen you with a woman and I couldn't have cared less. At a certain point, after having discussed all the problems regarding the work, we didn't know what more to say to each other. You were very nervous, you had the mobile phones right in the office next to the lift and every so often you heard them ring. Bollocks! I, instead, was calmer, I tried to see the positive side: after all, I hadn't had a break for almost nine hours of uninterrupted work. I took off my glasses rubbing my tired eyes. I tried to calm you down as much as I could. I even touched your arm - the most familiarity that I could allow myself without showing I meant something else. I half-joked saying that it was a well-earned rest but you were so nervous that it made it difficult to joke with you. Finally the technician arrived, freeing the lift. We were safe and sound; I secretly thanked God that I was not trapped in it alone, your presence had kept me company and cheered me up.

“Even the big boss is a human being” - I said to myself. From then on, I anyway thought I should have used the stairs. The following day, just arrived in the office, there was waiting for me on my desk - a lovely Murano glass vase, with a red rose in it! It was very beautiful, I smiled, upset and curious, I smelled it and stroked the petals, asking myself, amazed, who had made such an unexpected gesture. Then I found a little note hidden in the first file on my desk: “Thank you for having kept me company, yesterday - I should marry you”. No signature. What??? Whom had I kept company with the day before??? Racking my brain, I reached the only reasonable conclusion: it was you! The rose was a thankyou for having helped you overcome the difficult moment in the lift - but - was it something more? What should I expect from the most eligible bachelor in the firm, at whom practically all the women made eyes. Perhaps I had been the only one to treat him with discretion and professional coolness, always. Some days went by, nothing happened apart from the daily grind. All OK, but as soon as I had a free moment to check my Facebook messages, I almost fell off my chair: on my Facebook page, there was a shared message from you, a quote from someone I didn't know: “The foolish vanity of a man is to be always a woman's first love; women instead have a much more subtle instinct. Their foolish vanity is to be the last love of a man, for eternity”. Oh! My God! But, was it a little joke? I never allowed you to say or send me such things - I had stopped breathing - I mean, the big boss who writes such a “declaration” to one of his female

employees, and on his public profile where everyone can read it!!! Perhaps I was exaggerating, but in my mind and in my heart a bottomless and unlimited pit was opening up, like a flash of lightning hitting a rock; it splits it in two with fantastic force. My heart was opening up to innumerable possibilities, with the same speed as a flash of lightning - I was - I was losing -

2.

After a few days, silence came to my office like in a tomb - you've got red eyes, your hair's dishevelled, you fix me with a hardness that scares me a bit - you seem more distraught than usual. I don't know what's happening to you, but I try to appear calm and professional, as always.

In the meantime, I have not posted any reply on Facebook, I am still waiting for you to cancel the post off my profile, declaring it an error.

You ask me for a file, I hand it to you and in the process our hands touch, it must have happened thousands of times before, I don't know why it's different now. In a moment of distraction, I feel your breath on my cheek and I have a shock when your lips touch my neck, trembling - also your hands are shaking. I am really stumped by the improbability of the situation. Am I perhaps dreaming? My heart stops the moment when, encouraged by my immobility, you take hold of me gently round my waist and your lips press more resolutely onto my neck - your hot tongue follows, you explore my sensitive skin causing me shivers all over - Why am I immobile like as if I had died???

I have never felt anything like it - never such a shock, such alarm, such emotion. I like your perfume, nice and clean - and, above all, what you do to my skin - you make me go crazy, but it can't be that, a part of me knows only too well that it's a very big mistake. It's impossible that the most eligible bachelor in town tries it on really with me! But who do you take me for?? Before the absurd passion gets the upper hand over my reason, I go away shakily, pushing the desk between us like an obstacle. You apologise, breathing heavily and go away. I collapse, shaking, on the chair, my legs won't support me anymore. I am trying to understand something, but what, what is there to understand? Perhaps it was stress that made us give in for a moment, a unique episode that will not happen again.

3.

The morning after, there's another red rose awaiting me in an elegant and pretty Murano glass vase, together with a note: "To ask your forgiveness. This evening at 7 p.m. Dinner with Mr. Okashima of Mega Products, and, afterwards, - a show at the Duse Theatre. It would give us great pleasure if you could accompany us - Don't worry about clothes. Many thanks for saving me once again - x"

I stay a long time staring fixedly at the hand-written note. Above all, the "x" at the end fills me with new worries. That night I did not sleep a wink for thinking and rethinking about that splendid kiss on my neck - Perhaps it came about by chance, but there was so much passion between us - Did we both feel

it together? Or is it my crazy fantasy???. I don't feel myself any more, I really don't know what to do!!! I am - suspended in the air between the incredible madness about a kiss on my neck and the most complete fear, the absurd panic about being mistaken once again. Now I should find any excuse and kindly refuse your offer for this evening. I grab, with trembling hand, a sheet of paper and set to writing something about my sick grandmother who I have to look after - the irony is that it's true! - but I glance again at the red rose, fresh like this new passion that is overwhelming me, in spite of myself - leaving me breathless. The petals remind me of your lips - I let out a groan. It's the proof that I don't want to deny. I must do it, but I can't. After all, it's only about a dinner. A veiled opportunity to study you without you knowing and perhaps - understand a bit better who you are. Perhaps it will be just a dinner like so many others. Now if I think about it, I already once had to accompany Mr. Okashima and other colleagues to dinner and the theatre, which is his preferred cultural activity. OK Milena, calm yourself down. Don't get paranoid over an incident, accept it as though nothing happened. It's a chance to improve relations with the boss. But while I write you a thankyou email, I know deep inside me that: 1) I can't wait to meet you in a less formal environment and 2) this evening I will wear one of my best, most chic outfits.

4.

There's a small problem: I am prettier than I would want t.o be
My friend Sophie is looking at me euphoric for about ten

minutes, continuing to give me suggestions on what to do: smile; talk, etc. as if I was still a sixteen year-old. - OK, he is one of the men most in vogue in town and, moreover, he's my boss - but this doesn't mean that I have to transform myself into his new geisha.. or worse still, Mr. Okashima's - Perhaps I should put on something less striking.

- I forbid you! - shouts Sophie, gripped by a kind of post-bender euphoria while she takes photos of me to post on Facebook - as I stupidly called it - Instagram and all the other social media websites on the planet.

Well - as I was telling you, I am too elegant, like - a girl invited to the recent divorce of Brangelina, if they ever gave a party in honour of the sensational event gossiped about for so long by everyone. I had some blonde streaks done, in one of the best beauty centres in town, which in my black hair, gathered up in a special plait, create a nice and chic contrast. The skin-tight sky-blue suit shows off brilliantly both my curves in the right places, and my siren's eyes - at least in Sophie's opinion, after three glasses of sparkling wine. With a low-necked top and sleeves, it is covered with a blue veil dusted with glitter. Together with the fabulous Black Giardini sandals with vertiginous heels, it creates a very glamorous effect. At least, I hope so. - Oh God! why do I dress like that? Richard will definitely think that I want to take him straight to bed! Exactly the opposite of my intentions, I swear! - Don't worry, the worst effect that your get-up will have on him will be a pay increase - Therefore great, you win and you

shine! The effect I had on my boss was even worse than all that I and my girlfriend could have thought; he almost didn't speak all evening, staring at me as if he had suddenly become deaf and dumb; it was left to me the burden of conversation with Mr. Okashima, in the worst American English, learnt from so many of the films that I watch on-line. And while I pretend not to notice that Richard is staring at me - do you know what I am saying? - he doesn't stop staring at me the whole evening, as though he had never seen me before. I wonder if every so often he might give me an imaginary little lick. Oh Sir! a total, total disaster!!! An hour and a half of torture under his charming blue eyes are enough to promise myself to not dress and make myself up ever again in this way, as long as I can manage it. The fact remains that I know him, he loves sophisticated, but simple and natural things. This evening I really exaggerated but - perhaps my exaggerated and provocative get-up will convince him to not talk to me ever again for all his life! That could be the positive side! At the café - I never drink coffee - I excuse myself and go for a bath, happy to enjoy a moment of relaxation. Richard has rediscovered a bit of his usual talkativeness, he was telling our client about a game of bridge with Yessica Ferrari, one of his ex - flames and - as it happens - CEO of our competitor - I definitely need to regain my strength. - It's a bit too hot this evening, isn't it?? I utter a little shriek with almost a jump: Richard is behind me, staring at me in the mirror! - Er - Mr. Bredson - What - what are you doing in the ladies room? I lick my lips to hide my nervousness, I can't

believe he followed me in! Will I have permission to do a pee, in the absence of your undesired presence?? I blush violently, only now has he realised where he was, but how much has he drunk? - I just wanted to say to you - Er - that this evening - this evening truly - not that you are not always, but this evening - this evening truly - As has happened to him before, he can't manage to find the words, he seems suddenly to be a sixteen-year-old boy, his mind seems completely dulled by the image of me. Isn't it marvellous the effect that a beautiful girl can always have on a boy, of any age? You come towards me, you glue me to the washbasin, oh God! I can't escape. Milena - why don't you dress like that every day? Probably because not one of your colleagues would do any work any more - the males: out of admiration, the ladies: out of envy, the firm would go bankrupt in the space of a month - but, even so, it would be worth it - to die of happiness admiring an angel just dropped from the sky - I don't have time to answer with an intelligent, witty remark, his lips are already on my cheek. Oh God! we're starting again! He breathes in my perfume with his eyes closed, traces the lines of my cheekbone with his mouth, plays with a loose lock of my hair, pushes his cheek against mine in a sensual game which, little by little, makes me weak at the knees. Er! Excuse me! - a lady exclaims bitterly behind him who looks extraordinarily like a female version of Donald Trump. We rush out of the toilet laughing and for a moment the mirror on the wall seems to depict a fine couple during a relaxing business dinner.

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