

The C O L O R
of
H E A V E N

JULIANNE
MACLEAN

The Color of Heaven

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Excerpt from *The Color of Destiny*
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“A gem cannot be polished without friction, nor a man perfected without adversity.”

– *Donina Va'a Renata*

Preface



A lot goes through your mind when you're dying. What they say about life flashing before your eyes is true. You remember things from your childhood and adolescence—specific images, vivid and real, like brilliant sparks of light exploding in your brain.

Somehow you're able to comprehend the whole of your life in that single instant of reflection, as if it were a panoramic view. You have no choice but to look at your decisions and accomplishments—or lack of them—and decide for yourself if you did all that you could do.

And you panic just a little, wishing for one more chance at all the beautiful moments you didn't appreciate, or for one more day with the person you didn't love quite enough.

You also wonder in those frantic, fleeting seconds, as your spirit shoots through a dark tunnel, if heaven exists on the other side, and if so, what you will find there.

What will it look like? What color will it be?

Then you see a light—a brilliant, dazzling light—more calming and loving than any words can possibly describe, and everything finally makes sense to you. You are no longer afraid, and you know what lies ahead.

Sunshine and Rain



CHAPTER

One



In this remarkable, complex world of ours, there are certain people who appear to lead charmed lives. They are blessed with natural beauty, have successful and fulfilling careers. They drive expensive cars, live in upscale neighborhoods, and are happily married to gorgeous and brilliant spouses.

I was once one of those people. Or at least that's how I was perceived.

Not that I hadn't endured my share of hardships. My childhood had been far from idyllic. My relationship with my father was strained at best, and there were certain pivotal events that I preferred to forget altogether—events that involved my mother, which I don't really wish to go into now, but I will explain later, I promise.

All you need to know is that for a number of years my life was perfect, and I found more happiness than I ever dreamed possible.



My name is Sophie. I grew up in Camden, Maine, but moved to Augusta when I was fourteen. I have one sister. Her name is Jen and we look nothing alike. Jen is

blonde and petite (she takes after our mother), while I am tall, with dark auburn hair.

Jen was always a good girl. She did well in school and graduated with honors. She went to university on scholarship and is now a social worker in New Hampshire, where she lives with her husband, Joe, a successful contractor.

I, on the other hand, was not such a model student, nor was I an easy child to raise. I was passionate and rebellious and drove my father insane with my adventurous spirit, especially in the teen years. While Jen was quiet and bookish and liked to stay home on a Friday night, I was a party girl. By the time I reached high school, I had a steady boyfriend. His name was Kirk Duncan, and we spent most of our time at his house because his parents were divorced and never around.

Before you pass judgment, let me assure you that Kirk was a decent, sensible young man—very mature for his age—and I have no regrets about the years we spent together. He was my first love, and I knew that no matter where life took us, I would always love him.

We had a great deal in common. He was a musician and played the guitar, while I liked to sketch and write. Our artistic natures gelled beautifully, and if we hadn't been so young when we first met (I was only fifteen), we might have ended up together, married and living in the suburbs with a house full of children. But life at that age is unpredictable. It's not how things turned out.

When Kirk left Augusta to attend college in Michigan and I stayed behind to finish my last year of high school, we drifted apart. We remained friends and kept in touch for a while, but eventually he began dating another girl, and she was upset by the once-a-month let-

ters we continued to write to each other.

We both knew it was time to cut the cord, so we did. For a long stretch I missed him—he was such a big part of my life—but I knew it was the right thing to do. Whenever I was tempted to call him, I resisted.

I went on to study English and Philosophy at NYU, which is where I met Michael Whitman.

Michael Whitman. The name alone had a sigh attached to it...

He was handsome, charming and witty, the most perfect man I had ever seen. Every time he walked into a room, I lost my breath, as did every other hot-blooded female within a fifty-yard radius.

If only I knew then, when I was nineteen, that he would be my future husband. I probably wouldn't have believed it, but there's a lot I wouldn't have believed about the extraordinary events of my life. I doubt you'll believe them either, but I'm going to tell them to you anyway.

I'll leave it up to you to decide if they're real.

CHAPTER

Two



Michael was nothing like Kirk or any of the boys I had known in high school. His parents owned a corn farm in Iowa, but he looked as if he'd been raised by aristocrats in an English country house and had just stepped off the cover of *GQ* magazine.

Well-dressed and devastatingly handsome—with dark, wavy hair, pale blue eyes, and a muscular build—he had a way of making you feel as if you were the most attractive, witty, charismatic person on earth. And it wasn't just women who worshipped him. He was a man's man, too, with a number of close, loyal friends. His professors respected him. He was an A student and the class valedictorian at graduation. And then—big surprise—he went off to Harvard Law School on scholarship.

He was your basic “dreamboat,” and though he spoke to me now and then on campus, like everyone else, I mostly admired him from afar.

It wasn't until four years after graduation, when I was interning in the publicity department at C.W. Fraser—a major publisher of non-fiction books and celebrity tell-alls—that I became the envy of every single young woman in Manhattan and beyond.

It was June 16, 1996. I was twenty-six years old, and had helped to organize a book launch party that Michael attended.

We saw each other from across the room and waved. Later that night, we went out to dinner, and when he escorted me home, I invited him inside. We stayed up all night, just talking on the sofa, listening to music, and we kissed when the sun came up.

It was the most magical, romantic night of my life. One year later, we were married.



During our honeymoon in Barbados, Michael confessed something to me that he'd never been able to talk about before, not with anyone.

When he was twelve years old, his older brother Dean had died in a tractor accident. The vehicle slid down a muddy embankment, rolled over and landed on top of Dean, killing him instantly. Michael was the one who found him.

His voice shook as he described Dean's lifeless body, trapped beneath the heavy tractor.

I hadn't known about the accident when we attended university together. I don't think anyone did. Michael had always seemed so strong and dynamic. It seemed as if nothing bad could ever touch him.

As soon as I heard this, I understood that we shared something very profound—a common experience that left us both broken in unseen places, for I had lost my mother when I was fourteen.

I was still angry with her for leaving us.

Because that's what she did. She made a choice, and she left us.

Be sure to look for book two in the
Color of Heaven Series:

THE COLOR OF DESTINY

Excerpt from *The Color of Destiny*

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From USA Today bestselling author Julianne MacLean comes a heartbreaking, emotionally gripping novel of hard choices, lost love and finding happy endings—with a surprising twist that will melt your heart.

Eighteen years ago a teenage pregnancy changed Kate Worthington's life forever. Faced with many difficult decisions, she chose to follow her heart and embrace an uncertain future with the father of her baby and her devoted first love.

At the same time, in another part of the world, sixteen-year-old Ryan Hamilton makes his own share of mistakes but learns important lessons along the way. Twenty years later, Kate's and Ryan's paths cross in a way they could never expect, which makes them question the possibility of destiny. Even when all seems hopeless, could it be that everything happens for a reason, and we end up exactly where we are meant to be?

Includes Bonus Content: A Bookclub Discussion Guide

Saving Lives



CHAPTER

One



I'm sure if you look back, you are able to pinpoint specific events in your life that changed you forever. For me, one of those events occurred on a country road in New Hampshire, in the frigid cold of a mid-February afternoon in 2007, when I watched a scuba diver pull a dead woman from the bottom of a frozen lake.

"What happened?" I asked the cop when I stepped out of the ambulance and felt the heel of my boot slip on a patch of black ice. "*Whoa.*" I grabbed hold of the side mirror to steady myself.

"The driver swerved to avoid hitting a deer," he replied, blowing into his hands and rubbing them together to warm them. "Must have hit the brakes too hard. According to witnesses, the vehicle did a one-eighty, then rolled down the embankment. Landed upside down on the ice and stayed there for a minute or two before the ice broke. Then... down she went."

There were a few cars parked on the side of the road with their hazard lights blinking. It was the usual scene. Spectators stood around, watching the show. Cop cars were positioned with red and blue lights flashing, and other officers in neon yellow vests waved at oncoming

cars, motioning for everyone to move along.

“How long has the vehicle been underwater?” I asked, not knowing if it was a single driver or an entire family with kids. Heaven forbid.

“About twenty minutes,” the cop said. “Lucky thing there was a car following behind. Saw the whole thing and called it in.”

“I don’t know if I’d call any of this lucky,” I said. “How did you get a diver down here so fast?”

“Another stroke of luck,” the cop replied. “He’s a volunteer with search and rescue, and conveniently, he lives right there.” He pointed at a small lakeside bungalow.

“I suppose that *is* lucky.”

“Yeah, though I’m not sure how much good it’ll do. Twenty minutes under water. I’m not holding out much hope.”

I strode closer to the edge of the road to get a better view just as the scuba diver re-surfaced. He bobbed like a cork out of a gaping black hole in the ice.

In his arms, he held the limp body of a woman.

CHAPTER

Two



I became a paramedic because I was fascinated by emergency medicine. This obsession began when I was sixteen. How exhilarating to imagine that I could actually save a life. I did briefly consider going to medical school, but didn’t feel I had the grades.

Not that it doesn’t take brains to be a paramedic. I studied hard to get through the program. On top of that, it takes a certain type of person to keep a cool head in out-of-control situations when people are covered in blood.

I’m proud of my skills. I’m also proud of the fact that I graduated from high school at all, when someone else in my situation might never have made it. I’ll explain more about that later, but for now, let’s focus on the dead woman.



As soon as the rescue team reached the snow-covered shoreline and set the body down, I checked for a pulse. There wasn’t one.

“Hurry,” I said. “We have to get her out of here.”

I climbed up the embankment, reaching hand over

hand, slipping on snow-covered rocks, while the rescue team followed behind me, awkwardly hoisting the gurney. They reached the road at last and extended the wheels. My partner, Bill, bagged and masked the woman while I began chest compressions, which I performed while walking alongside the rolling gurney as we wheeled her to the ambulance.

Bill always did the driving. He enjoyed blasting the horn, running traffic lights, and I'm pretty sure he entered this line of work because he loved the wail of the siren. Me... I always reminded him to slow down and drive with care. All I wanted was to keep my patients safe and tell them everything was going to be okay.

I knew this woman couldn't hear me, but when we slid her into the back of the ambulance and the doors slammed shut, I spoke the words to her regardless. "Everything's going to be okay," I said. Habit I guess.

"Buckled in?" Bill asked over his shoulder as he turned the key in the ignition. He was joking of course, because I had work to do in the back. I was busy putting the leads on and calling ahead to the hospital.

When I had the doctor on the line, I calmly and quickly explained the situation while looking down at the woman's face behind the oxygen mask. She was about my age, mid- to late-thirties, with dark auburn hair. Some of the ends were white with frost. She was a sickly blue-gray color, like a cadaver in a morgue, but also severely hypothermic. That observation gave me hope.

"What's her temperature?" the doc asked me.

I reached into my bag for the digital thermometer. "Eighty-one degrees. And she's soaking wet."

He paused, but only for a second, then began spout-

ing off instructions. "Get her clothes off right away and cover her with a heating blanket. Tell your driver to crank up the heat in the ambulance as high as it will go. Start warm IV fluids. Stick the IV bags down your own shirt if you have to. The goal is to get her warm, even if you can only raise her temperature a few degrees. Don't defibrillate. Not yet. Focus on warming her up to at least eighty-six, then start CPR. We'll be waiting for you outside the ER doors."

I proceeded to remove the patient's wet clothes, then I wrapped her in an electric heating blanket and stuffed the IV bags down my shirt like the doctor suggested.

"Where's a microwave when you need one?" I said to Bill, shocked by the chilly bag against my skin. "Ooh, that's cold."

I couldn't imagine what it had been like for this poor woman, when gallons of ice water came pouring into her car.

I used my stethoscope to check for a heartbeat and looked at her face again. Would we be able to revive her? I wondered. And if we did, would she ever be the same?

"How you doing back there?" Bill asked as he took a hard right turn. I fell forward slightly, then tucked the blanket around the woman a little more tightly.

"We're okay. Do you have the heat up as high as it'll go?"

"Yeah, but do you really think there's any hope? She was down there a long time."

"She's not dead until she's warm and dead," I replied, taking her temperature again. Eighty-three degrees.

"Realistically, how often do they come back without any brain damage?" Bill asked.

"I don't know the stats, but I've seen it happen. When

I was a kid, my dad took our dog hunting for rabbits one winter and accidentally shot her.”

“Geez,” Bill said.

“Dad didn’t know that he shot her. He thought she ran off after something, then he found her in the snow after a couple of hours. I don’t know how long she was dead, but we all got the shock of our lives when she woke up after my dad brought her home and laid her down by the woodstove.”

“Are you sure she was really dead?”

“Yeah, a hundred percent sure. My head was resting on her chest. Maybe it was my body heat that brought her back.”

“Sounds like a miracle to me.”

I used my stethoscope to listen for a heartbeat again, but still, there was nothing.

“I don’t believe in miracles,” I said. “It’s just science. No different from a frozen dinner that sits in the freezer for six months, then tastes great after five minutes in the microwave.”

It was getting warm in the ambulance. I had to unbutton my jacket and shrug out of it. “How much further?” I asked Bill.

“We’re five minutes away.” He slammed on the brakes and laid on the horn. “Pull over you idiot!” Then he swerved and hit the gas.

I checked the woman’s temperature again. It was eighty-six degrees, so I began CPR.



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Don’t miss Julianne MacLean’s newest and most powerful women’s fiction novel to date – a gripping novel about one woman’s search for answers when her husband vanishes in the night.

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Olivia Hamilton is married to the love of her life, Dean, a charismatic pilot who flies private jets for the rich and famous. But when he vanishes over the Bermuda Triangle, Olivia’s idyllic existence unravels. After years of waiting, Olivia must eventually let go of the fragile hope that her beloved husband might still be alive.

Melanie Brown is a particle physicist who spends late nights studying the Bermuda Triangle. But her research interests falter when her mother dies in a tragic accident. Struggling to reboot her life and career, Melanie begins a forbidden love affair with her therapist.

When a shocking discovery shows Olivia’s and Melanie’s paths are intertwined, it casts Dean’s disappearance in a new light. The two women’s strange connection threatens to unlock secrets that will change everything Olivia thought she knew about her marriage, her husband, and most importantly, herself.



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About the Author



JULIANNE MACLEAN is a *USA Today* bestselling author of more than thirty novels, including the popular *Color of Heaven Series*. Readers have described her books as “breathtaking,” “soulful,” and “uplifting.” MacLean is a four-time RITA finalist and has won numerous awards. Her novels have sold millions of copies worldwide and have been translated into more than a dozen languages.

MacLean has a degree in English literature from King’s College in Halifax, Nova Scotia, and a business degree from Acadia University in Wolfville, Nova Scotia. She loves to travel and has lived in New Zealand, Canada, and England. She currently resides on the east coast of Canada in a lakeside home with her husband and daughter. She invites readers to visit her website for more information about her books and writing life, and to subscribe to her mailing list for all the latest news: www.juliannemaclean.com