

## Her Bodyguard: Sandra Kitt's *The Color of Love* as a foundational text for BWWM romance

Piper Huguley, Ph.D.

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**About the Author:** Piper G Huguley is a two-time Golden Heart® finalist and is the author of “Migrations of the Heart,” a three-book series of historical romances set in the early 20th century featuring African American characters. Huguley is also the author of the “Home to Milford College” series. The series follows the building of a fictitious college from its founding in 1866. The contemporary romance novel portion of this series, *Sweet Tea*, was published by Hallmark Publishing in July 2021. Her debut historical fiction novel about Ann Lowe, the Black designer of Jackie Kennedy’s wedding dress, will release on June 7, 2022 (William Morrow). She lives in Atlanta, Georgia with her husband and son.

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*The Bodyguard*, a screenplay by Lawrence Kasdan, circulated around Hollywood for decades. Written by Kasdan for Steve McQueen, the first actress thought to match McQueen’s star power was Diana Ross. They had disagreements about the billing and when McQueen died in 1980, the project moved on to Ryan O’Neal and Diana Ross. Ross lost interest in the project but when Kasdan had begun film collaborations with Kevin Costner in the 1980s, the project had more opportunity to see the light of day. When Whitney Houston and Kevin Costner finally made the film and it was released in 1992, the picture grossed enough money to become, at that time, the tenth highest grossing picture of all time (Snyder). The pairing of Houston and Costner seemed to reflect the zeitgeist of the moment, a marked increase in Interracial relationships between Black women and white men. Just a little more than two years later, author Sandra Kitt’s *The Color of Love* (1995) was published and set into motion, unintentionally, an entirely new arm of romance publishing that permitted the ever-loyal audience of Black women readers to embrace the

romance subgenre known as BWWM (Black Women and White Men), which, in turn, created a foundation for the Interracial Romance subgenre that still forms an important part of the romance industry to this day. Bodyguards protect and police officers, as their mottos says, protect AND serve. Kitt, in her novel, revises the movie trope to make the case that the only kind of man who will bring a happily ever after for a Black woman is one who will protect, love and above all, cherish her. His skin color does not matter.

Granted, *The Bodyguard* and the subsequent publication of *The Color of Love* have not been the only BWWM portrayals in popular culture. *The Landlord*, for instance, was a comedic portrayal of interracial relationships released more than a generation before in 1970. There was also the long-standing interracial marriage between Tom and Helen Willis on television on *The Jeffersons* in the late 1970s and early 1980s. But Sandra Kitt's novel, which had been in the works since the 1980s, can be seen as a response to the unhappily ever after end of *The Bodyguard*, where Frank and Rachel split up. It's never made really clear why they were called upon to end their relationship but Rachel's career as a very public and visible singer, and Frank's work as a bodyguard who blends into backgrounds, were incompatible. They could not be themselves if the other lover crossed over into the other one's life. So no Happily Ever After (the HEA moment in romance when readers are reassured that all will end well for the couple, often in marriage) was possible for them. Their last kiss, shared over the lofty tune of "I Will Always Love You," the Dolly Parton-penned tune sung in Whitney Houston's angelic soprano, was filmed with all of the romantic heart and soul that the moment of parting could muster. What is notable is that, and most importantly, their split did not occur because of race.

In her unique creation of a story with a protective hero and an artistic heroine, Sandra Kitt sought, as she explained to Julie Moody-Freeman in an interview, to write a layered, nuanced story with the greatest possible conflict: "that is this [mirrors the] relationship between the Black community and law enforcement officers. ... Could I write a story about a growing relationship between a Black female and a white male who also happened to be a police officer, and have the reader believe it?" The answer is a resounding yes. Kitt's *The Color of Love* features a complex romance between Leah Downey, a graphic artist who is in a disappointing relationship with Black Mr. Right Now, and Jason Horn, a recently divorced cop who has trust issues with women after his now-ex-wife, in the wake of the accidental death of their young son, was not faithful to him. The characters must navigate a maze of unsupportive family members, abusive partners, racist work mates and a society that is largely chilly to the prospect of their Happily Ever After.

Leah and Jason's potential HEA comes up against an even longer history of fraught relationships between Black women and white men. Patricia Hill Collins, in her landmark work *Black Feminist Thought*, weighs in:

The relationships among Black women and white men have long been constrained by the legacy of Black women's sexual abuse by white men and the unresolved tensions this creates.... [F]reedom for Black women has meant freedom from white men, not the freedom to choose white men as lovers and friends (191).

This riven history extends the past, which foregrounds the low societal status of enslaved women whose bodies were seen as public property and readily available for sexual

Congress—a loaded historical backdrop for relationships between Black women and white men.

Even when the enslavement of Black women came to an end in 1865, there were still laws in dozens of states against interracial marriage. The laws existed to prohibit Black men and white women from intermarriage, but of course, the prohibition existed against white men as well. However, for white men who saw Black women, any Black women, as perpetually sexually available, the risks of being outcast in society for entering into an interracial marriage with a Black woman were not as attractive. The risks were not attractive for potential Black wives either. In contemporary novels like *Iola Leroy*, by Frances Watkins Harper, published in 1892, the title character rejects the proposal of the white Dr. Gresham, on the basis of this particular issue. When he expresses his love for her, Iola tells him that it is impossible due to the “insurmountable barrier...that assigns [me] a place with the colored people” (Chapter 23). Dr. Gresham’s naïve approach to the world means that he lacks the understanding and knowledge of racism to be a suitable and, more importantly for a Black woman whose body is public property, a protective husband in a racist society. Other literary examples that discuss this barrier that exists between Black women and white men are Harriet Wilson’s *Our Nig* (1859) and Frank Webb’s *The Garies and their Friends* (1857).

Historically, real-life inspirations for Kitt’s couple did exist. Varying state laws against interracial marriage didn’t stop couples from having relationships or being together. Of course, the most famous example of a real-life BWWM marriage was of Richard Loving and Mildred Jeter. They married in Washington DC, but when they came home to Virginia, they faced arrest and exile. Their lawsuit against the Commonwealth of Virginia went to the Supreme Court in 1967, resulting in the ruling that upended all the variety of state laws that existed against interracial marriage. Even though there were always more interracial marriages between Black men and white women, the case that struck down the old laws was from a BWWM couple (Cashin 12). Examples of these openly rebellious citizens in regards to the law against interracial marriage must have always existed, because there were laws, and yet a whitewashed historical narrative called them impossible.

*The Color of Love* was Sandra Kitt’s third published book but as previously said, one that she had been working on since the 1980s. In her interview with Julie Moody-Freeman on the Black Romance Podcast, Kitt, a brilliant woman and science librarian, spoke about the genesis of *The Color of Love*. At the point she began writing the story (her first novel), she spoke about her desire to see something different:

I’d never seen a book like that. I’d never seen an interracial story that wasn’t just about a Black guy and white woman getting together, but exploring the hesitations, the difficulties, their fears, everything to make it real, to make it a real story (Moody-Freeman).

Kitt certainly makes use of this strategy well when she presents Leah, who appears to have PTSD from a recent robbery/rape attempt, and Jason, a police officer who has had his own issues in life. These complexities add richness to the story and strengthens Kitt’s case for why these two belong together.

At the same time, Kitt must make the case for why Leah's current beau is not the man for her. In doing this, Kitt risks receiving critique, because the Mr. Right Now character in Leah's life, her boyfriend Allen, is a Black man who doesn't protect, love or cherish her. In a white supremacist society, Black women are often called upon to uplift Black men in the face of oppression. But Kitt's priority is Leah. Allen's cavalier attitude toward Leah feels as if he's taking her for granted, at the very least, but more like ownership, at the very worst. Patricia Hill Collins, in her work, points out a larger issue in the conflict between Black men and Black women that applies to the shifting ground that the Leah/Allen relationship treads upon:

Some African-American men feel they cannot be men unless they dominate a woman... Those Black men who wish to be 'master' by fulfilling traditional definitions of masculinity—both Eurocentric and white-defined for African-Americans—and who are blocked from doing so can become dangerous to those closest to them (186).

Leah's recent mugging assault means that she's constantly on edge and feels the need to be safe. Unfortunately, Allen's priority is himself, and he's not at all invested in looking out for Leah's welfare. Even the way he kisses her isn't serving her needs. "He'd pull her abruptly into his arms and begin to kiss her ardently, immediately forcing her mouth open to receive his aggressive, rough tongue...she was uncomfortable. She felt cramped and bunched up" (Kitt 31). He's not the right man for her, and certainly not someone who is in the right kind of position to take on the protection of Leah, at this devastating time in her life.

Kitt extends her critique of Black men because they are the ones who hang out in the shadows and catcall Leah occur more than once in *The Color of Love*, and her reaction to them harkens back to her attack. In Chapter Five, Kitt shows what happens when someone tries to approach Leah in the wrong way and how Jason shields her:

She felt a hand on her arm. Her resolve to remain calm failed her. Her breath caught in her throat and she jerked away. "How 'bout you and me—"

"The lady isn't interested,' Jason cut in out of nowhere....

Leah knew a flashing moment of profound relief (99).

Clearly, Jason is the one who will provide Leah with that safety and protection that she seeks.

Kitt's critique in *The Color of Love* emerges at a time when employing this critique of Black men was a risky approach. By 1995 Black women writers were at the zenith of their literary power, but they faced great criticism from Black men who objected to their depiction in the novels by Black women writers. Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*, released as a novel in 1983 and a film in 1985, was held up by Black men as the prime enemy text. Rhonda Penrice in *The Grio* quotes one offended party who claimed Walker's book was public enemy number one to Black men, "It is degrading to black men...makes us all look like wife beaters and rapists,' one black man told *Los Angeles Times*." Penrice's article also quoted Black journalist Tony Brown of *Tony Brown's Journal* as saying that "the film of *The*

*Color Purple* was the most racist depiction of Black men since *The Birth of a Nation*". Late twentieth century cultural atmosphere was rife with interracial tension over gender relations within the Black community. Kitt, in her novel, is all about prioritizing Leah's feelings over the hurt feelings of Black men in her world who do not take the time to protect, love or cherish her. Thus Kitt ensures that *The Color of Love* is not purple as in Walker's book, nor is it Black. The true color of love will be whatever best suits Leah and for the man, whatever his color happens to be, who will meet her needs of tender care, love and protection.

Kitt doesn't make it easy, though. Jason Horn, at first glance, doesn't appear as if he is Prince Charming. Leah first encounters him on the front stairs of her stoop. His clothes don't convey someone who is a potential suitor. He looks homeless, lost and forlorn. Leah's sister, Gail, doesn't like that he is there and thinks that he is far from law-abiding and is a danger: "He's still sitting there. I should tell him this is not a shelter for the homeless... If he's here when you come home tonight, call the police" (Kitt 9). Gail speaks these words completely unaware that Jason is a police officer and just happens to be the protection that her sister is looking for.

However, Leah not only ignores her sister's words, but she goes so far as to pour him a cup of coffee and take it out to him on the stoop. Why does Leah provide this gesture of support and caring for a stranger? Especially so soon after she had been mugged? Leah's action is an astonishingly naïve perspective for someone who lives in New York City, and Kitt even discusses this when Leah looks at him through a window:

Suddenly he raised his head and turned to look directly at her. For a shocked moment their eyes met, and she felt a tumult, a frisson of some unnamed sensation that squirmed through her stomach. It wasn't fear, but it made Leah take full notice of him. And it made her feel strangely surprised (9).

The feeling that Leah is thinking about makes her feel alive and causes her to act in that kindly way toward Jason by offering him coffee. She sees him, and notices his humanity. Her heartfelt gesture might have had something to do with the fact that Jason, a white man, was in the front of her home, and Leah felt as if she was protected, even if he was in some zoned-out state.

Gail's sniping contempt for Jason from the beginning of the novel might make more sense to readers who might worry about Leah's kindness in New York City. However, Kitt implies that Gail does not love her sister as she should or protect her best interests. Jason is there to protect Leah, even against family members who might want to cause her harm. When Gail confronts him, saying "Someone has to look out for fools and little children. So far, you are behaving like both, sweetheart," she is insulting Jason, but she is also implying that Leah is a fool and child as well. Jason is more than ready for Gail when he responds:

'And who looks out for you?' Jason asked quietly....'I mean, has anyone ever told you to mind your own business?... [He continues] I really hate black people who hate white people who hate black people. It never ends, know what I mean?' (Kitt 123).

Jason's in-your-face riposte is the last thing that prickly Gail expects and Jason proves that he's more than capable of defending himself, and by extension Leah, even in verbal assault.

Thus, with no one Black providing a sure foundation in her life, Jason's whiteness, even while he is seemingly in the midst of a dark depression for reasons that readers do not know, provides a feeling of protection and comfort for Leah. His whiteness makes for a positive contrast with her increasing discomfort with everything dark that arises from her less than satisfactory relationship with Allen, as well as her feelings about the man who attacked her.

The language used to describe "the attack", as she called it, made her:

become paralyzed with fear when she further considered the other violent choices available to the attacker. ...She could still feel weak with nausea when she thought of that knife held against her face. He'd hit her with his fist, and when her head had resounded with a painful thud off the wall, she'd slid to the floor, dazed... the black man had pulled at slashed at the fabric, cutting Leah's fingers and thigh (Kitt 21-22).

Her presumed impending rape, prevented by a difficult-to-remove jumpsuit, or death by stabbing, puts Leah in a position to think about a relationship with a white man, one who, even when she learns that he is a police officer, will be someone who will protect her.

When Leah finds out that he is a police officer she does take a moment to consider how his job position impacts her as a Black woman. "She knew how cops treated black folks....'And I'm thinking a lot about how young black men have been senselessly killed by the police. White police'" (Kitt 51). This sentence is still, unfortunately, all too relevant 25 years on. It also matters in the novel at this point, but Kitt allows her readers to see that Leah considers all facets of this potential man in her life. However, later on, she seems to make peace with his job, because as Leah tells him, "You don't look like a cop," and upon finding out that he is a juvenile cop, she considers that he is somehow different from her image of cops or "men in blue" as she puts it (Kitt 52). Something about him as being less than a real cop, but still a cop, brings her closer to the possibility of an interracial relationship, rather than pushing her from it.

Jason's status as a defender is reinforced when, after a New Year's Eve party, he stops by his place of work with Leah and a troubling confrontation occurs when Leah is in Jason's office and one of his co-workers speaks to her in a demeaning way that shows that Kitt is very familiar with the status of Black women as public property when Leah is mistaken for a prostitute. The confrontation is necessary so that readers can know how Leah will respond when she is treated in a less than respectful way by a cop who would not respect or protect Black women. The co-worker, named Spano, dehumanizes Leah when he speaks to her:

'Look, you know the routine. Get your ass back up front.' [Spano] grabbed Leah by the arm and jerked her toward the door....

'You pig.' Leah said scathingly....

‘Shut the fuck up! Get out of here, Spano. While you still can,’ Jason ordered dangerously” (162).

Jason arrives in the nick of time to confront his co-worker, but then, because this encounter is devastating to Leah’s mind, Leah and Jason are forced to have a discussion about race that, in the trajectory of the novel, ends up pulling them closer together. Kitt’s intention means that the couple cannot ignore racist behavior in a society that conspires against them, but must confront the ugliness before they can have their Happily Ever After.

Kitt also gives inside glimpses of Jason’s life as a police officer, seeking to reassure readers by expressing him in his male point of view – something that was relatively unusual in women’s fiction and romance in the mid-1990s. In her interview with Julie Moody-Freeman, Kitt speaks of how white police officers told her how she got police culture right and the voice of the police right. They respected her research and contacted her to tell her that they enjoyed *The Color of Love*. It is a point of pride to Kitt that she wrote a book that appealed to a widespread mainstream audience reader (Moody-Freeman). Given that Kitt has spoken to tense relationships between Black people and police officers in the book via the confrontations that both Leah and Jason have with Spano, this approach helps readers know that Jason is the hero and that his intentions toward Leah are good.

Jason also won’t tolerate any disrespect from Slack, a troubled young Black man he has been mentoring. His relationship with Slack is part of his job, but he still understands who comes first when Slack threatens Leah. Slack asks her, “‘You scared of me?’, and she replies, ‘No... I just don’t like you very much.’” Slack shows poor taste when he responds, “‘I don’t fuckin’ like you either, bitch” (Kitt 278). After this unfriendly exchange with the jealous Slack, Leah falls, and Jason comes out to save her just in the nick of time. Jason will always be there for her, and she increasingly relies on Jason for the sense of safety that she craves – especially because she is in a vulnerable place after her attack.

The ultimate moment of shielding comes later on when Slack has a gun and threatens to hurt Leah. Jason does not fail her: “But he thought of what that gun might have done to Leah, what it might still do to someone else. His hand began to shake. He took aim and fired” (Kitt 325). Jason is shot in the meantime as well, but he does his job in protecting her. Once he does, once Jason makes the ultimate sacrifice, he’s worthy of her.

Her need to feel safe is written into the end of the story, in the vaunted HEA, “Feeling safe and settled at last, Leah kicked off her shoes and drew her legs up onto the bed. Lying next to Jason, she felt blissful and calm” (Kitt 334). This is the man who will shield her from all harm. This is her Prince Charming, her bodyguard.

With his sense of honor and tremendous loss, as well as his connection with other Black people like Slack, Jason is equipped to provide Leah with emotional support as well. This is critical because she’s in a fragile state. Jason, as a hero, is well equipped, emotionally, to support this woman, in this moment. Emotion, for Kitt, plays a vital role in this story and she spoke to that in the interview she gave to Julie Moody-Freeman: “You can’t make rules, assumptions, or hard fast beliefs. Because you are dealing with an emotion. Not your intellect, you’re dealing from here. When people fall in love, it’s from here—your heart.”

Allen, her foot-dragging boyfriend of two years, has no heart. He will be emotionally supportive, which is why she will choose Jason. This is clear from the moment that we meet Allen. He’s not a fun guy. When they dress to go to her sister Gail’s western event, he

grouses “Look like some damned country yokel. I don’t like this shirt....I’m not going anywhere with some bandana...around my neck” (Kitt 27). His complaints do the job that is intended to get under readers’ skin. From the start, even as he takes his own pleasure without seeing to Leah’s pleasure while they are having sex, he’s meant to be disliked. They have sex on Thanksgiving evening which ends up being horrifying. In Kitt’s narration of their encounter, Leah’s consent is conveyed as unnecessary, as long as Allen gets what he wants—especially in bed:

Allen buried his face in her neck, grunting and hissing. Leah didn’t understand what demon was driving him. She didn’t want to do this, and certainly not this way. Allen was not forcing her, but he was insistent. Leah couldn’t stop him... ‘It...hurts. You’re hurting me....’ (87).

Allen’s inconsiderate behavior causes Leah to throw him out of her apartment and she keeps waiting for an apology from him, which will never come. Kitt structures this moment as opportune for a love like Jason to come into Leah’s life, even if he is white and a cop. His own losses in life prepare him to be the most suitable love for Leah as well.

The first sight the readers are given of Jason are, of course, of him in that vulnerable position when he is lingering on her stoop, in a depressed daze, but he is someone who is in a position to care, because he has had a difficult time himself in life. Once he begins to date Leah, he’s not afraid to open up to her very early on. In Chapter Three, he tells her the sad backstory of his divorce ten years previously, and the subsequent death of his son:

Lisa was quick to point out to him that he had a son now, and it was time he put his family first above helping others. Jason knew she was right... Lisa moved back to Pennsylvania, taking Michael with her. She filed for a divorce, citing irreconcilable differences (Kitt 70).

His trauma and deep disappointment over his failure of his first marriage as well as the loss of his son makes him better prepared to support a fragile heroine like Leah, no matter what their racial differences are.

The death of his son, through no fault of his own, is a hard pill for Jason to swallow, but he’s being the reassuring man and the hero that Leah needs him to be by not drowning in his grief, but by owning up to it: “The words were said calmly enough, but Jason lifted his head and rested his chin on clenched hands...He looked at Leah with pain in his eyes, and she knew he wasn’t really seeing her” (Kitt 71). That moment, that time in his life was when he was on her stoop in a depressed daze, remembering the greatest loss he had suffered in his life, Jason’s eyes betrayed him and Leah saw his wounds. Their souls connected.

Besides having survived her own recent trauma, Leah knows loss because of her own brother. In her internal musings, she recalls Kenneth’s death in Vietnam. Jason was also a Vietnam veteran and this similarity cements them together even further. Right after telling her about the loss of his son, he opens up to her about his experience in Vietnam:

‘He was just like the rest of us, then,... Confused and scared, I mean nobody understood why we were there... While we were over there we didn’t always



understand who the enemy was. We just wanted to get home. It was a hell of a place. Hot. Wet. Miserable....' (Kitt 72).

They do not make love that night of confession, but they foster a deeper, more important connection to one another. The emotions exchanged when they share these open wounds is more solid evidence Kitt's readers need to believe in the possibility of this interracial couple having a happily-ever-after ending of their own.

Other previous men in her life had not given Leah the emotional support that she required. From her internal perspective, she compares Jason's willingness to connect to two previous men she dated: one Black, Ronald; and one white, Philip. Ronald had introduced her to the pleasures of sex, but was too harsh and too quick to judge her:

[Ron] also decided after a year and a half with her that she was bourgeois and an elitist, unaware and uninvolved. His accusations had stung deep. Questioning her loyalties, her priorities, her identity. Leah had spent the next two years marching and protesting on one advocacy issues after another to prove him wrong (Kitt 75).

Ron's lack of belief in Leah's devotion to Black causes means that Leah is not going to be able to be with someone like him.

Kitt reveals that Leah has dated a white man before. This matters because readers should not believe that Jason is just some novelty to her. Their relationship, for readers, must be feel realistic. So, Kitt tells readers about Philip, a previous beau, who does not care for her as she deserves. He also misses the boat by being unable to be there for Leah in an emotional way or in any way. When they go out and they run into a cousin of his, who is surprised to see that Philip is dating a Black woman, the seeds for the destruction of their relationship are sown. Philip is willing to use Leah for his own pleasure, but only in the darkness, "Philip and Leah drove through Central Park and ended up in the dark near the boat basin making out...She thought she might be in love again" (Kitt 75-76).

Leah thinks that Philip might be a candidate for a long-term relationship, but they don't discuss race. This is something that Kitt implies might be problematic down the road, but Leah doesn't see it yet: "It didn't bother her particularly that Philip was white and she was Black. As a matter of fact, it was not mentioned even once between them" (Kitt 76). When Philip is supposed to take her to a fancy dinner after a test, but takes her home instead, promises to call her then ghosts her, Leah is surprised. Kitt ensures that the readers aren't. Philip's lack of honesty is made apparent early on and Leah later reasons out why and how he is not an acceptable partner for her. Only someone who can be completely forthcoming and honest would be suitable for Leah.

Before Leah and Jason can share their bodies, Kitt makes it clear that in order for them to have real intimacy as an interracial couple they must have THE TALK about race. Kitt structures this at the midpoint of the novel, at the emotional high point when Jason's archenemy co-worker Spano calls Leah the foulest name possible when he mistakes her for a prostitute at the station. All aspects of Jason's life are open to her now. Will she be able to be emotionally intimate with a white police officer when all of her previous attempts, even with other Black men, have failed?:

'Why me, Jason? What is it with you anyway? Is it because I'm black? So you have some sort of bet with the guys at the station?....

'Everything I've ever heard, ever been taught, ever saw or read says we shouldn't be here like this. This just can't happen. Not after so much history and hate' (Kitt 167).

Unlike what Ron believed, Leah is aware of her racial background and history. In this moment, she wants to be sure that her body isn't just meant to be some man's short-term prospect, like she is to Allen at the beginning of the novel.

Jason reassures her that he has no hidden motive, no ulterior motive other than wanting to be close to her and cherish her. By this point, Kitt has built the case, sure and strong, that this is the hero for this heroine. This couple is meant to be together. Cleverly, in this crucial moment, Kitt brings together the protective aspect of the relationship that Leah is seeking with the emotional support she has long sought, but didn't even know that she wanted. Every move that Jason makes is gentle, and he seeks consent from her, unlike Allen, during the horrific Thanksgiving encounter:

The feel of his thighs and his muscular calves made her feel safely contained... He was putting on a condom. Her mouth quivered with tears. She couldn't seem to stop crying. Leah was amazed by his consideration and awareness. She was so far gone that she hadn't even given a thought to protection. Allen had never used condoms. She'd never asked him to (Kitt 169).

Her tears reflect her gratitude that Jason, in every way possible, is thinking of, and putting her needs, safety and emotion, first. In all respects, he is her bodyguard, physically and mentally.

Kitt wrote her book as women's fiction when it was published more than twenty-five years ago, but proved to be ahead of her time in terms of genre fiction, because she dared to allow readers into the mind of the hero as well. This way, readers are secure in his good intentions toward the heroine, who, even because of her name, is in a fragile place when the story begins.

Someone could argue that attention to economics is missing from *The Color of Love*. Cops are not wealthy. Kitt even has Jason's ex-wife tell him that her new man is a pediatrician, implying that she will now have a more solid economic future. However, once he and his ex-wife divide assets, Jason does have a nice nest egg after their house is sold. In this case, the economic aspect of the Happily Ever After could be considered to be part of the protection aspect of the story, but in Kitt's work, she makes it clear that Leah is doing very well for herself as a graphic artist and that Jason can hold his own with her fiscally. Allen is someone who makes money, but given how awful he is, it's clear that money isn't everything to Leah. Kitt even goes so far as to bring together the faithless Gail and the awful Allen to reassure the readers that these two uncaring people in Leah's life certainly deserve one another. Leah's happiness, a Black woman's happiness, is what matters. And that every Black woman deserves her happiness.

In her interview with Julie Moody-Freeman, Kitt discusses Jason and Leah's falling in love as an emotional process that has nothing to do with race: "I wanted to basically show that when it comes to love....there are no rules. .... And so I had to remember that ultimately that's [emotion is] what I'm put[ting] into the story." They fall in love because they are perfect for one another as human beings, not because of the color of their skin.

*The Color of Love*, then, lays a foundation for Interracial Romance, even if Kitt considered her book more of a mainstream text. The protective and emotional elements in the relationship between Jacob and Leah play out in multiple future novels that allow BWWM Interracial Romance to become a cornerstone of romance publication. A large reason for this is that readership of Black women form a large driving force in publication. The oft-quoted Pew Study, which was taken for other reasons, found out that the most likely reader is a Black woman with some college education (qtd in Bass). When the traditional publication houses based in New York did not generate books where these protective and emotional elements could be located and they could see heroines like themselves interrogate Black masculinity, the growing market of indie publication fulfilled their needs and the boom of BWWM Romance began. Kitt's important work provided a foundation for other giants like Alyssa Cole and Talia Hibbert, who have stormed the best seller lists with their own fresh takes on Interracial Romance.

Kitt takes the future Mr. and Mrs. Horn on quite a journey of self-discovery to their HEA. Leah's biblical name, which means weary in Hebrew, comes from the undesired first wife of Jacob from the Bible, whose eyes are described as "tender." Jason's first name is also biblical but also comes from Greek mythology story of the king who endured several trials before he could claim his throne. The Greek translation of his name is "to heal." In *The Color of Love*, Jason's love creates a place of hospitality and healing for tender Leah, who, by the end of this wonderful story, readers know that she is in very capable hands. This Interracial couple, given the Herculean task of finding their happily ever after and they meet the moment. Jason, and only Jason, can provide the protection and emotional support that Leah, weary of disappointed love, requires. These are the elements that allow *The Color of Love* to resonate across the 25 years that it has existed.

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