

TWO

Colby: So, how's the new job, Kit-Kat?

The breeze coming off the harbor was crisp and fragrant. Rich with salt, decay, and memories. It was welcome, cutting through the unseasonable heat and humidity on this early fall day. Sitting on my favorite bench, on the edge of Long Wharf, looking out on Boston Harbor, I felt hopeful about the possibilities ahead of me.

Even after all these years, I still marveled at the immense, black iron chain-link border, joined to massive black posts, bolted to cement blocks, lining the wharf. More a work of art than a functional deterrent. Despite their mass, I doubted they could stop either a rampaging ferry from crashing into the Greenway or a distracted tourist from tumbling into the dark waters. Nevertheless, I found comfort in their strong presence, much like the city itself.

When I was a student at Northeastern, I would frequently spend time here. Despite the nearby tourist destinations, including Faneuil Hall and the New England Aquarium, this was always a quiet place to take refuge. Backed by a beautiful, block-long trellis, named for Christopher Columbus, and with the vista of unlimited ocean before me, I could sit here and dream about my future, reflect on my past and stave off homesickness. Confident in the knowledge West

Virginia was as close as one of those planes I watched taking off over the harbor from Logan. Bonus, if I got hungry, the North End was steps away, with its fantastic array of Italian food.

Now, years later, I found myself here again, wondering about my future, and trying to stave off, not homesickness, but a deep longing. As I watched a plane take off and soar inland, my thoughts turned to Colby. Deputy U.S. Marshal Colby Jameson, tall, dark and dangerous.

I pulled out my phone and opened my messages. His last text to me was short and sweet:

I'm not giving up on us. XO

I hadn't replied. That was two weeks ago, and life was coming at me fast. Packing and moving eleven hundred miles from Peoria, Illinois to Boston, Massachusetts, kept my mind from obsessing on the muscled, mocha-skinned, green-eyed man who saved my life. Of course, I saved his life too, so I guessed we were even. That thought made me shudder. So did my next thought, only in a much different way. Our last time in bed, not knowing it would be our last time, was as mind-blowing as our first time together.

I watched another plane take to the sky and thought, *the airport is a train stop away, and Washington, DC is only a ninety-minute flight. Then I could be with him and tell him how much I miss him.* But I let that thought go, because I had a new life, a new job and a spectacular loft apartment, all thanks to my best friend, Mimi Webster. And if I didn't get my ass up off this bench, I was going to be late for all of it.

A few blocks later, I descended the stairs of the Old State House, one of the oldest public buildings in the country. In its basement was one of the more improbable stops on the MBTA—Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority—the T to locals. This subway station was a modern marvel hidden beneath pre-Revolutionary history. Reaching the bottom just as my train arrived, I slipped in through the closing doors and grabbed the first open seat. As I watched the dark, grimy walls whiz by, I reflected on how dramatically my life had changed in such a short time.

Divorce, murder, whirlwind romance, and now a new city and a new job.

The train lurched to a stop for the third time, and the recorded voice announced my destination. I stepped off the train, took the up escalator, and popped out into the autumn sun. I turned down Washington Street and continued my walk to my new apartment, which just so happened to be three floors above my new job. I was going to enjoy the commute.

It was a pleasant half-mile stroll, marked by a warm breeze. Summer had made a brief return, but it wouldn't be long before it gave way to cool days, cold nights and stunning fall colors.

As I left the medical buildings surrounding Tufts Medical Center, the streets quickly took on an artful flair. Brightly colored doors and building-long murals lined Harrison Avenue. Multi-storied red brick buildings prevailed, dotted with expensive lofts and upscale restaurants.

This was part of the trendy art district in South Boston. SoWa—South of Washington Street—a haven of artists, galleries, studios, boutiques, and design showrooms is an old warehouse district revived into a vibrant mix of art,

entrepreneurs, restaurants and an open-air market. It felt like coming home. I couldn't believe my luck.

Desperate to get out of Peoria, to leave behind my broken marriage and my stalled career, I was having little response to my job search. Then one morning my phone rang and my whole world changed.

"TJ?" said the breathless voice on the other end. "I'm going to need your help." Mimi, my best friend since college, transformed my life with those words.

"Is everything okay?" I asked, not understanding.

"Okay? Okay?! TJ, It. Is. Wonderful. Amazing! Fantastic!"

Mimi had a flair for the drama of things, so I waited patiently for her to come to the crux of it all.

"You are not going to believe what happened. You just aren't. My boss, Trevor Davenport, bought a building here, in Boston, in the art district," she paused to take a much-needed breath. "It has twenty galleries. Twenty! And another twenty shops and boutiques. But the showroom ...oh, TJ, it is all so wonderful."

I was sure it would be if she would get to the damn point. I said nothing, giving her space to continue.

"...almost half the main level, is a showroom of furniture, rugs, paintings, sculptures acquired from all over the world. The owner, who also sold the building to Trevor, is retiring, and Trevor wants to take over that business...well wants me to take it over. To manage it. To redesign and remodel the entire space. And to curate it. Maybe even do some acquisition work. And that's why I need you." She stopped to catch her breath again, and I assumed to await my response.

I was still unclear on what exactly she was proposing, but I was hoping it was gainful employment. “Mimi, are you saying you have a job for me?”

“Absolutely! I don’t think I can do it without you. And it gets better...” she paused again, and if she weren’t literally the answer to my prayers, I would have been annoyed. I closed my eyes and resisted the urge to reach through the phone and shake her. Finally, she continued, “...there are two small loft apartments above the gallery. Trevor is going to rent them to us for dirt cheap!”

A job, a place to live, cheap rent. I hung up the phone, walked into Nick’s office, the director of the funeral home and my boss, and gave him my notice.

I continued along Harrison until I reached Thayer Street. Two blocks long, it had been turned into a pedestrian plaza, with two wide walkways, separated by a grassy median. The galleries were on the west side. The buildings on the east side housed artist studios, an artist guild and a vintage market. I turned right onto the cobblestone pathway and walked past several of the galleries before ascending a flight of stairs. I pulled open the glass door and proceeded down the hall to the interior offices. I stopped at the door with a small placard that read: LEASING OFFICE.

I peeked in the sidelight to see Mimi, her red curls brushing her shoulders, dressed casually in jeans and a burnt-orange shirt with eyelet trim, her hands moving at the speed of light, giving instructions to a young, bespectacled, stylishly dressed man. I caught her eye, gave a little wave, and stepped through the solid oak door into the reception area.

“TJ!” Mimi exclaimed as she crossed the foyer to hug me. “Derek, this is TJ Wilde, she’ll be working in the showroom with me. TJ, Derek Pedulla is our leasing manager. Trevor very smartly kept him on after the sale. He knows everyone and everything that goes on here. Which is a good thing, because until Trevor gets back to interview general managers, I’m it.”

“It’s nice to meet you,” Derek said as he extended his hand. “I hear you are going to be living here, too.” I couldn’t help but notice he smelled divine as I stepped in to take his hand. His grasp was warm and friendly. He was tall and fit, with sandy brown hair. “My boyfriend and I have an apartment on the third floor,” he continued. “As soon as you’ve settled in, we’ll have you over for dinner. Simon has a studio across the street in the Artists Guild. He’s a sculptor.”

“That all sounds wonderful,” I replied, feeling buoyed by the proximity to art, culture, and new neighbors. “I can’t wait to meet him.”

“I’m going to give TJ the tour and hopefully not frighten her off with the amount of work we have in front of us. Then I’m going to take her to lunch. Text me if anything comes up.” And with that, she grabbed my hand and led me out the door. “I’m sorry I couldn’t help you unpack this weekend. There is so much to do. Are you all settled?” she asked as she dragged me down the hall to another door. This one had a small placard that read: MAGAZOLLI & MCMILLAN. Mimi pointed to it. “We are still working on names for rebranding. I’m sure you’ll have some great ideas.”

I wasn’t as sure. Mimi pulled a dozen keys from her pocket, sorted through them, found the one she was looking for, inserted it into the lock, and turned it and the doorknob