

Boston

***“Someone upstairs must be keeping an eye on me,
because they put a beautiful angel on earth for me to find.”***

“...her hope remained grounded in her whole-hearted outlook on life. It touched a chord in me, deep down in a place I thought had evaporated and withered away years ago.” I stopped. Not sure that I wanted to continue.

“Right there, Sir, I can see in your eyes how gentle you were with her.” Cate sensed my hesitation. “She was a new kind of woman for you, no?”

“Not always gentle. We had a few horrific and cruel moments, too.”

“What?” Cate asked.

“Forget it. Here’s the thing, Cate. My dating bag of tricks had taken a powder, and I had no idea how to act, other than to be honest with her. I felt driven to tell her everything, which is not the best way to go given how screwed up I am, but it was the only way I wanted to be with her. It messed with my head...don’t judge. I took it as a good sign.” I paused as I felt love, remorse, shame, and anguish all meet and begin to brew and sour in my belly. I had a long sip of whiskey.

“So much for that kind of honesty, huh? It was all red spiders.” I explained.

Cate nodded ‘no’. “No red spiders. No blue johnnies, just an intimate look into your worlds, one neither thought the other would share.”

“I never thought about it like that before. Huh...you know, it’s funny, I just realized that we...”

“What’s funny about honesty? I don’t see the humor.”

“Intimacy. That word.” I smiled.

“Tell me what you mean,” Cate asked.

“The ‘funny’ part of intimacy is, now that I think about it, is that Karis and I had already been out a bunch of times over those first few months and we still hadn’t, well, you know, been together yet.” I paused, embarrassed at having said that.

“That’s surprising, Sir,” Cate replied. She looked down, surveyed and adjusted her flight attendant uniform.

I gave Cate a little side-eye for how she reacted. “It surprised me too, especially because I didn’t realize it at the time. But it was cool. I’m sorry for even bringing it up, but I do have a point.” I centered my tie.

“Yeah? Tell me then.” Encouraging me to keep going.

“As we got to know the little, intangible things about each other, it was clear she was quickly becoming more to me than I could have ever believed possible.” I lost my train of thought mid-sentence.

Cate noticed that I was searching. She then spoke up.

“So that’s why you two hadn’t slept together at this point?”

I took a long minute to reflect. “That was definitely part of it. I think. We both could feel it wasn’t the right time yet.”

“And more than a few months had gone by, yes?” Cate clarified.

“Correct. She stayed the night plenty of times, but it was because she fell asleep watching a movie. Or I didn’t want her alone in an Uber. Or we both had too much to drink for me to drive her home, which before Karis, was a rule reserved only for my daughter.

"We were getting closer to *the* moment. A moment that I wanted to be on her schedule, not mine, which blew the curve on my in-bed-by-the-third date, average." I said and for the second time, immediately wished I hadn't.

"Well, look at you, all so upright and considerate." Cate smirked.

"We did talk about it. It was awkward, but I could tell she felt safe in telling me about her feelings on the matter. Eventually, it was clear to me as we spoke, that she didn't want our first time together, to be... well... fast."

I looked around the cabin to see if anyone was listening. All the passengers remained peculiarly quiet.

"Fast? Interesting way to put it." She asked.

"Cate, she was clear about how she felt about us and where we might be going as a couple, so no first-time wham bam thank you ma'am. Basically, she had no desire to be with me one minute and then head back to her place - or to work, the next." I stopped, having had a flash of the soft, tender look in Karis' eyes when she told me that she'd been giving this a lot of thought.

"She wanted it to be special for the both of you." Cate offered.

"She did. And she wanted us to be able to linger without a clock in our faces. She wanted time to slow down, the pace of the world to forget its drumbeat and to hold still for us between those beats - at least until we were ready to rejoin it, on our schedule, not on someone else's."

"She wanted new memories for you both. This was equally new and different for her, as well." Cate chimed in.

"Oh absolutely! Once her desires were out, we talked more and more about it."

"It made sense that we needed a weekend away, where it was just the two of us. A weekend that was worth careful planning, room service and *no* distractions. To be honest, it got me excited. I wanted to give all of that to her. I really did." Telling this to Cate, I felt my heart speeding up, as if that weekend was about to happen all over again.

"Beautiful," Cate said.

"You're right. I loved that she wanted a memory like that for us. She was clear that it was to become an anniversary of sorts for us."

"An anniversary?" She asked with surprise.

"Not so we could celebrate the act, Cate, but more about celebrating what it stood for - that it consummated a true, unbreakable commitment we were making to each other. It was *that* kind of an anniversary idea, you know, along of course, with the first time we went away together."

I was stumbling over my words trying to recall each key heartbeat across those first, transcendent hours Karis and I had, sealing our bond, setting up the rest of our lives together.

"I take your meaning. And I love it," she replied. "So how then, did you end up choosing Boston? How did it all unfold?"

"Right. She loved the East Coast and still loved Boston. I was surprised and proud of how ready she was to put that small part of her life well behind her. She wanted me to see that town the way she'd come to love it.

"In hindsight, going back there with me was her way to vanquish *her* demons. I should have respected that more." I looked at Cate to see if she was still listening. She gave me a favorable nod.

Happy to keep telling this part of my story, I continued. "The more I got to know her, OK, let me re-frame that, as I started falling for her, I felt a powerful desire to protect her, to shield her from that kind of hurt ever again, a hurt that to me, was what Boston stood for."

"Did you tell her that?" Cate asked.

"I was upfront about it. I told her I didn't feel comfortable going to Boston anytime soon. She told me I wasn't being realistic and that I can't hate an entire city because *she had* had a few bad memories there." I looked at Cate to gauge her reaction.

"That's fair, but was that your only reason? I do believe you wanted to protect her, but was that all?"

"Fine. The truth is, I didn't want to be in the middle of an important moment with her, only to wonder if she was having a different, separate kind of moment on her own."

"How do you mean?" Asked Cate.

"I was concerned that perhaps a memory sparked by a restaurant, a statue, or a fleeting glimpse of something, would set her back, forcing her to think about him, not me."

"That's fair," Cate replied, taking a deep breath.

"But you know what? Seeing her strength, I realized I was projecting my stuff onto her. She was so much better, so much stronger than I gave her credit for. Eventually she found a way to convince me to go East."

"She did? How?" Asked Cate.

"Honestly, it was quite impressive, accomplished with compliments from my old friend, Mark Twain." I waited for Cate to think about the 'Old Friend' part.

"Mark Twain? He's an old friend of mine, too," she replied.

"I am not just a fan, however. I'm more of a student, a trainee, an apprentice and a recruit. His observations always get to me. And Karis knew this."

"How did she use Samuel to her advantage?"

"I'll be damned if she didn't find a letter full of observations he'd written to a close friend upon his arrival in Boston for the first time."

"Well then, set the stage for me. Where were you? How did she bring it up?"

"It was late morning, pleasingly warm outside. We were hungry and took the opportunity to get out in the sun for brunch. Don't laugh, I like brunch food; and then Karis slowly started to bring up the idea."

"We need to go somewhere fun." Karis began, as she raised her Bloody Mary glass, removing what seemed to be a full-sized slice of pepperoni pizza, skewered into the glass as a 'garnish.' She tossed it on the table, took a long sip and said "I was thinking we go East. Somewhere fun, with lots of things to see, places to walk, and a little history for you. I know you love your history."

"I most certainly do," I said with a smile and cheers to her glass.

"Leigh, one of my favorite things is to see your eyes when you learn something new." She moved the pizza skewer to the side.

She paused, staring at the skewered pizza slice. "Ugh, why do they put that shit in a Bloody Mary glass, with all that other garbage piled on top of it? Does anyone eat it or is it just for Instagram?"

"I don't know. I like my food on a plate rather than on a stick in a glass of vodka and tomato juice." I bit on her opening line, so I asked politely "East Coast? Not New York. Not this time of year."

"I know that" she guaranteed me.

She got my point, I felt I needed to reaffirm it. "I go there for work enough as it is, so when it's on my time, on our time, I'd want to be anywhere else. Were you thinking DC, or maybe North Carolina?" I asked, taking a drink.

"Well, no. To be honest, I was rearranging the books in your library again, and cleaning the leather book covers when I saw one of them titled 'Letters.' I sat down in our chair - you know, that one we bought at that shop by my grandma's house. I had a closer look at what these 'letters' were." She stopped and waited.

"I love that book. That's a great collection, his letters." I leaned back and closed my eyes as I faced the sun.

"Well," she began. "In Twain's Boston letter, he described...did you know that there is an old church; the Old South they call it - with a British cannon ball sticking in it? Boston thinks the world of that little cannon ball. The locals still tell you about it to this day."

"That's cool." I lowered my head and opened my eyes to face her.

"Yeah. And they point it out to you, until you agree that there is no happiness like having a church with a British cannon ball stuck in the side of it." She smiled.

"Boston values and cherishes that artifact; and every time the Old South Church wears out, they build another and stick the cannon ball in it again. So, there's that."

"Pretty cool, though I'm not sure how a church wears out." I responded as she circled back.

"And there's Benjamin Franklin and the Freedom Trail.

You know, Boston thinks a great deal of Franklin. He was a big sports guy like you. Until he was an old man, he used to fly his kite every Sunday." She smiled. I wasn't sure about the kite story, then I realized she was just having some fun with me.

"I'm an enthusiastic fan of his, too," I smiled back.

"We could check out where he lived, along with the residence of John W. Hancock. We can go see his signature on the Declaration of Independence, see Faneuil Hall, the Cradle of Liberty and of course the North End, where the food is amazing, by the way." She talked herself out of breath but excited, nonetheless.

"Love it! That all sounds great," I shouted.

"Mark Twain... We'll bring the letters and see what he saw too!" I nodded in agreement. Hard to argue with that line of reasoning.

"Give me your phone." She reached her hand out and started to grab my phone off the table.

"It's almost dead, I forgot to charge it last night," I said as I grabbed it out of her hands and asked her to use her phone instead.

"OK, sorry. No problem. I think I have your credit card info on mine too, from when we sent Grandma those flowers for her birthday, remember?" She said, smiling from ear to ear.

I sat quietly and watched her go to work on her phone. She moved with a beautiful and loving purpose. Her long, slender fingers slid from one end of the phone to the other with serious flair.

"I remember. It was fun to fill her house with peonies." The smile on Karis' face always made my day. And my heart leap.

"All booked," she said a minute or two later with an air of accomplishment. She bought two first-class tickets and reserved my usual hotel, all within a few soft touches on a shiny piece of glass.

"Ain't technology something." I said, looking forward to our first trip together.

Radiant with delight, I watched her, picturing her taking a week to pack for two and a half days of travel. I was especially looking forward to what she'd choose to wear for our first night together.

"Sounds exciting," said Cate.

"It was. The day finally arrived. I picked her up at her place with a champagne-filled limo. We finished the bottle, arriving with time to easily check in and check her bag."

"What's wrong, Sir?" asked Cate looking at me directly. "You were mad that she checked a bag for two days travel?" Sarcasm.

"No, not that. I actually liked that part."

"At security, I wasn't allowed to stand next to her in front of the TSA Agent. He told me to step back because we weren't married. That's when it hit me for the first time."

"Hit you?" Cate paused and studied my eyes. "No, the look on your face, I can see it." She saw my now glassy eyes, my posture.

"It was more like a smack up the backside of my head from a drill instructor. I searched for the right words.

"I never wanted anyone to tell me to step back from her ever again. I hated - *hated* that feeling."

"I understand. But you did step back, right?" Cate asked.

"No choice. Karis saw the look on my face when the guard spoke to me. She gave me a beaming smile, quickly unloaded her stuff on the X-Ray belt, slid off her heels, shook out her long brown hair and moved forward, not making eye contact with the guard standing on the other side of the metal detector. He couldn't keep his eyes off her, by the way. Fucker knew she was mine."

"She breezed through and waited on the other side for her belongings. As they came through, she grabbed her purse, slipped on her shoes and stood there; her hand outstretched for me."

"I remember looking around to see if anyone was watching her wait for me. I was the proudest, no check that, the luckiest man in the world., Right then, right there at O'Hare airport."

"I can tell. She's all that to you. Well, was..." Cate said softly.

"More than you'll ever know, Cate."

"Oh, I know. Then what?" Cate kept me talking.

"In case I haven't mentioned," I began with a smile, "Airports are like a second home to me. So, I took her to meet the people I see every week as part of my pre-flight ritual."

"Around the corner from security, we had a drink at the Publican restaurant. We said hi to Mary the bartender there. Then we went over to the Admirals Club to have a drink and see my guy, Raheem. Before I knew it, we were boarded, doors closed, and on our way east. The flight attendants were great," I said with a big smile.

"They had better be," Cate replied with an equally big smile.

"Once in our seats, drinks were flowing non-stop. We sat holding hands for nearly the entire trip. I loved it."

"About two drinks in, she turned with an intoxicating fix on me, and called us a power couple."

"Power couple? What does that mean?" Cate asked for more.

"To her, it meant that she loved how together, we were 'unstoppable, charming, and intense', she'd say. She wanted to believe that we were the envy of anyone who caught a glimpse of us together, how we walked together, held onto each other. How we brought out the best in each other, she'd say."

"I like that it's how she saw you as a couple."

"Cate, on the red carpet, at a theater opening, or just walking down the street together, she was proud to be with me and me with her. She was Mt. Everest. My white whale, the final piece of a life puzzle I was methodically trying to put back together."

"That's quite a statement, Sir." Cate fixed her eyes on mine.

I took another deep breath. "I know what I sound like, but it's true. She brought out the absolute best and yes, sometimes the worst version of me, with nothing more than a look, a touch, or that giggle of hers."

Cate stared at me and didn't blink. She seemed to study my eyes, my posture, and the tension in my shoulders.

"You genuinely loved her? She was your soulmate." Cate dropped her stare and looked across the cabin, as she waited for my reply.

The whiskey had stopped working as I told her, "I've never loved and hated someone as much as her - she was my perfect match. I'll always love her the most. Always." Cate stepped back, looking confused.

"I mean perfect to fight with. Perfect to make up with. Perfect to love. She was beyond stunning, but her vulnerability gave me a beautiful person who, as smart as she is, was also needy, hyper, and overly emotional at

times,” I paused noting my commentary, “those were her words, Cate. She would accuse me of being exhausted with her because she absolutely exhausts herself.”

“Karis had also told me that she’d made up her mind to take a chance and reveal all that she was. It was perhaps the most nervous she’d ever been. In that moment, she told me she was ‘*slightly*’ medicated. But that didn’t matter, not to me.”

I stopped talking. This was not the kind of information I should be sharing with anyone, regardless of the years which had elapsed with Karis missing from me. Exposing Karis like this was betraying her trust – though I had no reason to keep her confidence any longer. At the same time, I somehow knew that anything I said in this moment would remain with Cate.

“Medicated? I know an ample number in those situations. These days it would seem the real question is who is *not* medicated, no?”

“Was there anything else which surprised you?” Cate seemed to be taking mental notes as I spoke. I just wanted to get back to our Boston trip. But I rounded out this part of the conversation.

“Anything else? Seems to be more than enough already.” I replied. She waited for me to continue. Patiently.

“OK, check this out. To date, she’s also the only woman I’ve met who had a therapist, a psychiatrist, and a psychic. And on any given day, any combination of those three would be advising her – and she’d be listening.”

“That combination might scare some away,” Cate observed.

“I can’t explain it, but I wasn’t scared at all.” I began, feeling like I was defending why the sun rises, or it rains in London.

“First, I got to know her before she told me this piece, so there’s that. Second, the psychic. Let’s be honest, what woman out there ignores their horoscope?” Cate didn’t flinch, so I continued.

“The take-away for me was that she was searching for answers and open to considering all opinions. I still don’t see that as a mistake or miscalculation, Cate?”

Cate took a moment and then spoke. “If I’m clear, medication and a team of doctors supporting her didn’t bother you?” Cate leaned to one side, hand on hip, waiting for me to respond.

“Cate, the woman I was falling in love with, the little things she paid attention to, I equated it all to her level of compassion.”

I stopped and took a long drink. The hum of the aircraft was soothing. The thought of that moment, of falling in love with Karis brought back an overpowering wave of emotions which I hadn’t felt in a long time. All I wanted to do was sit with that feeling, before reality set back in.

Instead, Cate asked me to continue. “I love all that,” said Cate, noticing my smile.

“Might you have a picture of her?” Cate asked.

“Yeah, I do. Hold on. Here.” I opened my phone and handed it to her as I scrolled to Karis’ LinkedIn profile.

“Thanks,” said Cate, slowly studying the photo. “Oh, she’s lovely. She looks remarkably like, like that actress...the one when she played a... and was able to shop...” Karis hated that comparison, no matter how accurate.

“She does... she’d get that all the time, but she’d prefer to never hear it again.”

“Boston?” Cate stressed.

“I stopped and looked directly into Cate’s eyes. Her long curls partially covered her left eye, but I could still see shimmering green and brown flecks reflected in the purple light of the dimly lit cabin.

She held my eyes to hers. I took a deep breath. She refused to speak, but just stared at me to continue my story.

“We had a great flight. We laughed and drank. Karis completed every Sudoku puzzle in the magazine, while holding my hand and talking about every topic under the sun. You have to admit, that’s all pretty impressive, no?”

"I'll agree with that," she replied with a smile.

"We landed, found our driver and made our way to baggage claim. Karis stood with the driver as she pointed out her bag; Man, did he struggle with that colossal pink baggage. I reached over to help, but he'd have nothing of it."

"The driver walked us to our ride. We got in and I immediately opened a bottle of bubbles. Carefully pouring two glasses, I gave a toast to her. She smiled as the limo cruised through Boston's tunnels on the way to our hotel."

"A wonderful way to kick things off," Cate said as she rocked back and forth on the short wall separating us.

"The car emerged from the tunnels, and we pulled up to the hotel. I rolled down the rear window to take in the sun. The air, as it made its way through the car, was energizing. We sat in the limo for a moment, finishing the champagne. The driver opened the door for Karis and then jogged around to the trunk to hand off our bags to Tony, the doorman.

I saw Tony, who gave me a big hug and smile and handed me the keys to our room. I introduced him to Karis. He welcomed us to the Four Seasons and said he'd get our bags upstairs so we could stretch our legs."

"Karis seemed to take all of this in stride and just smiled as things happened for us. I grabbed her hand, and we began to walk. Boston is a gorgeous city. Crowded, thriving and walkable. Another Constitution is there, Cate - the ship that is. And the North End restaurants, like she promised, were like home to me - plenty of Italians hustling around, running their mouths, just like the guys I grew up with."

The entire North End was loud, bright, colorful, and smelled like one big open-air Italian kitchen."

Cate brushed the hair from her face and rested her elbows on the wall. She laid her head to the right, resting it on her arm. She looked up, asking me with her eyes to continue.

"Karis was on a mission to get the weekend started. After boasting about how much better Chicago is vs New York style pizza, Karis threw a wrench and said she had a favorite Boston pizza place we needed to try. Karis stepped in the street, raised her hand, and shocked me with an ear-piercing whistle that instantly got us a taxi. Off we went. I was damn impressed.

The cab got us there in no time, we hopped out and walked into this old-style Italian restaurant. Packed with people laughing and eating, a gentle garlic perfume was floating across the dining room which was bathed in welcoming sunlight as Sinatra sang *Luck Be a Lady*. Small fans gently waved and blew across the tables, seemingly in harmony with the music.

The walls were a yellowish-brown stucco, covered in faint remnants of hand painted maps of Italy. The hot summer sun; along with years of eager patrons who'd run their hands on a path across these maps of Italy, now had a faded patina which resembled restaurants in Naples and Palermo, where I spent a few summers with my grandfather when I was a kid. I was in Boston. But I felt at home here with Karis."

"Other parts of the restaurant had become a tribute of sorts, full of handwritten signatures in fat, black Sharpie lettering. They wrote blushing comments, recorded important dates or expressed thank-you's to Frankie and his family for creating the perfect spot to dine, get engaged or celebrate a 57th wedding anniversary. This *was the place* for special moments like that.

The modest set of cozy, adjoining rooms gave one the burning inspiration to be bold, romantic, and ready to create memories that the walls would later celebrate as an eternal tribute for decades to come, once signed."

"That sounds like my kind of place." Cate smiled.

"On that sunny Boston afternoon, I quickly realized that it's not only beautiful 'out there' - but because of Karis, it was going to be beautiful everywhere, everyday - at least it was for a while."

"I can see that."

"The waitress jogged over and started talking as I pulled out a chair for Karis. She sat down, smiling, ready to order. The waitress was happy we seemed to know how to get an order going in this stirring and overloaded slice of Italian heaven."

"The sun was at her back, casting a warm, golden haze around her head and shoulders. I wanted to memorize everything about her in this moment."

"Her eyes looked especially bright; their usual deep brown shade was more the sheen of a copper orchid - sparkling as I saw my future in them. The slight restaurant humidity around us, most likely caused by the pizza oven, burning at over 800 degrees, gently curled her hair in a way that I hadn't seen before."

"Small straps on her summer dress followed the contour of her shoulders, traversing over her collar bones and down to the top her chest. I saw freckles on her tan shoulders that I hadn't noticed before. I swear one of those clusters of freckles aligned like the constellation which forms Athena - you know, the sister of Ares?" I paused and drank in the memory before I could continue the story for Cate.

"Yes, I know both constellations. That's beautiful you recognized that on her... and quite interesting to me as well," Cate said.

"The stars have always given me some kind of bizarre level of comfort. Sitting there with Karis, I realized instantly that I was in one of *those moments* in my undeserving life where all might actually be right with the world. In that moment, she put 'hope' back on the table for me. Hope that maybe I might be deserving enough to be there with her. I'll always know that I didn't deserve her but was smart enough to not to screw this moment up."

"I can tell."

"We sat and talked about what we were going to do that weekend. I honestly tried to listen, but my mind kept drifting across her eyes as I secretly began to design the plan for our future. Believing she's all mine, I knew I was the luckiest man on the planet. And a long way from a hole in the ground."

"While I'd missed most of her initial planning ideas, it didn't matter, I'd follow her anywhere. As she went on, oblivious to the drawn out looks and casual stares from the men; and a few women around us, I fell deeper and deeper in love with her."

"She went through maps and tourist guides and then, confirming on her phone, their open and closing times as we waited for our truffle and basil pizza to arrive. I smiled and stared deeply at my future. It was the happiest I'd been in a long time. The food made it to the table, and I casually asked her to recap what she'd said. We agreed to our plan for the day, as well as the next two."

"As I began to eat, she studied her map. She had one hand on the map and the other on her red wine glass, slowly swirling it around and around. The wine was flowing, and small pizzas kept coming to the table, every bite exploded with an unanticipated depth of flavor, though she'd only take one bite as each arrived and then put the rest on my plate. Or she'd pick through my plate and eat a little chunk of crust I'd left behind. I could feel her uncross and cross her legs, gently rubbing her foot against my leg each time.

"I always felt the need to be touching her, holding her hand. She once told me it was reassuring to her that I did that. When I didn't, she'd start to worry something was wrong with us. Halfway through pizza number 3, we had decided to start out by walking over to the Constitution. The ship, that is. She was wearing a giant grin."

"Karis," I said, "I love seeing you light up with that smile. I love seeing you happy."

"I'm very happy. I really am. Now, for the rest of today, I think these heels are broken-in enough that we can walk everywhere. I know you've been dying to see that ship and I really want to walk across the bridge to get there. Let's head there when we're done. Are you sure that's OK with you, baby?" she asked as she reached across the table to grab my hand.

"Sounds good to me. More wine?" I asked.

"Please. By the way, how's Frank? I haven't seen him in at least 24 hours now, I figured he'd find a way to be here by now. Or Jimmy. You OK without them and just me?" The change in tone and slight sarcasm was unmistakable - not totally inappropriate, but still...

"Oh, Frank's fine. He's working on his new normal. He was telling me about Jill and some of the things she used to do. He misses her so much. When he ends up on a rant, I just let him go, you know?"

"You're a good friend to him" she replied.

"Thanks. He's a great man. I'd do anything for him."

"That's great, baby. I don't have friends like that." Karis offered.

"No? Hey, I'm curious about something Jill used to do. Voicemail. Early in our relationship, did you save my voicemails and listen to them over again? Ever make your friends listen to them too?"

"Ah, maybe I saved a few. But I never made anyone else listen to them. The way you talk to me, that voice, is mine."

"Yours?" I asked, just to hear the answer again.

She leaned over and gave me a long kiss. "NO one else gets to hear that special voice of yours. Only me. I'm sorry if I'm constantly giving you these little tests to make sure you're my guy. But I'm done. I'm not dating ever again. You're it for me."

"I get you, I do," Karis studied my eyes. It was no secret why we came to Boston, but the small tests, the check-ins remained on the table for her, even in this moment, in Boston.

"Yes, I watch, dissect, examine, and evaluate everything you do. The words you use or worse, any words you stop using. The tone of your texts or emojis. Even that look on your face, like right now. Stop with that look. Please?" Karis was in a serious moment.

"You know how I feel about you. We're here because I know you're it for me." I was never more emphatic.

"I'm not going to be your number one girl. I'm your only girl. The last relationship you'll ever be in. Ever. You're OK with that, right?"

"Hell, yes I am." I told her with complete assurance.

She gave me a big, toothy smile. She was happy. So was I.

Adjusting her hair across her shoulders, she fumbled through her purse and pulled out her phone. She scrolled, then asked me.

"Do you remember this one text you sent me in the early days? I read it all the time. And OK, I have showed this to a few of my friends, because it's really so cute and sweet. And I know you meant it, even though I think versions made the rounds on the Internet..."

She handed me her phone. And I quietly read it aloud to her:

"...I'm going to take this moment as I leave Wrigley Field - having been over served - to deliver a formal disclaimer: I accept no liability for the content of this or any subsequent text for the next 12 (twelve) hours for the consequences of any actions taken on the basis of the information sent, about to be sent or never sent, unless that information is subsequently confirmed in text the following morning."

"While you are the intended recipient you are notified that due to my jealous nature, deep desire to be with you at your event, and the fact that I cannot attend said event, I hold myself harmless from any subsequent retribution on your part or the party of the second part (whomever that may be) for texts or lack thereof due to how insanely jealous I currently feel. Any disclosing, copying, distributing or taking any action in reliance on the contents of this

or subsequent texts - or lack thereof - is strictly prohibited. This agreement has been instituted primarily because I love you.”

“Secondly, because I’m heading to a place I’d rather not go and finally because when the evidence of said event are posted, I will simply not react well. I will choose to ignore and feel otherwise that said event was a bust, regardless of how many smiles or joyful photos the evidence suggests otherwise, because I am madly in love with you. And we’re only getting started.”

I finished reading it to her. Looking up, I smiled.

“Oh yeah,” I said. “I guess I remember sending it to you now. Hmm. That’s a really long text. Surprisingly good, though, eh? Send it back to me, please?” I asked.

“Sure.” She replied. “But it’s only for me, and no one else. Right?”

“Of course.” I said, confidently. She looked up at me, wanting to make a few things clear. She took a deep breath and began.

“Baby, I need you to understand that I am fully committed to you. I am dedicated, loving and loyal. And in return; and you haven’t done anything wrong, but I will always expect total honesty and the same deep commitment from you. I promise that you’ll never find a better partner or a more trustworthy woman, than me.”

She stopped and our eyes locked.

“I know that Karis. I believe you.”

“Leigh, we don’t choose who we fall in love with, maybe it finds us. Just like me at my lowest, and there you were. And you stayed with me, sitting outside, eating a blueberry muffin. It really did happen, so we need to hold on tight, to see it all the way through.”

“We need to treat this as a gift and keep making it happen. You are my everything, forever” she said, staring deeply into my eyes. Her resolve was inspiring. I was all in with her, but afraid to say it out loud, other than in my drunk text.

The magical effects of that pizza place overcame me, and I just put it out there, right there, like I should have a while ago because there was no one else in the world I’d rather be with.

I reached over and took her hand. I turned her phone over and pushed the maps to the side.

“Karis, I love you so much. I have since the moment we sat outside with that muffin and got yelled at by that old lady, I’ve loved you with all my heart for all of time.” I let it all out and held my breath.

She smiled as her face began to blush. Her eyes widened as she looked at me. “Baby, I know you love me. I’ve always been able to tell by how careful you are with me. You’ve been so patient with me. Even when my anxiety kicks in, you’ve stayed there for me.”

“The way you are always are with me, letting me vent, cry, obsess and just be with you, I’ve never felt safer. I love you back, with all my heart.” As she said it, her eyes began to well up. Happy tears.

The waitress was standing over us, pretending to write out the check, but was listening rather intently. With tears in her eyes, the waitress hesitantly handed me the check.

With an accent that could never be mistaken for anywhere but Boston’s North End, she told us “I pray to be in a relationship like you. You guys are amazing. Please come back when you have like nine kids so I can see that I have that chance, too.”

“We will,” I said with a smile. I checked around the table and made sure we had everything. We stood up and walked to the counter. I handed the waitress an extra \$20. We walked out as the line for the second seating began to fill the place. We pushed through the doors. Outside, I stopped Karis.

“Come here,” I said, as I pulled her close to me.

"Yes?" She said as I put my hands around her waist and pulled her close to me. I kissed her like I've never kissed before.

I could feel an energy flow between us unlike any energy I've ever known. Our lips separated but lingered close together. "I love you," I whispered.

"I love you too." She told me. "I'm the luckiest girl in the world," she said as my heart began to speed up. I didn't want to move. I wanted this moment to last forever.

I tried to take a mental picture of everything around us.

The feel of my feet firmly planted on the concrete stoop. The smell of her perfume, the feel of her waist in my hands, almost completely wrapped around her. The warm breeze, the rich smell of the restaurant, the quiet buzz of people around us. I stepped back and grabbed her hand.

"Ready to keep going?" I asked. She nodded with a big smile.

We set out for the US Constitution shipyard. I wanted to take a cab, but she insisted we see the city on foot; and by her standards meant with her feet clad in 5-inch heels. Yes, she looked incredible, but not very practical for what we had planned. It didn't really occur to her to wear anything else - heels were always part of any outfit. Flip flops were, 'lazy,' by her standards.

About halfway on our walk to the ship, I stopped. I pretended to take in the view as I walked around her to the railing on the bridge, noticing how red the back of her feet were beginning to get.

I motioned for her to get on my back. Without saying a word, she hopped on and wrapped her arms around my neck.

She rested her head on my shoulder for a minute, let out a soft sigh and I felt her breath on my neck. We were again on our way.

Over the years, I'd carried more steel, iron, and ammo cans than I cared to remember. *That* was hard. Carrying her across that bridge was effortless. She fit flawlessly on my back. I felt invincible. We laughed and talked and told bad jokes the entire way. It was one of the best days of my life."

Cate handed me a drink as my last words hung in the air, "and then..." Cate asked.

"And we walked to the ship. It was magnificent. And this woman, my version of Venus mixed with Aphrodite, was to be the woman on my arm and at my side, always."

"That sounds amazing. And afterwards...?" Cate asked gently.

"We went out for sushi. It was fantastic. Afterwards, I was about to hail a taxi when she suggested we walk back. It was a clear and starry night.

She grabbed my arm and held on tight as we chose to walk down the more historic streets, still lit by gas lamps, which cast a warm yellow glow on the old homes stacked next to each other.

The trees lining the streets were in full bloom. Large metal and stone planters on the sidewalks leading up to the historic homes, were filled with yellow, red and purple flowers. People strolled past one historic home after the next, casually talking without a care in the world.

As I looked into the eyes of each passerby, I could see love was clearly felt across Boston that evening.

Wearing her signature heels, Karis navigated the cobblestones with flair, holding my arm the entire time.

She pointed out specific places where history had happened and gave me detailed background as to why it was important.

We emerged from the side streets, crossing the first busy intersection. The hotel lobby was in our sights. The hotel, Victorian in design, not for effect but because of its age, was well-lit for the evening. The lobby was adorned

with a combination of candles and warm, yellow lights. It smelled distinctly of warm, spicy gardenias, accented with a calming hint of lavender.

We could hear the quiet buzz of the hotel and after-dinner guests enjoying gin martinis and Manhattans in the ornate lounge. Looking in, we decided to have a drink. We sat close to each other at the bar. I ordered her a glass of champagne and for myself, a Gentlemen Jack, neat. We talked about the ship, our dinner, the history we saw on our walk home, and what we'd do the next day.

Her hand came to rest on the top of my leg, as I gently rubbed her forearm. Her perfume was intoxicating and added to the flavor of the whiskey in the most seductive way.

She reached for her bubbles, stopped and instead, reached a little further. Her eyes fixed on mine, she smiled as she grabbed my glass and took a sip of whiskey, watching me watch her as she drank. Her lips, fresh with whiskey, she leaned over and kissed me. Magical.

We finished our drinks. I signed the check and asked the bartender to send up a bottle of Dom. We headed for the lift. I took her hand into mine and as we began to walk, an overwhelming sense of hope, love, and purpose came over me. I knew right then that I was never more deeply in love than I was with this woman. This moment by far eclipsed any first time experience I'd ever felt before.

Holding her hand in mine, my heart filled with purpose. I knew I was to love and protect her until my last breath. It wasn't a choice for me. It was now how life was supposed to be.

The doors slowly opened and together we stepped into the lift. I pressed the button, and we rode to the top floor. I could see us in the brass-walled reflection as she dropped her head, trying to hold back a smile. She looked down then up, searching for my reflection.

The bell went off as we got to our floor. We exited and found our room. As we walked in, she asked that I remain in the sitting room, outside the bedroom until she came to get me. I took off my jacket and sat down as she disappeared, closing the double doors to the bedroom behind her.

Three knocks on the outer door signaled the champagne had arrived. The waiter brought it in and set it down on the bar along with two beautifully cut crystal champagne glasses. I told him I'd open the bottle, tipped him well, and sent him on his way.

After opening the bottle, I dimmed the lights, found her favorite Lana Del Rey music to play and locked every detail of the room into my head. Knowing that she was here, with me was incredibly dreamlike.

She wouldn't let me see what she'd decided to wear for our first night in Boston together. My mind raced over the possibilities as I decided to pour the champagne. I'd just finished pouring bubbles for us as she uninhibitedly strolled into the lounge to summon me.

I looked up and saw an angel, grinning with confidence and brimming with expectation. She'd selected a stunning all-white ensemble. On top, she wore the most enticing, full-length satin and embroidered lace robe, slung just off the top of her shoulders. Underneath, she was slightly covered in a beautiful, yet alluring lace and silk corset. The way it tightly hugged her body, it flowed across her as she moved towards me. Enchanting.

She was the living manifestation of a goddess on earth. Without saying a word, I smiled, handing her a glass. She took a sip. Then took my hand as she whispered with the voice of an angel for me to come to bed with her. Seduced by her playful, mischievous touch, I was transported to a different time and place.

It was tender, yet intense and passionate. Time seemed to take a long pause for us as we moved together as one. We were no longer two individuals. We became one, an 'us' that night.

Energy flowed between our bodies in a continuous, sensuous pulse. We were locked together, until the light of the early morning began inflicting itself on us through a useless set of ornate bedroom curtains...

Heaven's Rewrite by Johnnie London

I held my breath for a moment as I finished explaining to Cate all that I felt was proper to say. I couldn't help but smile, thinking back on that perfect night. Eventually, I looked at Cate for her reaction.

"It was as close to heaven as I've ever been."

"Yet, here we are now." Cate replied.

A mood-breaker, to say the least. I reached for my drink and finished what was left as Cate yanked me back to reality.

Trying to hold on to a shred of emotion from that night, I told Cate, "like I said, it was enchanting, magical. Perfect. That entire weekend showed me that I had my soulmate, and we consummated a bond eternal. I was done with anyone else, ever. She was it."

"Yet here we are," Cate said again, handing me another full glass of whiskey.

"Where did that just come from?" I asked her.