“Are you Ruby?”
“Sometimes. Not today.”
“Will you be on Monday at 10 A.M.?”
“I don’t know.”
“I guess I’ll just have to take my chances.”

Ruby Jaundoo is a cool customer. She wasn’t eager to talk with the writer who was telling the story of the transformation of Boston’s notorious Columbia Point housing project into Harbor Point, a model of mixed-income housing.

After years of being ignored—years of being shunned—the residents of Harbor Point, and formerly of Columbia Point, are suddenly finding themselves sought after. Academics are writing articles and dissertations, journalists are writing multi-part stories, government officials are visiting and having their pictures taken. Columbia Point has a new name and, thanks to millions of dollars, a new look; it is being held up to the rest of the country as a sorely needed solution to the nation’s housing crisis.

Ruby Jaundoo has watched it all come and go—and come again. Through all of the changes—from the darkest years when fire engines and ambulances refused to enter Columbia Point without a police escort, when the only people who wanted to do business at Columbia Point were the drug dealers, to the bright, new days of polite but firm security guards at Harbor Point’s entrance gate and tennis players on the carefully landscaped mall that leads to a breathtaking view of the harbor—Ruby Jaundoo has been the same person, living in the same place, wanting the same thing: a decent place to live.

This is the story of how she got it.
Columbia Point stood out starkly on the Boston landscape. It was not necessarily the worst of Boston’s housing projects, but it was certainly the most visible. For thousands of commuters driving up and down the Southeast Expressway in the late 1970s and early 1980s, it was a haunting sight: a forbidding mass of flat-topped yellow brick buildings, their windows covered with red plywood, isolated out at the edge of the bay. From afar there were no signs of life, and most people had no reason to get any closer. Stories in the newspapers told of drug dealers, prostitution, shootings. Columbia Point was a symbol of failure—the failure of public housing, the failure of racial integration, the failure of the war on poverty—that many people would just as soon forget.

It had not always been so. Columbia Point had a very different past, and it would have a very different future.
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