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emotional depth of the ocean'**

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# **Malibu Rising**

**Taylor  
Jenkins Reid**

BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF

**Daisy  
Jones  
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BY TAYLOR JENKINS REID

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# Malibu Rising





Malibu catches fire.

It is simply what Malibu does from time to time.

Tornadoes take the flatlands of the Midwest. Floods rise in the American South. Hurricanes rage against the Gulf of Mexico.

And California burns.

The land caught fire time and again when it was inhabited by the Chumash in 500 B.C.E. It caught fire in the 1800s when Spanish colonizers claimed the area. It caught fire on December 4, 1903, when Frederick and May Rindge owned the stretch of land now called Malibu. The flames seized thirty miles of coastland and consumed their Victorian beach house.

Malibu caught fire in 1917 and 1929, well after the first movie stars got there. It caught fire in 1956 and 1958, when the longboarders and beach bunnies trickled to its shores. It caught fire in 1970 and 1978, after the hippies settled in its canyons.

It caught fire in 1982, 1985, in 1993, 1996, in 2003, 2007, and 2018. And times in between.

Because it is Malibu's nature to burn.

. . .

At the city line of Malibu today stands a sign that reads, MALIBU, 27 MILES OF SCENIC BEAUTY. The long, thin township—an area that hugs



the slim coast for almost thirty miles—is made up of ocean and mountain, split by a two-lane throughway called the Pacific Coast Highway, or PCH.

To the west of PCH is a long series of beaches cradling the crystal blue waves of the Pacific Ocean. In many areas along the coast, beach houses are crammed along the side of the highway, competing for views, narrow and tall. The coastline is jagged and rocky. The waves are brisk and clear. The air smells of fresh brine.

Directly to the east of PCH lie the immense, arid mountains. They dominate the skyline, sage green and amber, composed of desert shrubs and wild trees, brittle underbrush.

This is dry land. A tinderbox. Blessed and cursed with a breeze.

The local Santa Ana winds speed through the mountains and valleys from the inland to the shore, hot and strong. Myth says they are agents of chaos and disorder. But what they really are is an accelerant.

A tiny spark in the dry desert wood can grow to a blaze and run wild, burning bright orange and red. It devours the land and exhales thick black smoke that overtakes the sky, dimming the sun for miles, ash falling like snow.

Habitats—brush and shrubs and trees—and homes—cabins and mansions and bungalows, ranches and vineyards and farms—go up in smoke and leave behind a scorched earth.

But that land is young once again, ready to grow something new.

Destruction. And renewal, rising from the ashes. The story of fire.

• • •

The Malibu fire of 1983 started not in the dry hills but on the coastline.

It began at 28150 Cliffside Drive on Saturday, August 27—at the home of Nina Riva—during one of the most notorious parties in Los Angeles history.

The annual party grew wildly out of control sometime around midnight.

By 7:00 A.M., the coastline of Malibu was engulfed in flames.

Because, just as it is in Malibu's nature to burn, so was it in one particular person's nature to set fire and walk away.



Saturday, August 27, 1983



# Part One

**7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m.**







**7:00 a.m.**

Nina Riva woke up without even opening her eyes.

Consciousness seeped into her slowly, as if breaking the morning to her gently. She lay in bed dreaming of her surfboard underneath her chest in the water, before she began remembering reality—that hundreds of people were going to descend upon her house in just over twelve hours. As she came to, it dawned on her once again that every single person who would show up tonight would know the indignity of what had happened to her.

She lamented it all without even peeking through the curtains of her own eyelashes.

If Nina listened closely, she could hear the ocean crashing below the cliff—just faintly.

She had always envisioned buying a home like the one she and her siblings grew up in down on Old Malibu Road. A shabby beach bungalow off of PCH, built on stilts, extended out over the sea. She had fond memories of sea spray on the windows, of half-rotted wood and rusting metal holding up the ground beneath her feet. She wanted to stand on her patio and look down in order to see high tide, hear the waves crashing loudly underneath her.

But Brandon had wanted to live on a cliff.

So he'd gone and bought them this glass-and-concrete mansion, in the cliffside enclave of Point Dume, fifty feet above the coastline, a steep walk down the rocks and steps to the breaking waves.

Nina listened as best she could for the sounds of the water and she did not open her eyes. Why should she? There was nothing for her to see.

Brandon was not in her bed. Brandon wasn't in the house. Brandon wasn't even in Malibu. He was at the Beverly Hills Hotel, with its pink stucco and its green palm trees. He was—most likely at this early hour—cradling Carrie Soto in his sleep. When he woke up, he would probably take his big paw of a hand and move her hair out of the way, and kiss her neck. And then the two of them would probably start packing together for the U.S. Open.

*Ugh.*

Nina didn't hate Carrie Soto for stealing her husband because husbands can't be stolen. Carrie Soto wasn't a thief; Brandon Randall was a traitor.

*He* was the sole reason Nina Riva was on the cover of the August 22 issue of *Now This* magazine under the headline NINA'S HEART-BREAK: HOW ONE HALF OF AMERICA'S GOLDEN COUPLE GOT LEFT BEHIND.

It was an entire article dedicated to the fact that her tennis pro husband had publicly left her for his tennis pro mistress.

The cover image was flattering enough. They had pulled one of the photos from her swimsuit shoot in the Maldives earlier that year. She was wearing a fuchsia high-leg bikini. Her dark brown eyes and her thick eyebrows were framed by her long brown hair, lightened from the sun, looking a tad wet, a faint curl still in it. And then, of course, there were her famous lips. A billowy bottom lip topped by her thinner upper lip—the Riva lips, as they had been dubbed when they were made famous by her father, Mick.

In the original photo, Nina was holding a surfboard, her yellow-

and-white Town & Country 6' 2" thruster. On the cover, they had cropped it out. But she was used to that by now.

Inside the magazine, there was a picture of Nina in the parking lot of a Ralphs grocery store from three weeks prior. Nina had been wearing a white bikini with a flowered sundress thrown on over it. She'd been smoking a Virginia Slims and carrying a six-pack of Tab. If you looked closely, you could tell she had been crying.

Next to it, they'd put a photo of her father from the midsixties. He was tall, dark, and conventionally handsome in a pair of swimming trunks, a Hawaiian shirt, and sandals, standing in front of Trancas Market, smoking a Marlboro and holding a bag of groceries. Over the photos ran the title THE APPLE DOESN'T FALL FAR FROM THE RIVA TREE.

They'd framed Nina as the dumped wife of a famous man on the cover, the daughter of a famous man on the inside. Every time she thought about it, her jaw tensed up.

She finally opened her eyes and looked at her ceiling. She stood up out of bed, naked except for a pair of bikini underwear. She walked down the concrete stairs, into the tiled kitchen, opened the sliding glass doors that looked onto her backyard, and stepped out on the patio.

She breathed in the salt air.

It was not yet hot that morning; the breeze that stalks all seaside towns was running offshore. Nina could feel the wind across her shoulders as she walked onto the perfectly cut grass, feeling the stiff edges of the blades between her toes. She walked until she got to the edge of the cliff.

She looked out onto the horizon. The ocean was as blue as ink. The sun had settled into the sky an hour or so ago. Seagulls chirped sharply as they dove and rose over the sea.

Nina could see the waves were good, a clear swell was moving in toward Little Dume. She watched a set come in, watched them go unriden. It seemed like a tragedy. Those waves hitting the break all by themselves, no one there to claim them.

She would claim them.

She would let the ocean heal her like she always had.

She may have been in a house she never would have chosen. She may have been left by a man she could not even remember why she'd married. But the Pacific was her ocean. Malibu was her home.

What Brandon had never understood was that the glory of living in Malibu was not living in luxury but raw nature.

The Malibu of Nina's youth had been more rural than urbane, the rolling hills filled with dirt paths and humble shacks.

What Nina loved about her hometown was how ants found their way to your kitchen counters, pelicans sometimes shit on the ledge of your deck. Clumps of horse manure sat along the sides of the unpaved roads, left there by neighbors riding their horses to the market.

Nina had lived on this small stretch of coast her entire life and she understood she could do little to prevent it from changing. She had seen it grow from humble ranches to middle-class neighborhoods. Now it was becoming a land of oversized mansions on the beach. But with vistas this beautiful, it had been only a matter of time before the filthy rich showed up.

The only real surprise was that Nina had married one of them. And now she owned this slice of the world, she supposed, whether she liked it or not.

In a moment, Nina would turn around and walk back into the house. She would put on her swimsuit and head right back to this spot, where she would descend the side of the cliff and grab her board from the shed she kept on the sand.

But right that second, Nina was thinking only of the party tonight, having to face all of those people who knew her husband had left her. She didn't move. She wasn't ready to turn around.

Instead, Nina Riva stood on the edge of the cliff she'd never wanted, and looked out onto the water she wished was closer, and for the first time in her quiet life, screamed into the wind.

"Stay here." Jay Riva hopped out of his CJ-8, jumped the five-foot gate, walked down the gravel drive, and knocked on the door of his older sister's house.

No response.

"Nina!" he called out. "You up?"

The family resemblance was striking. He was slender and tall like she was, but more powerful than reedy. His brown eyes, long lashes, and short, rumpled brown hair made him the kind of handsome that breeds entitlement. With his board shorts, faded T-shirt, sunglasses, and flip-flops, he looked like what he was: a championship surfer.

Jay knocked again, slightly louder. Still nothing.

He was tempted to pound on the door until Nina got out of bed. Because, he knew, eventually, she'd come to the door. But now was not the time to be a dick to Nina. Instead, Jay turned around, put his Wayfarers back on, and walked back to his Jeep.

"It's just you and me this morning," he said.

"We should wake her up," Kit said. "She'd want in on these waves."

Tiny Kit. Jay started the car, and began his three-point turn, careful to make sure their sticks stayed put in the back. "She watches the same forecast we do," he said. "She knows about the swell. She can take care of herself."

Kit considered this and looked out the window. More accurately: She looked out where a window might have been if the car had doors.

Kit was slim and small and tightly built, all sinew and tanned skin. She had long brown hair, lightened with lemon juice and sunshine, freckles across the bridge of her nose and onto the apples of her cheeks, green eyes, full lips. She looked like a miniature version

of her sister without any of the grace and ease. Beautiful but maybe a bit awkward. Awkward but maybe beautiful.

"I'm worried she's depressed," Kit said, finally. "She needs to get out of the house."

"She's not *depressed*," Jay said, as he came to the intersection where the neighborhood roads met PCH. He looked to his left and then to his right, trying to time his turn. "She's just been dumped is all."

Kit rolled her eyes.

"When Ashley and I broke up . . ." Jay continued. They were now flying north up PCH, the base of the mountains to their right, the vast clear blue ocean to their left, the wind so loud Jay had to shout. "I was upset about it, but then I got over it. Just like Nina will soon. That's how relationships are."

Jay seemed to be forgetting that when Ashley had broken up with him, he was so upset that he wouldn't even admit it had happened for almost two weeks. But Kit wasn't going to mention that and risk him bringing up *her* love life. At the age of twenty, Kit had not yet kissed anyone. And it was a fact that she felt every day, every moment, some more acutely than others. Her brother often talked to her as if she were a child when it came to love, and when he did, she found herself reddening—equal parts embarrassment and rage.

The car approached a red light and Jay slowed down. "I'm just saying, getting in the water is probably what she needs right now," Kit said.

"Nina will be fine," he said. With no one else at the intersection, he put his foot on the gas and drove on, even though the light had yet to change.

"I never liked Brandon, anyway," Kit said.

"Yes, you did," Jay said, catching her eye out of the corner of his. He was right. She had. She had liked him so much. They all had.

The wind roared as the car sped up and neither of them spoke until Jay pulled a U-turn and took a spot on the side of the road at County Line, an expanse of sand at the very northern edge of Malibu where surfers hovered in the water all year round.

Now, with the southwest swell, there would be waves hollow

enough to get barreled. And maybe show off a little if they were so inclined.

Jay had taken first and third in two United States Surfing Championships. He had three *Surfer's Monthly* covers in as many years. A sponsorship with O'Neill. An offer from RogueSticks to shape a line of Riva brand shortboards. He was a favorite going into the first ever Triple Crown later that year.

Jay knew he was great. But he also knew that he attracted attention based in part on who his father was. And sometimes, it was hard to tell the line between the two. Mick Riva's shadow excelled at haunting each one of his children.

"Ready to show these kooks how it's done?" Jay said.

Kit nodded with a sly smile. His arrogance both infuriated and amused her. By a certain population, Jay might have been considered the most exciting up-and-coming surfer on the mainland. But to Kit, he was just her older brother, whose aerials were getting stale.

"Yeah, let's go," she said.

A short guy with a gentle-looking face and a wet suit half undone around his hips spotted Jay and Kit as they started to get out of the car. Seth Whittles. His hair was wet, slicked back. He was wiping his face off with a towel.

"Hey, man, I thought I might see you here this morning," he said to Jay as he came around the side of his Jeep. "The tubes right now are classic."

"For sure, for sure," Jay said.

Seth was one year younger than Jay and had been one grade behind him in school. Now, in adulthood, Seth and Jay ran in the same circles, surfed the same peaks. Jay got the sense that felt like a victory for Seth.

"Big party tonight," Seth said. His voice had the slightest edge of bravado to it and Kit instantly understood Seth was confirming he was invited. Kit caught Seth's eye as he was speaking and he smiled at her, as if just now realizing she existed.

"Hey," he said.



“Hi.”

“Yeah, man, party’s on,” Jay said. “At Nina’s place in Point Dume, just like last year.”

“Cool, cool,” Seth said, one eye still watching Kit.

As Seth and Jay continued talking, Kit got the boards out of the back and waxed them both down. She started dragging them to the shoreline. Jay caught up with her. He grabbed his board out of her hands.

“So I guess Seth is coming tonight,” Jay said.

“I gathered,” Kit said, tying her leash onto her ankle.

“He was . . . checking you out,” Jay said. He hadn’t ever noticed someone checking Kit out before. Nina, sure, all the time. But not Kit.

Jay looked at his little sister again, with fresh eyes. Was she hot now or something? He couldn’t stand to even ask himself the question.

“Whatever,” Kit said.

“He’s a good guy but it’s weird,” Jay said. “Somebody scoping out my little sister in front of me like that.”

“I’m twenty years old, Jay,” Kit said.

Jay frowned. “Still.”

“Yeah, well, I’d rather die than suck face with Seth Whittles,” Kit said, standing up and grabbing her board. “So don’t lose sleep over it.”

Seth was an all-right-looking guy, Jay figured. And he was nice. He was always falling in love with some girl or another, taking them out to dinner and shit. Kit could do worse than Seth Whittles. Sometimes she made no sense to him.

“You ready?” Kit said.

Jay nodded. “Let’s go.”

The two of them headed into the waves as they had countless other times over the course of their lives—laying their bodies down on their boards and paddling out, side by side.

There were already a handful of people in the lineup. But it was easy to see Jay's prominence as he made his way past the breakers, as the men in the water saw him coming toward them. The lineup spaced out, made room.

Jay and Kit saddled up right at the peak.

Hud Riva, short where his siblings were tall, stocky where they were lithe, who spent the summer getting sunburned as they grew bronze, was the smartest one of the bunch. Far too smart to not understand the true ramifications of what he was doing.

He was eight miles south on PCH, going down on his brother's ex-girlfriend Ashley in an Airstream illegally parked on Zuma Beach.

However, that was not how he would have phrased it. For him, the act was making love. There was simply too much heart in all of it, in every breath, for it to be anything cheaper than love.

Hud loved Ashley's one dimple and her green-gold eyes and her gold-gold hair. He loved the way she could not pronounce *anthropology*, that she always asked him how Nina and Kit were doing, and that her favorite movie was *Private Benjamin*.

He loved her one snaggletooth that you could only ever see when she laughed. Whenever she caught Hud looking at it, she'd get embarrassed, covering her mouth with her hand and laughing even harder. And he loved that about her, too.

In those moments, Ashley would often hit him and say, "Stop it, you're making me self-conscious," with the sparkle still in her eye. And when she did that, he knew she loved him, too.

Ashley often told him she loved his broad shoulders and his long eyelashes. She loved the way he always looked out for his family. She admired his talent—the way the world looked more beautiful through his camera than it did right in front of her. She admired that he could get in just as dangerous waters as the surfers did, but that he swam, or balanced on a Jet Ski, holding up a however-many-pound camera, capturing in perfect light and motion what Jay could do on the board.

Ashley thought that was the more impressive feat. After all, it wasn't just Jay who had made the cover of *Surfer's Monthly* three

times in as many years. So had Hud. All of the most famous shots of Jay were by Hud. The wave breaking, the board cutting through the water, the sea spray, the horizon . . .

Jay might be able to ride the wave but Hud was the one making it look beautiful. The name Hudson Riva was in all three of those issues. Ashley believed that Jay needed Hud as much as Hud needed Jay.

Which is why, when Ashley looked at Hud Riva, she saw a quiet man who did not need attention or accolades. She saw a man whose work spoke for itself. She saw a man instead of a boy.

And in doing so, she made Hud feel like more of a man than he ever had before.

Ashley's breath got shallower as Hud moved faster. He knew her body, knew what she needed. This wasn't the first or second or tenth time he'd done this.

When it was over, Ashley pulled Hud up to lie next to her. The air was muggy—the two of them had shut all the windows and doors before they had even kissed, for fear of being seen or heard or even *sensed*. Ashley sat up and cracked open the window near the bed, letting the breeze in. The salt air cut the humidity.

They could hear families and teenagers on the beach, the waves rolling onto the shore, the sharp whistle of a lifeguard at the nearest tower. So much of Malibu was restricted beach access, but Zuma—that wide stretch of fine sand and unobstructed coast against PCH—was for everyone. On a day like this, it attracted families from all over Los Angeles trying to squeeze one last memorable day out of summer vacation.

"Hi," Ashley said softly, shy and smiling.

"Hi," Hud said, charmed.

He grabbed the fingers of Ashley's left hand and played with them, weaving his own fingers between them.

He could marry her. He knew that. He'd never felt this way about anyone before but he felt it for her. He felt like he'd known it since the day he was born, though he knew that couldn't possibly be right.

Hud was ready to give Ashley all of him, anything he had, anything he could give. The wedding of her dreams, however many babies she wanted. What was so hard about dedicating yourself to a woman? It felt so natural to him.

Hud was only twenty-three but he felt ready to be a husband, to have a family, to build a life with Ashley.

He just had to find a way to tell Jay.

"So . . . tonight," Ashley said as she sat up to get dressed. She pulled up her yellow bikini bottom and threw on a white T-shirt that said UCLA in blue and gold across the chest.

"Wait," Hud said, sitting up, his head almost hitting the ceiling. He was wearing navy blue corduroy shorts and no shirt. There was sand on his feet. There was always sand on his feet. It was the way he and his brother and sisters had grown up. Sand on their feet and on their floors and in their cars and bags and shower drains. "Take your shirt off. Please," Hud said as he leaned over and grabbed one of his cameras.

Ashley rolled her eyes, but they both knew she would do it.

He pulled the viewfinder down, looked at her directly. "You're art."

Ashley rolled her eyes again. "That is such a lame line."

Hud smiled. "I know but I swear I've never said it to any other woman on the planet." This was true.

Ashley took her hands and crossed them over her chest. She grabbed the bottom edge of her shirt, and pulled it off her head, her long sandy hair falling down her back and around her shoulders. As she did all of that, Hud held down the shutter, capturing her in every state of undress.

She knew she would look beautiful through his lens. As he clicked, she grew more and more comfortable, blooming at the idea of being seen by him. Ashley slowly took her hands and put them on her bikini bottom and untied the strings holding it on. And in three swift clicks, it was gone.

Hud stopped for an imperceptible second, stunned at her

willingness, at her initiative, to become even more bare in front of his camera than he'd ever asked of her. And then he continued. He photographed her over and over and over again. She sat down, on the bed, and crossed her legs. And he moved closer and closer to her with the camera.

"Keep shooting," she said. "Shoot until we're done." And then she pulled at his shorts, and let them fall down, and put her mouth on him. And he kept photographing her until they were done, when she looked up at him and said, "Those are just for you. You have to develop them yourself, all right? But now you'll have them forever. Because I love you."

"OK," Hud said, still watching her, stunned. She was so many incredible things at once. Confident enough to be this vulnerable. Generous but in control. He always felt so calm around her, even when she thrilled him.

Ashley stood up and tied her bikini bottom back on, put her shirt on with conviction. "So, like I was saying, about the party tonight . . ." Ashley looked at Hud to gauge his reaction. "I don't think I should go."

"I thought we decided—" Hud started but Ashley cut him off.

"Your family has enough problems right now." She started slipping her feet into her sandals. "Don't you think?"

"You mean Nina?" Hud said, following Ashley to the door. "Nina's going to be fine. You think this is the hardest thing Nina's had to go through?"

"That's even more to my point," Ashley said as she walked out of the Airstream, her feet hitting the sand, the sun hitting her eyes. Hud was one step behind her. "I don't want a spectacle. Your family . . ."

"Attracts a lot of attention?" Hud offered.

"Exactly. And I don't want to be one more problem for Nina."

It was this kind of thoughtfulness for his sister, despite having met her only a few times, that Hud had found so enchanting about Ashley from the beginning.

"I know but . . . we have to tell them," Hud said, pulling Ashley toward him. He put his arms over her shoulders, tucked her head underneath his. He kissed her hair. She smelled like tanning oil—fake coconuts and bananas. "We have to tell Jay," he clarified.

"I know," Ashley said. She rested her head on Hud's chest. "I just don't want to be this person."

"What person?"

"The bitch, you know? That comes between brothers."

"Hey," Hud said. "Me falling in love with you is my fault. Not yours. And it was the best thing I ever did."

Fate trips up sometimes. That's the conclusion Hud had come to. It's how he made sense of a lot of things that had happened in his life. Whatever hand was guiding him—guiding everyone—toward a certain future . . . there's no way it could work without error.

Sometimes the wrong brother meets the girl first. It doesn't have to be any more complicated than that. Hud and Ashley . . . they were simply correcting fate.

"It doesn't even make sense I was with Jay," Ashley said, pulling back from him except for where her hands interlaced with his.

"That's what I thought the first time I saw you," Hud said. "I thought, *That girl doesn't belong with Jay.*"

"Did you think I belonged with you?"

Hud shook his head. "No, you're far too good for me."

"Well, at least you recognize it."

Ashley pulled far away this time, sinking her heels into the sand, letting Hud's grip on her be the only thing keeping her from falling down. Hud let her hang for a moment and then pulled her back to him.

"You should come tonight," he said. "And we will tell Jay and it will all be OK."

There was an unspoken pact between them that what they were going to "tell Jay" was going to be a lie. A half-truth.

They were going to tell Jay they were together. They were not going to tell him they had started sleeping together one night six



months ago, when they ran into each other on the Venice Boardwalk. Back when Ashley and Jay were still together.

Ashley had been wearing a denim jacket over a coral dress that was floating up with the breeze. Hud was in white shorts and a blue short-sleeved button-down, a pair of old Topsiders on his feet.

Each had been out drinking with friends when they found themselves passing each other just outside a tourist shop, selling tank tops with cheesy catchphrases and cheap sunglasses.

They stopped to say hi and told their friends they would catch up in a moment. But “a moment” seemed to get longer and longer until they realized they weren’t going to catch up with their friends at all.

They kept talking as they slowly started walking together down the boulevard, going into shops and bars. Hud tried on a straw cowboy hat and Ashley laughed. Ashley jokingly grabbed a Wonder Woman lasso and pretended to twirl it in the air. And Hud could tell, the way Ashley smiled at him, that the night was becoming something bigger than either of them intended.

Hours later, after a few too many drinks, they crammed themselves into one of the bathroom stalls of a bar called Mad Dogs. Ashley whispered into Hud’s ear, “I always wanted you. I always wanted you instead.” *She’d always wanted him instead.*

A second after she’d said it, Hud had kissed her and grabbed her legs, pulling her up around his waist and against the wall. She smelled like a flower he couldn’t name. Her hair felt fine and soft in his fingers. No one had ever felt as good against him as she did that night.

When it was over, they both felt exhilarated and satiated and light as air, until the anvil of guilt settled in their stomachs.

Hud liked thinking of himself as a good guy. And yet . . . sleeping with your brother’s girlfriend was exactly the sort of thing a good guy would never do.

Certainly not more than once.

But there was that night and then another. Then dinner in a restaurant four towns up the coast. And then a few discussions of how, exactly, Ashley should break up with Jay.

And then, she did it.

Five months ago, Ashley had shown up at Hud's Airstream at eleven o'clock at night and said, "I broke up with him. And I think you should know that I love you."

Hud had pulled her inside and taken her face in his hands and said, "I love you, too. I've loved you since . . . I don't know. Well before I should have."

And now they were just biding their time, trying to create the perfect moment in which to tell Jay the half-truth. A half-truth between half brothers, though Jay and Hud never thought of themselves as *half* brothers at all.

"Come to the party," Hud said to Ashley. "I'm ready to tell everyone."

"I don't know," Ashley said as she put on her white sunglasses and grabbed her keys. "We'll see."

**8:00 a.m.**

Nina was out in the surf, having a hard time finding the kind of long, slow right-handers she was looking for.

She wasn't there to shred. And the waves weren't right for it that morning anyway. All she wanted was to ride her longboard gracefully, cross-stepping up to the nose until the waves knocked her off.

The beach was quiet. This was the glory of a tiny, exclusive cove, protected on three sides by fifty-foot cliffs. While technically the beach was public, the only people who knew how to get to it were those who had access to private stairs or those willing to hike the jagged coastline and risk high tide.

That morning, Nina was sharing the cove with two teenage girls in neon swimsuits who were sunbathing and reading Jackie Collins and Stephen King.

Since Nina was the only one in the water, she hung out on her board just past the peak, unhurried. As she floated there, the wind chilling her wet skin, the sun crisping her bare shoulders, with her legs dangling in the water, Nina was already getting a small slice of the peace she'd come out here for.

An hour ago, she had been dreading the party. She'd even

fantasized about canceling it. But she couldn't do that to Jay, Hud, and Kit. They looked forward to this party every year, talked about it for months afterward.

The party had started out as a wild kegger years ago, a bunch of surfers and skateboarders from around town gathering at the Rivas' house the last Saturday in August. But in the time since, Nina's own fame had risen and she'd married Brandon, garnering even more attention.

With each passing year, the party seemed to attract more and more recognizable people. Actors, pop stars, models, writers, directors, even a few Olympians. Somehow, this once small get-together had become *the* party to be seen at. If only to be able to say you were there *when*.

When, in 1979, Warren Rhodes and Lisa Crowne got naked in the pool. When, in '81, the supermodels Alma Amador and Georgina Corbyn made out with each other in front of their husbands. When, last year, Bridger Miller and Tuesday Hendricks met for the first time, sharing a joint in Nina's backyard. They got engaged two weeks later and then Tuesday left him at the altar back in May. *Now This* ran a headline that said, WHY TUESDAY COULDN'T CROSS THAT BRIDGE WITH BRIDGER.

There was no end to the stories people would tell about what happened at the Riva party, some of which Nina wasn't even sure were true.

Supposedly, Louie Davies discovered Alexandra Covington when she was swimming topless in Nina's pool. He cast her as a prostitute in *Let 'Em Down Easy* and now, two years later, she had an Oscar.

Apparently, at the party back in 1980, Doug Tucker, the new head of Sunset Studios, got plastered and told everyone that he had proof Celia St. James was gay.

Did Nina's neighbor Rob Lowe sing all of "Jack & Diane" with her other neighbor Emilio Estevez last year in her kitchen? People claimed so. Nina never knew for sure.

She didn't always catch everything that happened in her own home. Didn't see every person that showed up. She was mostly concerned with whether her brothers and sister had a good time. And they always did.

Last year, Jay and Hud had smoked weed with every member of the Breeze. Kit spent the entire night talking to Violet North up in Nina's bedroom, a week before Violet's debut album hit number one. Since then, Jay and Hud had tickets to the Breeze's shows whenever they wanted. And Kit did not shut up about how cool Violet was for weeks afterward.

So Nina knew she couldn't cancel a party like that. The Rivas might not be like most families, being just the four of them, but they had their traditions. And anyway, there was no good way to cancel a party that never had any invitations. People were coming, whether she wanted them there or not.

She'd even heard from her close friend Tarine, whom she'd met at a *Sports Illustrated* shoot, that Vaughn Donovan was planning on coming. And Nina had to admit Vaughn Donovan was perhaps the hottest guy she'd ever seen on-screen. The way he smiled as he took off his glasses in the mall parking lot in *Wild Night* still got her.

As Nina watched a swell come in just west of her, she decided the party was not a curse, but a blessing. It was exactly what she needed. She deserved a good time. She deserved to let loose. She could share a bottle of wine with Tarine. She could flirt. She could dance.

Nina watched as the first wave in a set crashed just beyond her. It peeled slowly, consistently, beautifully to the right, exactly as she'd hoped. So when the next one came in, she paddled with it, caught the feel of the tide underneath her, and popped up.

She moved with the water, thinking only of how to compensate, how to give and take in perfect measure. She did not think of future or past, but only present. *How can I stay, how can I hold on, how can I balance? Better. Longer. With more ease.*

As the wave sped up, she hunched farther down. As the wave slowed, she pumped her board. When she had her bearings, she danced, lightly, up to the nose, moving with a softness that did not compromise speed. She hovered there, on the tip of the board, her feet balancing, her arms out to steady her.

Throughout it all, this grace had always saved her.

## 1956

Our family histories are simply stories. They are myths we create about the people who came before us, in order to make sense of ourselves.

The story of June and Mick Riva seemed like a tragedy to their oldest child, Nina. It felt like a comedy of errors to their first son, Jay. It was an origin story for their second son, Hud. And a mystery to the baby of the family, Kit. To Mick himself it was just a chapter of his memoir.

But to June, it was, always and forever, a romance.

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Mick Riva first met June Costas when she was a seventeen-year-old girl on the shores of Malibu. It was 1956, a few years before the Beach Boys got there, mere months before *Gidget* would begin to beckon teenagers to the waves in droves.

Back then, Malibu was a rural fishing town with only one traffic signal. It was quiet coastline, crawling inland by way of narrow winding roads through the mountains. But the town was coming into its adolescence. Surfers were setting up shop with their tiny shorts and longboards, bikinis were coming into fashion.

June was the daughter of Theo and Christina, a middle-class couple who lived in a two-bedroom ranch home off one of Malibu's many canyons. They owned a struggling restaurant called Pacific Fish, slinging crab cakes and fried clams just off the Pacific Coast Highway. Its bright red sign with cursive type hung high in the air, beckoning you from the east side of the highway to look away from the water for just one moment and eat something deep fried with an ice-cold Coca-Cola.

Theo ran the fryer, Christina ran the register, and on nights and weekends, it was June's job to wipe down the tables and mop the floors.

Pacific Fish was both June's duty and her inheritance. When June's mother vacated that spot at the counter, it was expected that it would be June's body that filled it. But June felt destined for bigger things, even at seventeen.

June beamed on the rare occasion that a starlet or director would come into the restaurant. She could recognize all of them the second they walked in the door because she read the gossip rags like bibles, appealing to her father's soft spot to get him to buy her a copy of *Sub Rosa* or *Confidential* every week. When June scrubbed ketchup off the tables, she imagined herself at the Pantages Theatre for a movie premiere. When she swept the salt and sand off the floors, she wondered how it might feel to stay at the Beverly Hilton and shop at Robinson's. June marveled at what a world the stars lived in. Just a few miles away and yet impossible for her to touch because she was stuck serving french fries to tourists.

June's joy was something she stole between shifts. She would sneak out at night, sleep in when she could. And, when her parents were at work but did not yet need her, June would cross the Pacific Coast Highway and rest her blanket in the expanse of sand opposite her family's restaurant. She would bring a book and her best bathing suit. She would fry her pale body under the sun, sunglasses over her eyes, eyes on the water. She would do this every Saturday and Sunday until ten-thirty in the morning, when reality pulled her back to Pacific Fish.

One particular Saturday morning during the summer of '56, June was standing on the shoreline, her toes in the wet sand, waiting for the water to feel warmer on her feet before she waded in. There were surfers in the waves, fishermen down the coast, teens like her laying out blankets and rubbing lotion on their arms.

June had felt daring that morning and put on a blue gingham strapless bikini. Her parents had no idea it even existed. She'd gone



into Santa Monica with her girlfriends and had seen it hanging in a boutique. She'd bought it with money she'd saved from tips, borrowing the last three dollars from her friend Marcie.

She knew if her mother saw it, she'd be forced to return it or worse yet, throw it out. But she wanted to feel pretty. She wanted to put out a signal and see if anyone answered.

June had dark brown hair cut into a bob, a button nose, and pert bow lips. She had big, light brown eyes that held the giddiness that often accompanies hope. That bikini held promise.

As she stood at the shoreline that morning, she felt almost naked. Sometimes, she felt a little guilty about how much she liked her own body. She liked the way her breasts filled out her bikini top, the way her waist pulled in and then ebbed out again. She felt alive, standing there, partially exposed. She bent down and ran her hands through the cold water rising up to her feet.

A twenty-three-year-old, as-yet-unknown Michael Riva was swimming in the surf. He was with three of the friends he'd made while hanging out in the clubs of Hollywood. He'd been in L.A. for two years, having left the Bronx behind, running west in search of fame.

He was finding his footing coming out of a wave when his gaze fell on the girl standing alone along the shore. He liked her figure. He liked the way she stood there, shy and companionless. He smiled at her.

June smiled back. And so Mick ditched his friends and headed toward her. When he finally made his way over, a drop of ice-cold water fell from his arm onto hers. She found herself flattered by his attention even before he said hello.

Mick was undeniably handsome with his hair slicked back from the ocean, his tan, broad shoulders shining in the sun, his white swimming trunks fitting him just so. June liked his lips—how the bottom was so full it looked swollen, and the top was thinner and had a perfect little v in the center.

He held out his hand. "I'm Mick."