

LBRIS

We know
books

BY TAYLOR JENKINS REID

Malibu Rising

Daisy Jones & The Six

The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo

One True Loves

Maybe in Another Life

After I Do

Forever, Interrupted

Malibu Rising

Taylor
Jenkins Reid



HUTCHINSON
LONDON

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 umber, 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.

LBRIS

We know
books

Saturday, August 27, 1983

LBRIS

We know
books

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, rumped 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.