

Chapter Two

Try to Hang on for the Ride Known as Summertime



Anyone could have predicted that the summer's turmoil would start the moment Kona's rusty Jeep blasted through the wooden white entry gates that Saturday night. The car skidded around a rare Japanese tree and screeched to a stop. He marveled at the deep tire marks he'd made in the cinnamon pebbles raked like frosting.

Luke stepped out from the passenger side first. He swiped his hands down his black pants and stiffened the collar on his white shirt, his handiwork with the iron now ruined by the ride in Kona's damp Jeep. His soft, dark eyes itched from a day in the salt water, and a trace of white zinc remained in a small patch of stubble on his handsome jaw. He patted down his shaggy mahogany hair, particularly on that stubborn part on the top. No matter how hard he'd worked, nothing felt right.

The guys were trying their best, but that didn't extinguish the "fish out of water" neon signs blinking on their foreheads as they entered the fray of the .001 percenters at the Chase estate. The mansion, which they'd only seen from the beach shoreline, bulged

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with impossible weight over the fragile oceanfront dune. The party above was filled with warlocks who controlled every lever of Manhattan's industries—from Wall Street and media to advertising, fashion, and the arts.

"You think we're dressed right?" Luke asked. "*Hamptons Festive* might mean those pink ties and blazers."

"Nah. Black and white. Always the safe bet. All good," answered Kona. Years battling waves and climbing up Hawaiian palm trees to pick coconuts had sculpted his burly frame, now sheathed in a wrinkled white button-down he'd found in the depths of his dresser. Kona had inherited his Nordic father's bushy blond eyebrows and blue eyes and his Hawaiian mother's high cheekbones and caramel skin. "When you're tan and good-looking and not a fat banker, it doesn't matter what clothes you got on. Fuck these people: we look good. And forget Simone for a night. C'mon. Let's find you a higher grade woman."

Luke fist-bumped the young valet parking attendant he recognized from town. "Thanks, man," he said, as Kona threw the kid his keys in a large arc over the exposed roll bar of his Jeep. "We teach the Chase kids to water-ski and surf; I'm sure little Richie made them invite us."

Luke didn't like gaining entry to the Chases' exclusive party when the twenty-three-year-old parking valet couldn't get in, and he promised himself he'd sneak him a beer on the way out. He remembered this same kid had dented the shiny right bumper of the owner's new four-seater Porsche Panamera "family car" when the automatic driveway gates had opened on their own last summer. Jake Chase, the forty-seven-year-old, corpulent owner of the otherwise pristine vehicle, didn't much mind. He knew he'd simply have someone tell someone to tell someone to repair it.

At the scene of the fender bender, Jake, amazed by his uncanny ability to keep everything so well in perspective, had assured the

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young man: “It happens, kid. Don’t sweat it. Hell, why should a fifty-thousand-dollar gate function properly when you push a button?”

The legendary Jake Chase was like that, always trying to prove he was on even par with the local guys because he started out driving a laundry truck to get by in college. By the time he was thirty-five, that stint behind the wheel led Jake to create the country’s largest Laundromat chain. Developing entire malls followed, and the cash rolled in with the same certainty as those pounding waves in front of his summer home.

Jake would punch the guys too hard in the upper arm to make sure they were alert when he recounted tales of his career. He’d then throw his balding head back in laughter, hoping deep down in his short, stubby build that they got his inane jokes. Cool is a gift bestowed. Luke and Kona knew one couldn’t buy, rent, borrow, or steal it.

But at this moment, Luke was feeling anything but an arbiter of cool, even among posers. It was an accepted fact of life on this rarefied outer tip of Long Island that many of the local families’ incomes were reliant on wealthy Manhattanites with their clan-like customs and infantile impatience. Every summer, these invaders crashed into town on Memorial Day weekend and vanished at the stroke of 6:00 p.m. on Labor Day.

“C’mon, man,” yelled Kona, shaking his stringy blond hair that graced the lower part of his shoulders—a perfect length to attract the lady folk, while still thrusting a middle finger at any semblance of a desk job. “Julia Chase is waiting for me upstairs; I just feel it.” Julia Chase, the buxom hostess of tonight’s Memorial Day weekend cocktail affair, had pushed the guys hard to show, insisting her glamorous friends wanted to meet real surfers.

Luke, thirty-one, and Kona, thirty-four, had both grown up in the same Southampton school district. Their local friends and

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relatives were electricians, land surveyors, restaurateurs, AV technicians, shop owners—normal American folks who actually lived in one residence all year round. Though Kona had spent many school years in Hawaii on an Air Force base with his parents, both men had grown closer than brothers. They knew middle-class childhoods, nothing more—and a lot less when times were tough.

The gray slate steps were illuminated with a subtle line of lights flooding the stairs as if they were leading to the entrance of a royal Egyptian tomb. Kona didn't appreciate that the entry was conveniently lit for his bare toes in black rubber flip-flops, nor did he know that a few steps cost more than he and Luke made all summer.

As he strode up to the event, Kona couldn't decide if Julia Chase's supersized wealth and married status were an inconvenient reality, or one of those thrilling challenges that tended to smack him in the face.

"The beach was empty, my towel was like a goddamn postage stamp in the sand," Kona declared, with boorish confidence. "And Julia chooses to do a down-dog yoga move like five feet in front of me? She's dying for it."

"She may have not even noticed you were there," counseled Luke. "She'd just dropped her kid off at camp and maybe wanted to stretch a little. Don't get us in hot water with Jake Chase. The season is just starting and that kook is sharper than he looks."

Entering *her* territory and this grandiose house, Kona began to question everything he'd felt on *his* territory: the water sports camp on his beach. Whether he could properly evaluate Julia's stretching needs or not, he resorted to his fail-safe stance and walked up those illuminated steps like he owned the entire forty-million-dollar beachfront property.

The guests inside reveled on this Memorial Day Saturday, drunk with the sweet aphrodisiac of summer's arrival. Kona re-

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minded himself that life was all about making moves—on bored, horny housewives, on job connections with the city people, on any opportunity that befell him. He rubbed the stubborn sand out of his eyebrows and shook his head a bit to cast off these rare schoolboy inhibitions.



Chapter Three

Shoreline Sideshow



Near the twelve-foot-high privet to the side of the estate, a young woman escaped the party and raced behind the pool shed, her heart beating violently. She tried to create moisture in her dry mouth by sucking on the insides of her cheeks. Pulling her glorious, curly mane off her bare back, she knotted it up into a bun so as to better perform the business she had in mind.

Waiting for her, he lay like a starfish in the dark, tangled brush. His blazer flapped open against the sandy earth beneath him, exposing the Lilly Pulitzer pink-and-yellow gardenia lining he found so festive and reassuring all at once. He passed the time deciphering the sparkling constellations above, his eyes eventually settling on the hunter, Orion.

The shoulder straps of her orange silk romper got caught in the branches as she dashed along. An undulating field of high sea grass shielded the spot they'd agreed on. She knew sneaking here was not the best idea, but it was funny that he'd suggested that they should do it now. An Instagram of the spot would be awesome. No one would ever recognize the patch of grassy sand where he waited, but

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she would make clear what transpired there. And she would never tell anyone with whom.

He checked his vintage Rolex Daytona. Indeed, she was eighteen minutes late. Off in the distance, the waves of the Atlantic pounded the shoreline, making the ground beneath him reverberate with a gentle rumbling. He had all night to mingle, and he knew all the arrivistes sipping their colorful cocktails on the other side of the hedge wouldn't discover them. His reasoning, honed on the debate team at Exeter, usually did not fail him. But tonight, with his mind consumed in the sparkling sky and his loins captivated by her sheer roundness, his thinking was not sound. After all, ensuring a young woman's discretion was far more difficult than pinpointing the archer's bow above.

As she opened the wooden gate, it creaked loudly, and she carefully closed it back while covering it with dangling branches.

"Over here," he said quietly, calmly. She liked his voice. It was so gentlemanly, so evolved, so not like men her age.

"I'm coming!" she whispered loudly, hopping on one platform espadrille as she pulled off the other. She walked with both shoes hanging from her two fingers as she moved along the pathway toward him. Before reaching the clearing where he was lying, she noticed the stars flickering above as the evening sky transformed the landscape into a hazy, Hamptons purple hue. She snapped a photo to be posted later. *For sure.*

"You smell delicious," he muttered as he pulled her down toward him. He kissed her furiously for good measure, then, not too subtly, pushed her head down his torso to get on with it already.

Chapter Four

Preposterous Posing



It's not like we're saving some hedge fund client in rough currents; they hardly need us here," Luke whispered loudly to Kona. He was taller than his childhood friend, but much slighter in composition. He looked back at the lawn, which was as long as the five-par golf holes he used to caddy. "Let's hold back a little, look at the line of cars arriving now." He pointed at the never-ending driveway behind them. A dozen cars snaked along, while uniformed valets raced around to open doors as if they were saving children from a burning building. First rolled in a vintage 1970's Mercedes convertible 280SL, then a Porsche Turbo S, and then an Aston Martin V12 Vantage.

"C'mon man, I'm hungry," Kona yelled back to Luke. "*A'ole pilikia*. Stop sweating this. Let's go crush the buffet." For the first time, the men were able to check out the grounds of the famous Chase house, normally hidden behind twenty-foot-tall hedges. Only in the late autumn and winter, when the leaves fell and the green walls turned to barren branches, could anyone get even a glimpse of the landscaped Southampton estates filled with outdoor art installations, tennis courts, and infinity pools stretching out

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toward the sea. Like many of his neighbors, Jake Chase had labeled his home with a wooden plaque out front as if it were Windsor Castle on the English countryside. He fretted over the possibilities for months until he settled on *Pine Manor*. That many of these homes were contemporary in design or had titles that had nothing to do with the local landscape (no pine trees nearby) didn't much matter. It was the aura of gentility and massive wealth that the monikers announced.

Kona and Luke passed an enormous sculpture that looked like a poodle made up of long balloons that clowns twist into shapes. Luke knew he'd seen that same image in pictures from a museum exhibit, but he couldn't remember the name of the artist. He wondered if it cost over a million dollars, or over ten million, or possibly even more.

Just then, both men heard laughter on the other side of the hedge.

"Let's start some trouble if you wanna wait," said Kona, trying to peer through the bushes at a couple in the sea grass. "We're going to find something we shouldn't."

He grabbed Luke's shoulder and pushed him behind the pool shed so they could both get a better look. They cleared the brush from above a small wooden gate. Though the clusters of high sea grass obstructed their view, they could see a man was lying on his back. He looked older; they could make out grayish hair, with his elbow draped on his face while a young woman had her mouth bobbing up and down between his thighs.

"Check it out," whispered Luke, who never wanted to follow Kona's often disastrous lead. "He's really getting worked on. And look at her, on her knees getting so busy. Check out his blazer, what is that, yellow flowers inside it? I told you they'd all be wearing stuff like that. You recognize the guy?"

"No idea."

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“Let’s go,” cautioned Luke.

“Nope,” replied Kona. “Stay here, we gotta nail this old asshole. She looks too young.” He waited a few more moments, and then yelled “Yo!” at the couple to get their attention and freak the older man out.

Suddenly from behind the pool shed on their side of the hedge, a muscled man dressed in a white polo shirt with *Pine Manor* stitched on the left chest tapped Luke’s arm with enough force to inflict a bruise. “Can we help you boys? Whom are you yelling at?” He elbowed his partner.

“No, uh, we were . . .” answered Luke, rubbing his arm.

“You were what?” The two security goons looked at each other, trying to divine if Luke and Kona were nosy guests or criminals. “Should we escort you up to the cocktail area, or is there a problem here we should alert Mr. Chase about?”

Through the high sea grass that lined the deck ahead, the young woman completed the artistry with her expensive mouth. She then ran back to the party, her short silk romper outlining her curvy legs and water balloon breasts, as the man disappeared to the darkened beach below.

Luke said, “All good, all fine.” The men walked up the stairs, while the guards muttered to themselves.

“I think we should figure out who the guy was,” said Kona. “I got a nose for bad stuff and I’m telling you . . . sicko preppy pervert.”

On the expansive deck overlooking the Atlantic Ocean, a sea of kelly green and Tweety-bird yellow now greeted Luke and Kona, as if they had suddenly walked onto a life-size board of Candy Land. Orange and pink weather balls were strung across the pool. Waiters meandered through the throngs with cantaloupe mojitos curated to match the guests.

The guys didn’t know where to move first, as wealthy summer people converged in tight, impermeable circles. On the couches,

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a media CEO who had just merged his company with a telecommunications giant pontificated gleefully about spineless anti-trust legislation. And inside, a black artist, dressed in a Gucci bomber jacket, track pants, and snakeskin Balenciaga high-tops, mesmerized a crowd about his blockbuster show in Chelsea. While waxing on about cultural signifiers, his devotees jockeyed to secure one of his tar-covered sculptures they knew would triple in value by next summer.

Luke and Kona walked strategically around the herd of partygoers toward the bar, the drink less important to them than their dire need to look occupied and purposeful. This kind of money would make anyone nervous. Luke tapped his toe impatiently. “Like I predicted, we don’t know anyone.” The wind turned slightly, and they got a whiff of the wood burnt pizzas the celebrity chef created in the Chases’ new outdoor pizza oven.

“Relax, man,” answered Kona, grabbing a slice with heirloom baby artichokes and truffle shavings. “We look fine, professional.” Of course “professional” to these two meant they had “a job,” such as running a water sports venture in summer. In winter, Kona worked as a Hawaiian landscaper and Luke, a part-time marine biology teacher. To everyone else at the party, “a job” meant “own, run, or be the majority stockholder in a multinational conglomerate.”

“C’mon,” whispered Kona, glaring into the crowd before him. “Let’s nail the lecherous guy in the grass.”

Luke and Kona waded around huge floor pillows covered in Mexican tapestries, an attempt by Julia Chase to make the “intimate” affair for one hundred and fifty guests seem thrown together and casual. The party planner had charged the Chases a twenty-eight-thousand-dollar design bill just to get the “bohemian” décor on paper, fifty-five thousand dollars for a tent complete with Latin American planters flown in from Belize, and a sixty-four-thousand-dollar food and beverage bill that included a shellfish taco bar with

several handsome servers hacking open stone crabs flown in from Florida. The Kobe beef sliders and the hip-hop Pandora station pumping in the background helped boost the Chases' bourgeois self-delusion that they were playing it down.

"C'mon, Luke, let's cop some drinks," Kona demanded, suddenly fed up with feeling inferior. He grabbed two pink, girly shot glasses from a passing waiter who looked annoyed they considered themselves guests.

"Doesn't it look like an airport hangar, all the glass and steel?" Luke asked, noticing how the ten-thousand-square-foot house lit up the sky. "If I had fifty million dollars, I think I'd build something that looked like a home where people actually watch TV, fuck, and sleep."

Kona elbowed Luke, saying, "Hot babe at nine o'clock." On their left, a married mother of four brushed her butt into a best-selling author's side, as she gobbled her meal for the night, three radishes from the crudité tray.

Minutes later, Julia Chase spotted Luke and Kona lying back on loungers by the pool, several black cod ceviche crisps they'd hoarded balancing on their thighs. As they chomped, she appeared before them like a Missoni mermaid, with a long knit skirt in shades of peach that strategically matched the setting sun. A slinky white silk tank top left no one guessing as to her nipple size and shape: half-dollar sized, coffee-with-cream in color, and showing the beginnings of chilly air.

"Kona, Luke, there's so many people who want to meet real surfers!" Julia's blond curls framed her beautiful, angular face, and her lips were permanently poised as if to whistle. "Let me introduce you." She blew out her breath slowly.

"Sure." Kona slowly lumbered up as if he didn't really need to meet anyone, because, well, he was fitting in just fine.

But before they could take the seven steps over to her, Julia had

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turned away to infiltrate another group of men and women who would rather swallow an orange beach ball than talk to someone who wouldn't advance them socially or professionally.

At this point, Luke and Kona only wanted another free shot of expensive Patron tequila, or three . . . and hopefully to embarrass the pervert in the brush, when a young woman appeared and said, "Hey, guys! It's so cool you showed."

Neither Luke nor Kona could respond at first—they were both so alarmed by the transformation that a year could inflict on a teenage girl. They remembered Alexa Chase, their camper for four summers, as the girl with braces, teeny little budding breasts, and twig legs.

"What happened to you? You look so, well, so different, Alexa," sputtered Luke, still struggling to accept this woman with rambling curves was the skinny girl who acted as DJ on his water-ski boat instead of getting in the water like the rest of the campers.

"What is it?" she asked with faux naïveté.

"You look like you grew up five years. I swear if any tenth-grade boys get . . ." Luke stammered, his paternal instincts kicking into turbo gear.

"What? I'm sixteen. You guys are acting silly. There are no boys. I just gained like twenty pounds this year." Alexa swiveled her butt around and grabbed a chunk of flesh.

Both guys looked up at the sky, their cheeks flushing red.

"So this summer I swear I'm going to get in the water more to work it off."

Kona ruffled her hair like she was his kid sister and put his arm around her. "We're glad to see you," he said. "But Luke's right. Look at you! What are you wearing, honey? How short is that? Did your parents okay your outfit?"

Alexa twirled around for them, her curly ponytail whipping around her head. She took off her long sweater and fidgeted with

the straps of her silky orange romper. Just then, in the exact same millisecond of the exact same infinitesimal tilt of the Earth's axis, Kona's and Luke's faces turned as white as the plush loungers behind them.

"What is it?" she asked, smiling.

"Uh, nothing . . . it's just . . ." Luke said, trying hard to delete the image of the man getting pleased in the sea grass.

"You guys are being weird. Go get a drink or something, I'm not checking my outfits with my mom!"

Alexa strutted toward the Beluga caviar tapas bar as if she were on a catwalk.

"I can't handle this; she's so young still," said Kona.

"She's sixteen years old. The guy was like forty. In her parents' home, or near it?" said Luke. His eyes glazed, colorful humans, drinks, and pillows now blurring together.

Like twins in their monochrome black pants and white collared shirts, Kona and Luke stood there dumbstruck one moment too long.

Just then, a man dressed in Pepto-Bismol-colored pants shoved his empty highball glass in Kona's one hand, mashed a pesto marinade-covered napkin and shell-encrusted toothpick in the other and said, "Waiter. Be so kind. Fetch me two gin and tonics."