

By the *New York Times* bestselling author of
DAISY JONES & THE SIX

MALIBU RISING

A NOVEL

**TAYLOR
JENKINS REID**



*Malibu
Rising* A NOVEL

Taylor Jenkins Reid



BALLANTINE BOOKS | NEW YORK

Malibu Rising is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are the products of the author's imagination, or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

Copyright © 2021 by Rabbit Reid, Inc.

All rights reserved.

Published in the United States by Ballantine Books, an imprint of Random House, a division of Penguin Random House LLC, New York.

BALLANTINE and the HOUSE colophon are registered trademarks of Penguin Random House LLC.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOGING-IN-PUBLICATION DATA

Names: Reid, Taylor Jenkins, author.

Title: *Malibu rising* / Taylor Jenkins Reid.

Description: First edition. | New York: Ballantine Books, [2021]

Identifiers: LCCN 2020005038 (print) | LCCN 2020005039 (ebook) | ISBN 9781524798659 (hardback; acid-free paper) | ISBN 9781524798666 (ebook)

Classification: LCC PS3618.E5478 M35 2021 (print) | LCC PS3618.E5478 (ebook) | DDC 813/.6—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2020005038>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2020005039>

Hardback ISBN 9781524798659

International edition ISBN 9780593355268

Ebook ISBN 9781524798666

[randomhousebooks.com](https://www.randomhousebooks.com)

Book design by Susan Turner, adapted for ebook

Cover design: Laura Klynstra

Cover images: Ty Sheers/Getty Images (aerial view of surfers), Trevor Williams/Getty Images (female surfer)

ep_prh_5.7.0_c0_r0

Contents

[Cover](#)

[Title Page](#)

[Copyright](#)

[Malibu Catches Fire.](#)

[Saturday, August 27, 1983](#)

[Part One: 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m.](#)

[7:00 a.m.](#)

[8:00 a.m.](#)

[1956](#)

[9:00 a.m.](#)

[1956](#)

[10:00 a.m.](#)

[1959](#)

[11:00 a.m.](#)

[1959](#)

[Noon](#)

[1961](#)

[1:00 p.m.](#)

[1962](#)

[2:00 p.m.](#)

[1969](#)

[3:00 p.m.](#)

[1971](#)

[4:00 p.m.](#)

[1975](#)

5:00 p.m.

1975

6:00 p.m.

1978

1981

Part Two: 7:00 p.m. to 7:00 a.m.

7:00 p.m.

8:00 p.m.

9:00 p.m.

10:00 p.m.

11:00 p.m.

Midnight

1:00 a.m.

2:00 a.m.

3:00 a.m.

4:00 a.m.

5:00 a.m.

6:00 a.m.

7:00 a.m.

Acknowledgments

By Taylor Jenkins Reid

About the Author

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.

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 HEARTBREAK: 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.”