

CHAPTER



THE NEXT DAY STARTED OUT DISASTROUSLY. TO BEGIN with, I'd overdone it in the workout center. My body felt like I had gone ten rounds with Mike Tyson, taking every shot to the solar plexus. Getting out of bed was like peeling a stuck bandage off a dry scab.

The hot shower didn't even begin to hit it. I was in agony. I canceled Brian—told him I'd be back tomorrow. Then I waved off breakfast with Evelyn and went down to face Melissa.

She was asleep in the right cabana, the higher one. It sat on the top of a landscaped berm, which was fashioned like a huge pork chop and wrapped around one end of the pool. The berm was wide at the end where we were, but it stretched back toward the hotel along a narrowing ridge. Before waking Melissa, I looked at the loser tent we had occupied the day before. No doubt about it, this was high

ground—a lofty Olympian peak. I surveyed our old digs, where a fat woman and a man with the worst toupee in Hawaii lay, thinking they had scored the best location. But they were losers—hotel indigents. We had the primo spot. I had climbed one or two perilous feet to reach this glittering social peak. Evelyn and I had finally become pool-area royalty. Valhalla.

Melissa opened her eyes and looked at me. “Happy?” More sarcasm.

“Delirious,” I said.

She grabbed her stuff and got up. That was it for this morning’s discourse. Melissa was out of patience. She had a meager supply. But who can blame her? It was nuts getting up at 4 A.M. just to snag one of these dumb things.

I watched her rolling, sexy walk; watched the lechers by the pool sneaking looks at my barely pubescent daughter. As far as I was concerned, they were all candidates for the Mann Act.

I waited until Melissa was gone. Then I sat and scanned the area, looking for my goddess, holding my breath, so that when I spotted her I wouldn’t lose it, gasping and sighing like a busted windbag, making the same hopeless gushing sound I’d made when I spotted her yesterday.

And that was the second disaster.

She wasn’t there.

I left my stuff in the chair, then got up and walked all over the grounds. I asked one of the pool boys if the ladies’ room was empty: a

tough question for a mid-fifties guy to ask, but I cleaned up the moment by adding that I was looking for my wife.

He smiled and said, "Yes, Mr. Best, it's empty."

I looked around. I waited. Then fear overtook me. What if my goddess and Mr. Tidy Bowl had left? What if their vacation was over? What if I'd never see her again?

When I got back to the tent, my stuff had been moved and there was a thirty-five-year-old, wide-shouldered asshole wearing a CSI: Miami baseball cap occupying my cabana. His skinny, big-breasted squeeze was sprawled in the pool chair beside him.

"This is my spot," I told the guy. He was big—huge actually. I'm beginning to suspect that a lot of guests at this hotel must be on steroids. Maybe Brian gives shots. This guy had shredded arms and a rippling six-pack. I haven't got the time to work up a set of abs like that. I've got a business to run. His face was crafty but pockmarked. He and Evelyn would look perfect together on a Gold's Gym poster—"The Anabolic Workout." He glared at me with mean, dangerous eyes.

"It isn't your cabana," he said. "It's mine."

"My stuff was in it. I had my book, my sunglasses . . . my radio. It was all on the towel right here."

The guy smiled a lazy, sweet smile. "I think you're mistaken."

"My daughter got up at 4 A.M. to secure this cabana. I just came down."

"Nobody was here when I sat down. I think that's your stuff over there." He pointed to my things piled on a nearby table, while his

wife, or secretary, or whoever the lounging cupcake in the string bikini was, just stared, holding her hand up to shade her eyes, squinting at me like I was dirt that blew in under the door.

“Look, this is my cabana,” I said, turning up the volume, putting a little more bass into the mix.

“Don’t make this into something you can’t deal with,” the muscle-head in my pool chair said softly.

“Are you threatening me? Is this a threat? Are you suggesting violence?” I was outraged.

“Get the fuck away from me,” the man said, softly. Only now, he sat up. Shit, a monster!

So, there you have the gist of it. Me, standing there with a body that already felt like the home stretch at Hollywood Park, him looking like Bluto in a TV-show ball cap. Normally I don’t back down, but this morning, with everything else, I just decided to let him have the cabana . . . but not before giving this bastard a good parting shot.

“You haven’t heard the last of this,” I whimpered. Shit. More and more, I was beginning to act and sound like a total pussy.

Next I had to take on Evelyn. I caught her as she came out of the hotel and tried to convince her that we should go into Lahaina and shop, but she wanted sun. Then I said, “Let’s rent a catamaran.” Anything to keep her from seeing I’d lost her power position by the pool.

But no, she wanted the cabana. Then, shrewdness born from years of pool-chair infighting crossed her narrow features. “Who’s guarding our place?” she wisely asked.

"Uh, well . . . I lost the cabana," I finally admitted.

I won't go into a play-by-play of what happened next, but let me say here that it wasn't pretty, and it did absolutely nothing for my self-esteem.

We ended up playing golf. Evelyn was pissed, but her anger gave her an extra twenty yards off the tee. She beat me easily.

The only great thing that happened on the golf course occurred when we got back to the caddy shack to turn in our shoes, rented cart, and golf clubs. Actually, it was more than just great—it was miraculous. Because, you see, she was standing there—my dream woman and the curly-haired, athletic asshole with the perfect teeth. They were also returning their rented equipment.

"Great course," I said to her as she was passing to leave.

"What?" she said, turning. *God, up close she was even more breathtaking.*

"Great golf course," I repeated.

"Yes, it is." She turned and left with the handsome man.

Our initial contact—our first conversation. Okay, okay . . . I know . . . not much, I agree. But at least we had exchanged words. I would give you some kind of glowing description of her tonal quality if I could, but to be perfectly frank, I was so shaken, and she had said so little, I didn't even remember what her voice sounded like. I was that gone . . . that out of it . . . that completely in love.