

Chapter 17

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

BOND GIRLS OR GIRLS BONDING?

Saturday, June 24

...“Oh, please, call me Julia,” she said. “Your son can certainly come over. Do you summer out here regularly?” Katie shook her head, noting the use of “summer” as a verb. Julia pushed her luscious blond curls off her face. “I know we just met, but I’m heading to a great Exhale Core Fusion class, just five minutes away. While the boys play, we can go if you like?”

“What is . . .” Katie prepared herself to feel deeply out of it, one of those things that’s not like the others.

“Core Fusion? You don’t know it? Fred and Elisabeth? All the celebrities go. It’s an amazing workout.”

“I was kind of hoping to join a gym today,” Katie said. “I do have my exercise gear in my car. But I have to be back close to here, for a job thing I have, by two-thirty.”

“Be sure.” Julia smiled warmly. “It’s only an hour and close by. You look like you’re in great shape. They won’t bring you out on a stretcher, I promise. It’s challenging, but fun. They just announced a twelve-thirty class with Fred so I thought I’d rush to it now

after checking in that Richie was okay. Next to your son, he appears to be better than fine.”

Katie liked something about this woman, despite her cosmetically engineered figure, her hair bleached several shades too light, and her Technicolor exercise outfit—basically, the kind of woman she’d never thought she’d relate to. And though she felt silly jumping into a stranger’s plan, she did need a workout. The boys would be occupied, supervised, and Luke Forrester knew Julia as a regular, so . . .

“Why not go?” Luke added. “Core Fusion classes are part of the mom routine. Give it a try?” He smiled.

“They just announced a midday class,” Julia explained. “And I got two spots just for the hell of it. You know, I could probably sell them for three-hundred dollars each.”

“Julia will take good care of you,” Luke reassured her, amused that Katie was jumping into the Hamptons housewives insanity. “You couldn’t have a better guide.”

“Can you give me clear directions? I don’t want to be late or lose you in all the weekend traffic.”

Julia put her hand on Katie’s. “Stop. Please. Let me take you in my car and we’ll have our own play date.”

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CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

WACKY WORKOUT

Next thing Katie knew, she was flying down Route 27—the road that served as the central vein of the Hamptons—in Julia Chase’s second sports car, a navy blue Maserati GranTurismo Convertible MC that purred like a snoring grizzly bear. As they careened down the highway, Katie tightened her seat belt and gripped the sides of her plush leather seat. The pavement, so close to the bottom of the car, seemed like mere inches beneath her feet. To her right lay the ocean and enormous estates, and to her left, the smaller, less desirable parcels of real estate dotting the potato field horizon.

As they turned onto the back wooded lanes, the expensive grip of the tires felt like the centrifugal force of a roller coaster. Katie thought about how the very rich must experience everything differently, even a simple curve in a road.

“So I don’t see a ring. Are you dating anyone?” Julia yelled, the convertible top down and her lemon-yellow hair flying all around her head like a 1950s movie star on the mountainous roads of Cannes.

“Well, yeah . . .”

“That sounds noncommittal.”

“Well, it’s more than that, but just starting, I guess.”

“You don’t have to explain; I know so many men who are always looking, so I thought I’d ask.”

“I came here counting on seeing a man named George. I don’t need a setup for sure.” And after a brief pause, Katie added, “We’re just kind of trying it out, so I should give it a chance.”

“And you came from out West, Luke mentioned. It’s Portland? Seattle? It’s all the same to us New Yorkers. Sounds horrible, but that’s the goddamn truth. We voyage all over the world, but we can be the most provincial people, just sticking to our little insular zip codes—10021 in the city, 11968 here. Terrible, really, but it’s paradise. So what am I going to do?” She turned and smiled at Katie.

“Yeah, well, it is beautiful. But I have to say, not quite as gorgeous as Hood River, Oregon, where I’m from. It’s at the base of Mount Hood and in the Columbia Gorge, and surrounded by orchards and vineyards. You can view Mount St. Helens in the distance and even Rainier on clear days. There are wildflower fields as far as you can see, and great hiking.”

“I might mountain bike, but you’re not getting me in hiking boots.”

“Call me crazy,” answered Katie, now wiping her fingers along the smooth mahogany dashboard of the Maserati. “But I figured that out.”

Next they had entered a small, sandy driveway off a back road and slowly edged up to the top of the hill where a large barn structure housed the Exhale Core Fusion studio. When they rolled up to a dusty lot, toned women were jumping in and out of luxury sedans and sports cars, not one weighing in at more than 125 pounds. Suddenly, Katie

realized the frenetic, honking scene in the beach lot was like a calm Buddhist colony compared to this one.

“This sucks, word got out,” Julia lamented, watching the exiting and entering cars in virtual gridlock, inching in and out of cramped spots and up and down the tight sandy lane.

“The other class is ending now and the new class always arrives right as they are leaving, which is what causes this mess,” explained Julia. “I thought that for this extra class midday, during lunch, things would be calmer. But this is going to get ugly.”

“Why?”

“Because there are twenty-five spots in the class. This extra class is like a bag of bread rolls thrown on top of a starving refugee camp. People are desperate to get it, grabbing, pushing, fighting, you’ll see.”

“Well, it does seem like some of these mothers have really bad manners,” Katie offered. “Before at pickup, and at some stores in town, I saw them acting insanely.”

“Bad manners? Try ruthless psychopaths.” Julia pulled her \$161,070 convertible an inch closer to the center of the lot, where other cars were trying to exit, driven by mothers rushing to a golf, tennis, or a lunch emergency.

“That’s my spot!” a woman in a robin’s egg-blue convertible MINI Cooper yelled at Julia. “I call it! That one!”

“You call parking spots like that?” asked Katie.

“You don’t get it yet,” Julia said, laughing. “The possibility of missing a chance to work four grams of fat off their inner thighs is like missing a chance to secure their kids a

spot at Harvard. Watch, she's going to accelerate and kill someone trying to get the spot before me."

The women maneuvered their masterpiece vehicles like fourteen-year-old girls in their first parking lesson with Daddy. It didn't take an engineering major to divine that the woman in the MINI Cooper would have to physically bend the metal on her car in half to move it into the spot she'd "called." But then, Julia wasn't much better off either: she was trying to enter a too-tight spot, at a ninety-degree angle with a two-inch cushion of space. So far she'd spent about six minutes going an inch forward and then back, clearly not understanding her Maserati would never make it into the spot if she were going to tack it in by inches. Katie thought it rude to ask Julia if these people paid people to take their driving tests.

"Don't take this the wrong way," Katie said. "But let me park the car or you're going to smash it up. You gotta start again, roll back like ten feet, and do a wider turn to get in there. You go in, and sign us up. I'll be there in three minutes and change and meet you."

"You can do it? I'm so sorry; you must think I'm an idiot. I've never been a good parker." She smirked a little. "Truth be told, I get driven more than I drive and I'm out of practice."

"Yeah, I can park the car. All good," Katie said, smiling and happy to be useful. She found this Julia amusing in her honesty.

Five minutes later, as Katie entered the studio where Julia had saved her a mat, she wondered what in hell they would do in this class. Several different sizes of weights, cloth bands, and P.E. style red balls lay in piles in a large room surrounded by mirrors and

ballet barres. She felt intimidated, but also willing to give her sporty physique a test. She placed her chic but simple white leather purse she'd found for forty-seven dollars at Filene's Basement in the corner next to a pile of twenty-five different bags costing around four thousand dollars each from Celine, Gucci, Alaïa, Chloé, Stella McCartney, Prada, and Givenchy. The three in precious ostrich hides had price tags north of eight thousand.

Better that Katie didn't know the total cost of the strewn bags was well over a hundred thousand dollars. And that wasn't counting the twenty-five wallets inside costing another two thousand dollars a pop, nor wads of hundred dollar bills in the wallets the women had their husbands' offices send out. Call it an even two hundred and fifty thousand dollars littered in a big messy clump in an exercise class that absolutely no one was sweating over.