

the beach house

BY TAI FRENCH



ABOUT THIS BOOK

YOU CAN TAP ON THINGS, THEY'LL TAKE YOU SOMEWHERE COOL.
SO IF YOU SEE TEXT LIKE THIS, GIVE IT A TRY AND CLICK/TAP IT.
ENJOY.



#TaiWasHere Productions @TaiWasHereXO · Sep 9, 2021



Collabook: a modern comic book constructed of narrative tweets against the backdrop of immersive collage art. (Coined by [@TaiFrench](#))



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Best Way To Enjoy This Narrative Experience:

Find a cozy space, settle in & dive into the story.

Turn on your favorite chill playlist to add to the ambiance.

This is a digital read so if you need to make the text bigger, pinch to zoom.

Lastly, enjoy & share.

Thx for being here.

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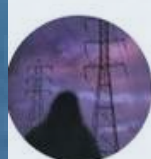


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"The Beach House" | Chapter One: "Rio"

I didn't wanna leave the city. I dreaded seeing Braymond on the smoggy rooftop that day, like we always did when we wanted to escape the world and even ourselves.

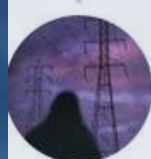


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Our feet hung over the edge of the dirty building, swaying miles high over the alley. "What you wanna talk to me about? You sounded weird on the phone," he got right to it. Bray was tough, his shell just as much as his soul. Knuckles bruised, eyes low, he didn't trust nobody.



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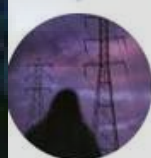
"I'm leaving," my voice damn near cracked.

"Whatchu mean leavin'," he bucked as he swigged from his pint-sized gin. He was effortlessly cool, grim, but intoxicating.

"The city. My mom can't keep up with her shit so we gotta go."

"Go where? You talkin' crazy, Rio."

"The beach."



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"WTF is at the beach?" he got louder.

"My mom's twin sister. She has a beach house & a daughter same age as me."

"So you leavin' me here in this pissy ass city by myself to go live it up in some fancy beach house wit yo cousin?"

"It's not my choice, Bray."

"It can be!"

"I'm 16!"



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"I ain't got nobody!" he often reminded me of that when I made him mad. "Just you! My mama ain't shit, daddy ain't shit, damn near raised by wolves out'n these gutta streets. What 18 y/o you know walkin' around wit bullet wounds cuz he wouldn't come off a fake chain?" he ranted.



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"Bray, please calm down," I tried to temper him before he flew off the deep end or jumped over the side of the building. "Nah, you can't go," he demanded as he chucked the empty bottle across the sky.



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"I don't have a choice."
"I don't wanna hear that. You stayed wit me even when ya moms said you can't," he began pacing abruptly, clenching his fists. Not gon lie, it was hot see'n him worked up. His filthy vans, dingy jeans, & denim jacket he always wore hung on him just right.



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"What am I supposed to do? Drop outta school and live with you? You don't even have a place of your own. You either sleep on friends' couches or cars or vacant garages. You hustle for the money you get and just spend that on liquor."
"How else I'm spose to make it thru the day?"



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"You all I got, Rio." he started to break down, "who else gon look out for me, bring me food, keep me sane so I don't go back in that dark place? I need you. You're everything to me." It was all too heavy for me.



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"I'll come visit, you have my word," I tried.
"Nah you leave, ain't no tellin' Ima be here if you come back. Have fun with yo new life at yo lil beach house. Must be nice to just pack up'n start ova. Ery'body ain't got it like you." His glare pierced my heart as he straggled off.



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When I got home, my mom was packing up the kitchen and blasting the new @Drake album while baking random shit to get rid of it before we left. She shuffled over to me without a care in the world and shoved a warm cookie in my mouth. "Taste this, it's bussin' huh?" She grinned.



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"Please stop sayin bussin' or anything else you learned from TikTok," I rolled my eyes, chewing the cookie. It was good but I didn't feel like telling her it was.

"Stop acting like I'm so old. I'm only 38. Millennials still run the world." She was so proud to be Gen Y 😞



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She shoveled the rest of the cookie into her mouth, "You like that? It's a brown vegan butter chocolate chip and maple turkey bacon cookie."

"It's cool I guess..."

"Sup with you? Grumpy cus you gotta leave your lil boyfriend? Trust me you'll be much better apart. Thank me later."



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Ugh she swears she's the biggest Drake fan. "I know you sneak off to see him when you're at 'Tamika's house,' or 'staying late at school for blah blah blah'," she air quoted almost every word in that sentence.



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"Well we leave bright n early in the AM so I hope you got your goodbyes in. Your room all packed up?"

"Not like I got much to pack. I don't understand why we gotta go way out there. I was raised in the city. The beach is too slow. I feel like I'm being punished for no reason."



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"If you call livin in a 4,000 sq/ft beach house rent-free after being crammed up in this old boxy apt for 12 years punishment, you must have some high expectations or low standards, sista."

"Doesn't matter how big or fancy the place is, it's not home," I was missing Bray already.



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Mom was always this kind of carefree, go with the flow, rob Pookie to pay Jamal type chick. She always had a few boyfriends at a time that all served different purposes I guess. One to help pay the bills n buy her shit, another to waste time with, others for God only knows what.



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But I guess the boyfriend well ran dry because here we were being uprooted cus she somehow didn't pay her taxes for the last 5-6 years and now they're coming to collect. If she can't pay, she could face jail time. So we have to go. Seems no man-friend was up to take on that tab.



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"I honestly think you're gonna love it out there. Not only for the stunning views but you get to hang with your cousin 24/7. I'm sure you have many things in common & she's probably got some cool friends. It'll be like having a sister & live-in bestie. Just like me n'ya auntie."



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"I thought Aunt Kit got on your nerves," I recalled.
"Only when she's being a know-it-all or doing all that whining. It's definitely something I can handle. Besides, our twin-ergy outweighs all the petty BS."
"If you say so," I knew she was undermining their constant rivalry.



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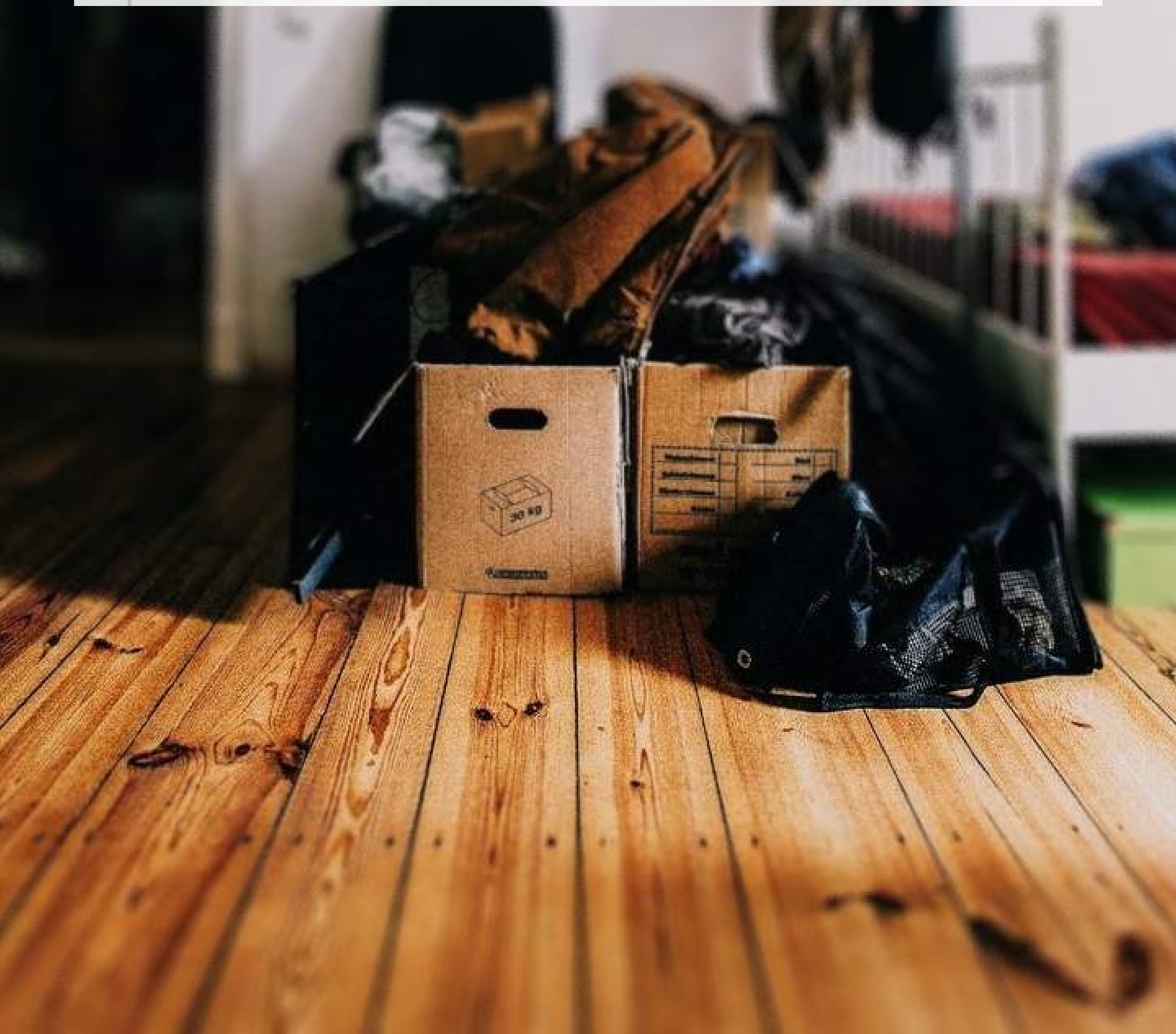
"She calls you Rude Jude and you call her Bitchy Kit. Doesn't sound as sappy as you're making it seem," I called her out.
"Those nicknames go way back to high school, and yeah she can be bitchy so it's fitting," mom threw in a lil shade.



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"Well her rich boyfriend must like bitches cus isn't that his house they live in?"
"Yup! And hopefully he has a nice friend just as successful if not more than he is." I couldn't roll my eyes harder if I tried.
"I'm going to bed," I just wanted to crawl under the covers & cry.





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Driving down the coastline, the sun shimmered off the blue waters but I felt a deep gray cloud inside of me. I was scared I was never gonna see Bray again, afraid somethin bad was gonna happen to him. I tried texting him all night but got nothing in return. "Please text me back."



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I was tucked away in my head & mom could tell. "You hungry?" she tried to temp check.

"No."

"It's not the end of the world, y'know," she shrugged off my feelings, "you're 16. There will be plenty other boys." I didn't care about other boys and Bray wasn't just a boy. I loved him.



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The ride was long, beautiful, and tortuous. The longer we drove, the further away from my life back home. After 9 hours with everything we own strapped in mom's Santa Fe, we made it to the beach house.

I promise one day
I'll come back for
you





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'WTF' is all that came to mind when we pulled up. The beach house was enormous compared to our lil dingy apartment. Towering palm trees lined the property, massive windows carried light through the modern house with crazy views of the ocean and the perfect beach town.



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"Holy shit," mom uttered taking in the sights, "the pix don't do this place justice." We parked in the large driveway & started to grab our things when a man came out of the front door and greeted us. He was chipper and helpful as he rushed down to give us a hand with our stuff.



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"Hey, you must be Jude and Rio, I'm-," mom cut him off.
"Benedict, right? My sister doesn't stop gushing about you."
"No, I'm Girard, you can call me Rardy. I'm Benedict's business partner. Sheesh it's scary how identical you and Kit are," he stared at her as if she were a myth.



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He was clean cut in some tailored slacks, a tucked in Gucci polo and the matching lace up harness shoes. His gold watch was like damn and smile Crest worthy.
"What kinda biz you do," I asked spotting his designer drip.
"You're looking at it," he waved our attention to the house.



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"We design & build luxury properties such as this one," he answered, "we have our own architecture firm, the leading firm in the region actually and we just expanded globally with a new contract in Dubai." Nice flex. He was clearly proud but still grounded. We followed him in.



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The house was even more stylish inside. Marble walls and floors, high ceilings with huge ass windows in the roof, decorated like an expensive magazine with furniture out of this world. "You sure this ain't a museum?" I had to ask.

He chuckled, "Certain, but surely flattered."



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I went over to one of the huge windows & looked out at the beach that sat right off of the backyard. There was a pool, firepit, more palm trees, even more flashy furniture. Couldn't believe this was my new home, couldn't believe Bray would never get to experience this. "Wow..."



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"Mom, you see this," I asked as she floated over, taking in the beauty just as I was.

"It's amazing. Must be nice living like this."

"I can take you to your rooms & let you settle while I grab the rest of your things from the car," he offered.

"That's nice but you don't have to."



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"Bene and Kit gave me one job, to make sure you received a warm welcome. I can't disappoint," he assured us with that nice smile.

"Where are they anyway? I thought they'd be here when we got in."

"They had some last minute business come up and asked me to be here to greet you."



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"Aren't you a good friend," mom remarked, "you two grow up together or something?"

"We met in college, pledged together, roomed together, then started the firm 8 years ago. He's definitely a brother from another."

"What's there to do around here?" I wondered aloud.

"What isn't?"



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"Everything's here. Any beach activity you can think of, obviously, from yachting to water sports, there's every restaurant in town, all the shopping you could want from designer to leisure, nightlife, recreation, stadium's not too far away for any concert or pro sports event."



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"Do you moonlight as a tour guide or what? You know this place up and down," mom seemed impressed, enamored even.
"I guess I missed my calling with that one," he smiled. "I'm actually really fond of this place & work'n in the market here we're privy to the goings-on in the area."



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"I take it you live here then?" mom fished.
"I own a condo about 10 minutes down the way, not too far. Our main office is in town so I'm there mostly or onsite overseeing our contract work." Then, out of nowhere the front door flings open & Aunt Kit rushes in like a tidal wave.



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"Ruuude Juuude," Aunt Kit called out in excitement as she made her way over to mom with open arms and a big smile showing all her teeth. Behind her, Benedict her BF shuffled in wiping tiny beads of sweat from his forehead with a printed handkerchief.
"Whew, it's hot out there!"



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Benedict looked like a replica of Rardy. Similar stature & taste in fashion only Bene came in a little under Rardy's 6'2 stance, but not by much. Bene pressed his keys 2 lock his Aston Martin in the driveway.
"You must be Rio! Damn you look like Zori. No lie you could be twins."



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Zori was Aunt Kit's daughter. We were both 16. Mom and Kit had the twenergy thing down strong, they were both pregnant with us at the same time. "Where is Zori?" I asked.

"Out shopping with some friends. She should be here soon. I told her to be back to greet you" Aunt Kit said.



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"Yeah right. I knew she wouldn't be here in time. What 16 y/o can you pull from the mall for any reason at all? That's why I made sure Rardy was here," Bene chimed in.

"Rardy was the perfect host," mom smiled as Aunt Kit stared her up and down.

"Look at you!" Aunt Kit exclaimed.



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"Look at YOU!" mom threw back at her. They seemed genuinely excited to see each other and they were undoubtedly identical. I hadn't seen Aunt Kit and Zori in 9 years. I was only 7 and that's before Bene was in their world and they were living like this. They hugged and hugged.



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"This house is fucking amazing," mom expressed to her twin.

"Right? Bene designed it and Rardy built it. They are killin' it out here. They have contracts all over the place."

"Rardy was telling us. Congrats on all your success, Bene and it's nice to finally meet you in person."



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"Thanks & likewise. Crazy we've been together for what babe 6 years & this is our first time meeting," Bene gave mom a sweet, respectable hug.

"I appreciate you letting me & Rio stay here."

"Anything for family. Mi casa es su casa."

"Excuse you, this is my house" Aunt Kit teased.



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"Of course. Kit is the Queen of the Castle, I'm just here for show," Bene chuckled checking his cell phone while still managing to track our conversation.

"Let's be real, this is Princess Zori's world. The mood of the house shifts according to hers," Aunt Kit clarified.



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"I can only imagine what this place is gonna be like with two of you here. We may need to build a bunker or panic room for refuge, sis. You remember how we were as teenagers," Aunt Kit said with a quiver of seriousness in her voice. Mom shook her head recounting her teen ways.



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"But truly, I'm glad you're here. I know how hard it gets out there raising a daughter alone. I did it, not nearly as long as you have at this point, thank God for Bene. I don't want you struggling out there. Stay as long as you need. I know you'll love it here," Aunt Kit stated.



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"I can introduce you to some influential women who can set you up with a good career. Anything I can do to help get you back on your feet."

"Thanks, sis," mom seemed to be in her head now. She had a problem taking help from people. She swore she didn't need anything from anyone.



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"You ladies hungry? We made dinner reservations at the Hibachi Grill at 7. Kind of a welcome dinner for you two," Bene chimed.

"Hell yeah, I love Hibachi!" I said. This was starting off right.

"Good. So go get settled and we'll head over around 6:30," Bene instructed.



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Aunt Kit ushered me to my new room upstairs. It was huge with my own big windows overlooking the backyard. "Zori's room is down the hall. Enough space when you need alone time but close enough when you wanna hang. Are you moody like that daughter of mine?"
"Uh, I don't think so."



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"Well hopefully some of that will rub off on her. I hate we've all been apart for so long. I know I missed so much of your life & your mother & I took precious years of bonding from you & your cousin. We always said we were gonna raise you together. But life does its own thing."



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Aunt Kit seemed regretful and a little uneasy like there was some guilt living inside of her. Whatever happened I'm sure she wasn't the only one to blame. She wrung her hands intensely, like a nervous habit. "It's all good, Aunt Kit. We're here now. We can make it up."



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Aunt Kit pulled me in for a hug & kissed me on top of my head like a mother to a child. The years of distance didn't weaken the love. It didn't hurt that she looked just like mom so it was easy to reconnect w/her. "I'll let ya do ya thing. Love ya, RoRo. She winked & left."



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Rardy led mom to her new room on the 1st floor. She had a laid out suite.
"Here's your room. There's an en suite, walk-in closet, private entrance to the backyard-"

"That a jacuzzi out there?" Mom pointed out.

"One of my favorite features of this build," Rardy remarked.

"Wow."



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"There's also a fireplace that pops out of the wall under the TV there,"
Rardy grabs a remote & activates the fireplace.

"This room might be too sexy for me."

"This whole house was built with sex appeal. Who doesn't want to feel sexy when they come home?"

"Definitely a luxury."



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"Don't let me stop you from indulging," Rardy said as he headed toward the door. Mom called out before he left.

"You coming to dinner with us?"

"Oh yeah, I'm not missing the Hibachi Grill. Trust, after the first taste you'll be addicted." He smiled then left.



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I heard voices whispering down the hall and peeked out the bedroom door to get a better earshot. The whispers were coming from Aunt Kit's room.



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I saw her and Bene moving back and forth across their cracked bedroom door changing their clothes for dinner and talking in a hushed, heated tone. I couldn't make out what they were saying, but it seemed intense.



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Maybe Bene wasn't too thrilled to have us in his nice beach house for an unknown amount of time, but then again, why would he extend the offer? Maybe Aunt Kit told him unflattering things about mom over the years and he just wasn't feeling it...



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...or maybe the house felt a little more crowded with us here, even though it was huge. We were practically strangers to him after all. There's also a good chance it had nothing to do with us completely. Bene closed the door just as it was getting interesting.



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I turned back to my room and saw Zori's room at the other end of the hall. The door was closed but I could tell who it belonged to from the eyelashes and fingernails decal across it. I tipped down the hall to her room and turned the knob to go in.



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She probably has an enormous closet spilling out with clothes and some other cool rich brat shit. I turned the knob, it was locked. What teenager locks their bedroom door while they're out? What was cousin Zori trying to keep hidden or who was she trying to keep out?



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This place was starting to feel a little weird. Maybe I was convincing myself that it wasn't as good as it seemed just as an excuse to go home even though there was nothing there except Bray.



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That reminded me...I wondered if he returned my text. Who was I kidding? I'd been glued to my phone since birth. I knew he didn't, but that didn't stop me from checking every 5 minutes.



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Aunt Kit's voice startled me from behind. "Jude!" She yelled for Mom from her bedroom door, clasping a shiny gold bracelet on her wrist. She had on a printed silk halter linked at the neck with a gold chain and some sleek leather pants with a strappy open toe heel. Cute.



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Her hair was in a top knot. She looked like one of those kept women from the Housewives of Enter City Here. "She keeps that thing locked up. She's private like that." She saw me in front of Zori's bedroom door. "I'm sure it's what you imagine."



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She winked at me and resumed calling for mom. “Jude, you want something from my closet to throw on for dinner tonight?” She looked at me, I hadn’t changed my clothes yet. “You wearing that?”
“No, I’m gonna change,” I told her as I drifted back to my room.



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She called for mom again, only louder this time. “Juuude!” Mom was already walking up the stairs to her.
“I’m coming, shit. It takes me a moment to get around this big ass place.”



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She snagged a look at Aunt Kit’s outfit. “Oh that’s how we’re doing it? You look real cute to sit down and eat at a restaurant. Kinda place is this?”
“It’s cute, a little casual swank,” Aunt Kit said casually. “I got some vintage Versace in here, come on.”



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She led Mom into her large master suite. Mom turned to me watching from the bedroom door and gave a smirk as if to say ‘fancy’ before disappearing behind Aunt Kit.





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...

We sat at a large table in the dim Hibachi Grill. All the couples & families at different tables looked like they belonged there. Everyone casually being, no stress or fuss or worry seemed to bother them. It felt like everyone in this beach town was as cool as the night water.



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...

Bene was chummy and common with the chef, ordering for the table. Aunt Kit was fixing her lipstick in her Chanel compact mirror. Cousin Zori still wasn't there. Mom looked like a replica of Aunt Kit.



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They were already identical but now in Aunt Kit's expensive clothes, Mom looked like her clone or pet project. She adjusted her cleavage and turned to Aunt Kit, "I thought Rardy was joining us," she tried to slide in coolly.



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...

"Huh? Oh yeah, he should be here any- Speaking of the devil, here he comes." Rardy walked in with a tall beautiful woman beside him who looked like she just cat-walked outta Essence or Vogue magazine.



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...

Mom tried to control the jealousy creep'n up on her face. "That his sister or what?"
"He's an only child. That's why he doesn't like to be alone. That's prob his newest toy."
"Toy?" Mom still sounded jealous. She pinned her eyes on the beauty as they made their way to the table.



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...

"Hey everybody, sorry we're late. Got a little caught up and short on time," Rardy said, pulling the seat out for his date...the seat next to Mom. Her eyes couldn't roll harder. "Uh huh, we know what that means, brotha," Bene said, greeting him with a fist bump.



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“Tiffany, you met Bene’s girl Kit once before, and this is her twin sister Jude and her daughter Rio,” Rardy sat next to his date. Mom tossed a quick phony smile and adjusted her cleavage to expose more.

“Nice to meet you,” model Tiffany said in a soft spoken tone.



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“Y’all order already?” Rardy asked, his arm draped over the back of Tiffany’s chair. His big gold watch was hanging by Mom’s shoulder in her peripheral. Before anyone could answer, it felt like a tornado hit the door and stormed over to us.



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A wild, loud petite girl in heels, a tube top & small skirt came over squealing and slurring her words. She chomped on some bubble gum like a starved yak.

“Heyyy everybody! Y’all look cute! You all got dressed for me?” the girl plopped down in an empty seat amused with herself.



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“Ooh water, I need some water.” She put her gum on the rim of an unclaimed water glass and chugged it down. “Where were you and are you drunk??” Aunt Kit asked with a squinted brow.



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Everyone was looking at her naturally, but I was staring unusually hard. She looked intense. She looked disturbed. She looked like me...exactly like me. That’s when I knew for sure that cousin Zori finally graced us with her presence.

To Be Continued...