

THE CLIQUE

SUMMER COLLECTION



KRISTEN

A CLIQUE NOVEL BY
LISI HARRISON



poppy

LITTLE, BROWN AND COMPANY
New York Boston

THE BAXTERS' SUMMER RENTAL
WESTCHESTER, NY
Friday, July 17
11:43 A.M.

“Rate me.”

“No.”

“Come on, Ms. Gregory. Rate meeee.”

“No.”

“Kris-ten! Come on, pleeeeee. You always rate Massie.”

“That’s different!”

“Just say a number.”

“Fine. *Nine*.”

“Ehmagawd! I’m a nine!” Ripple Baxter hugged the shell-framed mirror on the living room wall of her father’s sea-inspired Westchester summer rental. “I knew this pink snakeskin headband was a must.” She petted her deep-fried blond hair.

“Correction.” Kristen Gregory sat on the wood-plank floor, then placed her over-sweetened lemonade on the nicked surfboard coffee table. “It’s not your score. It’s your *age*. You’re *nine*. You have to be twelve or older to qualify for a rating.” Kristen leered at Ripple from across the musty furnished-by-garage-sale cottage. “Speaking of nine, did you know it’s the square root of eighty-one?”

Ignoring her, Ripple turned sideways and examined her

new outfit. A long, pale pink hoodie, meant to cover the hips, practically swallowed the top two thirds of her short, muscular frame. Her knees could have easily been mistaken for extremely saggy boobs, had her purple rhinestone-covered flip-flops not been so close.

“Ripple, your dad is paying me to teach you math and if you don’t—”

“Ms. Gregory, he does not, not, *not* care about *math*.” Ripple fluffed the dark lashes around her light brown eyes. “All he cares about are waves. He just wants someone to look after me so he can drive out to Long Island and surf. You’re more like a tutor-sitter. Heavy on the ‘sitter.’”

Funny. Lately Kristen felt *heavy* on everything. How could she not? While she was sweating in a six-week summer school program, Massie was in Southampton, Alicia was in Spain, and Dylan was in Hawaii. Even Claire had left town. True, she’d gone back to Orland-*ew*, but it was better than tutor-sitting a bratty nine-year-old for eighth-grade wardrobe money. When would it be *her* turn to make memories? And when would Ripple stop calling her—

“Ms. Gregory!” Ripple flipped up her pink hood and checked her reflection in the mirror again. “The only thing you can teach me is how to *be* Massie Block.”

“You could start by lowering that hood,” Kristen blurted, then immediately hate-pinched her own leg for encouraging the little wannabe.

Ripple did as she was told, then reached into her Coach

Heritage Stripe Swingpack knockoff and pulled out ten plastic purple bangles. Glued around them was a white price tag that said 5 FOR \$2. “Left or right?” She lifted her wrists. “WWMD?”

Kristen stood and shuffled across the uneven wood floor in Steve Madden cork wedges, her pleated Diesel denim mini swaying below her tight yellow Lacoste halter. “Massie wouldn’t do *either*!” She grabbed Ripple’s soon-to-be-bangled wrists and pulled her back to the coffee table. “They’re *H&M*!”

“Well, then, what *would* she do?” Ripple widened her light brown eyes in anticipation and propped her elbows on the surfboard table.

Kristen squeezed the gold Coach locket Massie had sent her for her birthday—complete with a group photo of the Pretty Committee inside—and thought, *What would Massie do?* But not being an alpha, Kristen wasn’t completely sure.

“She would do her homework, *okay*?” Kristen lied, flipping open Ripple’s crisp, unused math textbook. “Now, if a carton of eggs was one-fifty yesterday and is fifty percent off today, how much are the eggs? A, a dollar; B, two twenty-five; or C, seventy-five cents?”

Ripple plopped down on the green and blue Hawaiian print-covered futon, annoyed. “Why won’t you *help* me?”

“Because it’s illegal to help a stalker.” Kristen ran her hand along her stubbly calf, thinking that the best part of her pathetic day might be the leg-shave bath she had scheduled before bed.

“I am not, not, *not* a stalker!” Ripple whipped the purple bangles across the room. They bounced twice before settling into a cheap plastic heap.

“Then focus and answer the question!” Kristen shouted, grateful that they were the only ones home.

“Wait, I have a better question.” Ripple sniffled. “If your three-week crush told you surf chicks were ‘cute ’n’ all’”—she air-quoted—“but that some sophisticated older girl named Massie Block was super hot, what would *you* do?” She stood and paced. “Would you A, want to figure out the price of eggs; B, stay true to your surfer roots; or C, ask your dad to hire you the summer math tutor who just happens to be Massie’s BFF?”

Kristen’s stomach lurched. “You’re using me for Massie info?”

Ripple smeared glittery pink drugstore gloss on her droopy bottom lip. “It’s not using if you’re paying.”

Kristen felt dizzy. In that very instant, her entire world had just been turned upside down and dumped like a giant handbag. Yes, she was getting paid, but that was supposed to be for her alpha mind, nawt her alpha friend. So what made *her* special now? Once again, being Massie’s BFF was her only claim to fame. Her intelligence was meaningless. *Gawd!* If the game Rock, Paper, Scissors were real life, it would be called Brains, Beauty, Brawn. And Beauty would beat Brains and Brawn every time.

Someone kicked the front door open. “Hello? Anyone

home?” A thick beam of sunlight seeped inside the dark cabin. There stood a shirtless boy. It was as if he’d been summoned by God and delivered by angels.

“Dune?” Ripple ran to greet her brother. “What’re ya doin’ home?”

The thirteen-year-old surf star dropped his salty backpack and took off his white straw fedora. Blond hair the color of Baked Lays swung above his shoulders as he lovingly hugged his sister back.

Awww.

“Coach kicked me off the team.” He shrugged like someone who cared but didn’t want anyone to know.

“Why?”

“Last night, the Atlantic was all lit up with phosphorescence. It was past curfew, but I had to paddle out and—”

“In the *dark*?” Ripple gasped, finally sounding like a nine-year-old.

“It was totally worth it.” He rubbed his bare chest. “I caught a six-foot left and the water was glowing all green and everyone came out to watch and—” He stepped down the single step that led to the sunken living room and plucked a plastic McIntosh from a bowl of fake fruit on the rickety end table. “Who’s this?” He tossed the red apple in the air and caught it.

Kristen’s skin stung the way it had when Principal Burns announced, to the entire school, that she had been named captain of the soccer team. He looked right at her, and she blushed as though there were a hundred of him.

“Hey, I’m—”

“Oh, this is Ms. Gregory, my tutor.” Ripple flirt-knocked the apple out of Dune’s hand and giggled when it rolled across the floor.

“Stop calling me that!” Kristen reddened again, this time from rage. She was nawt going to be used and humiliated by a *nine*-year-old. As soon as their father came home, she was going to quit. Westchester was packed with mathtards. She’d find someone new to tutor by sundown—someone with air-conditioning and decent snacks.

“Hey.” He snicker-waved, unsure what to call her. “I’m Dune.”

Kristen remembered seeing him at Briarwood’s wave pool dedication ceremony last spring, but she’d been so distracted by her then-crush Griffin Hastings, she hadn’t noticed what a perfect hang-ten Dune was.

Ehmagawd! Kristen swallowed hard. Did she actually just think that? Whenever she had super-cheesy thoughts like “a perfect hang-ten,” she was entering crush mode. “You can call me—”

“Ripple!” Dune suddenly noticed his sister’s pink headband, matching sweatshirt, and purple rhinestone flip-flops. “What are you getting tutored in? Looking like an OCDiva?”

Kristen gasped silently. Was that what the surf guys called the girls from Octavian Country Day School.

“Trying,” Ripple admitted shamelessly. “And please, from now on, call me Rassie. Like *Massie*, but with an *R*.”

Dune hiked up his slouching gold and brown board shorts. “It makes more sense if you lose the *R*.”

Ripple whipped a stuffed starfish at his defined shoulders. For the first time in her life, Kristen envied a beige pillow.

“New York sucks.” Dune tugged at the shark tooth necklace hanging around his neck, his mood shifting faster than the tides. “I can’t believe I’m gonna be landlocked in Westchester all summer.”

Just then a large, fit older man padded through the open door, his bare, callused feet slapping against the dark floors like tap shoes. He clapped Dune on the shoulder. “Whose fault is that, son?”

“Dad!” Their shirtless chests slapped as they came together for a hug.

Brice Baxter smiled and ruffled his son’s long straight hair. He wore camouflage trunks and a faded yellow *DON’T WORRY BE HAPPY* baseball cap. “Now go grab your boards. We’re going barge surfing.”

“But I just styled my hair!” Ripple whined, petting her scalp.

Her father chuckled, never suspecting that his tomboy daughter could have been serious.

“So you’re not mad I’m back?” Dune said to the fallen apple on the floor. “Because I sure am.”

“Nah.” Brice pulled his cap lower. “Your mother will be mad. But that’s why we got divorced. That woman cannot go with the flow. I would have been mad if you passed up

phosphorescent surf. Besides, the Tavarua trip is coming up. Enjoy the break while you can.”

“I guess.” Dune’s sad brown eyes beamed respect and love for his father.

“You surf, Kristen?” Brice asked, the crispy corners of his hazel eyes scrunching with genuine hospitality. “Because I’ve been teaching for eighteen years, and I can have you standing by—”

“Um, no. I’m more of a soccer person,” she blurted, making it perfectly clear that she was far from an OCDiva.

“Then tell your parents you won’t be home for dinner.” He rested his arm on her sunburned shoulder. “The Baxters are gonna teach you how to surf.”

Without hesitation, Kristen texted her parents, then followed the Baxters out to their blue Chevy Avalanche. Maybe she could give her job one more chance . . . for poor Ripple, of course.

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