

An excerpt of **SAPPHIRE ATTRACTION** By **Zuri Day**

Real estate mogul Ike Drake Jr. likes women the way he likes his cars—polished, sophisticated and reliable. Quinn Taylor, meanwhile, is as fiery and unpredictable as the red Corvette she drives. From the moment she roars into Paradise Cove, music blasting, they're like oil and water. And when a judge rules that Quinn must work off the damages in Ike's office after she broadsides his sedan, the tension between them escalates...before exploding into raw desire.

Quinn's unconventional ways are ruffling feathers in this picturesque town. Yet there's something compelling about the place—and about powerfully strong, steady Ike. Simple chemistry won't be enough to bridge the gap between them, especially with a determined ex-girlfriend waiting in the wings. It'll take the kind of trust that requires putting your heart on the line to secure a glittering, priceless future...

Chapter 1

The smooth sounds of classic jazz filled the four-door luxury sedan. Ike Drake Jr. had had a stressful weekend, and he appreciated the way Wes Montgomery's fluid guitar licks poured over his soul like water, washing the frenzy away.

In his preteen years, Ike had temporarily eschewed the music his grandfather loved in favor of the pop and hip-hop stars who then provided the soundtrack of his life. That didn't last long. By tenth grade, during summers spent on Walter Drake's farm, he regained an appreciation for his elder's favorite musicians: Miles, Ramsey, Dizzy, Charlie and Wes. He also shared Walter's passion for fishing, golf and classic cars like the meticulously restored 1961 Ferrari Spider he now drove. His grandmother Claire had labeled him an old soul since childhood, and even way back then had affectionately called him Mr. Ike.

Ike tapped a beat on his steering wheel, focused on the music and tried to forget about why his jaws were tight and his muscles were in knots. Days of Paradise, an annual event celebrating the incorporation of Paradise Cove and held during Labor Day weekend, was always a hectic time. The Drakes were among the town's founding families, along with one of the wealthiest and most well-known. Their company, Drake Realty Plus, had built and/or sold many of the homes and apartments in which citizens resided. Ike's brother Niko was mayor of the city. The Drake family participation was high profile and taxing. In addition to serving as the grand marshal for this year's parade, he was on the Days of Paradise board and had helped oversee a three-day carnival and annual charity ball. These extracurricular activities on top of being immersed in the closing of a deal costing more than a hundred million dollars brought enough anxiety to raise his blood pressure. No one would fault him for being stressed and on edge. But if he was honest with himself, he'd admit that all of these very important issues weren't the real reason for his discomfort.

The real reason was a woman named Quinn.

She'd burst into his world on Saturday night at the fund-raiser ball. Like a tornado, she'd bowled over everyone in her path and left hearts and emotions strewn around the room. Ike's were among them.

The soothing sound of Wes's "Bumping on Sunset" gave way to the memories of Saturday night. Without realizing it, his relaxed shoulders tensed. He gripped the wheel.

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"Who's that?"

Ike and two of his brothers, Warren and Niko, stood near the main bar in the Paradise Cove Country Club's ballroom. Their position afforded an unobstructed view of the room's entrance, through which a sexy siren who had elicited Niko Drake's question had just entered.

"I don't know," Warren responded, his eyes glued to the room's sudden star attraction as he sipped a neat bourbon. "But I guarantee she won't remain anonymous for long."

Ike could only stare. The stranger was stunning. Tall, he imagined around five-seven, but appearing statuesque because of strappy stiletto sandals and a high ponytail that exposed dainty drop earrings and an elegant long neck. Her dress was ultra-classic—a sleeveless black gown with a gently scooped neckline that hugged her slender body to the knee before flaring out into a dramatic train. Ike subconsciously nodded his approval as she came farther into the room, looking neither left nor right but either straight ahead or down at the petite satin-clad woman beside her. Classy, conservative, elegant...a perfect fit in this country club crowd. Her mannerisms were understated, and while he was sure she was aware of her beauty and the subtle murmur of voices that followed in her wake, she seemed admirably unaffected.

After a long on-again, off-again relationship with a woman who, like him, had grown up in PC, Ike was single. Were he looking for a wife, she could potentially be a candidate. She was someone he decided to meet before the night was over. His eyes followed her as she passed the brothers, several feet away but partially hidden. His interest grew as he took in her regal bearing. He smiled as she passed them. But when he saw the back of her gown, his expression changed. He became as annoyed as he was attracted.

WTH?

The back of her Chai original was as risqué as the front was moderate. It plunged from her shoulders to just above her backside, exposing an expanse of creamy smooth skin that made him think of vanilla ice cream covered with cashews and warm caramel. The back of the dress was made of lace, with carefully placed flowers in the fabric the only thing that allowed the enchantress to maintain any modesty at all. It was way too revealing, Ike noted. He now clearly understood why her entrance had caused the crowd to murmur, women to narrow their eyes and men to get poked in the side for staring. The woman was practically nude.

"Careful, darling. Scowling too hard for too long may cause permanent wrinkles."

Ike had been so intent on watching—some would say judging—the room's star attraction that he hadn't even seen his date approach. "Did you see that? What a spectacle!" When the woman disappeared amid the throng crowding the bar, Ike finally managed to tear his eyes away. "The way she's dressed is disrespectful. I can't believe Mrs. Newman didn't insist she change before bringing her here."

Audrey Ross knew Ike well and quietly noted his strong reaction to the new girl in town. She had been his on-again, off-again girlfriend for the past ten years. They were no longer dating but remained good friends.

Niko had walked away but Warren remained. He turned to Audrey. "Is she related to her?"

"Maggie Newman?"

"Yeah."

Audrey nodded. "Her granddaughter, Quinn Taylor."

"I don't remember seeing her before," Ike said. "And the way she grabbed everyone's attention, most folks in this town haven't, either."

Quinn emerged from the bar area with two glasses of champagne and carried them over to where Maggie Newman sat. Ike forced himself to quit looking, but Warren continued to enjoy the show. Almost every eligible bachelor seemed to vie for her attention as she calmly held court at one of the room's center tables, the one next to the table occupied by the Drakes.

Once again, Audrey was a fountain of information. "She grew up on the East Coast and attended an elite boarding school in Switzerland before returning to America to get her college degree. At some point she got engaged to a prince, then broke things off mere weeks before the wedding. That happened recently—just a few months ago. It caused a minor scandal, as you can imagine. One of many she's created since her teen years. Glen finally had enough."

Ike's head snapped around. "Glen Taylor? The judge?" Audrey nodded. "What could he possibly have to do with her?"

"Believe it or not, he's her dad."

"The conservative Republican? I don't believe it."

"It's true."

"Where's her mother?"

“That’s a mystery,” Audrey mused. “No one knows about her, what happened to their marriage or why Quinn was raised by her dad.”

“I’m surprised anything about her got by you, Audrey,” Warren said. “How do you know so much?”

“Mom and Mrs. Newman are sorors, and good friends. I happened to be there during their afternoon tea chat, shortly after Quinn came to town. At any rate, the judge arrived on the West Coast as a single father and from what I hear, never mentioned Quinn’s mother or any other woman from his past. The closest she had to a mother figure was her grandmother and a nanny, who was obviously long on patience and short on discipline. The result was a spoiled brat who grew into a troublemaking teen. Shortly after his marriage to San Francisco socialite Viviana Lange, Quinn was shipped overseas. Knowing the Langes and their obsession with image, that doesn’t surprise me. The story from there is public knowledge, as it’s been largely played out in the society pages of the *Chronicle*.” She took a sip from her wineglass, watching Quinn’s deft handling of her admirers. “From the look of things,” Audrey finished, “she’s still a troublemaker.”

“I wonder what she’s doing here,” Ike muttered, thinking out loud.

Audrey waved at an associate, talking over her shoulder as she walked away. “If the past continues to repeat itself, we’ll no doubt find out.”

The scowl returned as Ike pondered what Audrey had shared. Glen Taylor was a successful and well-respected judge. Both avid golfers, they’d run into each other on a course or two, the first time at the country club where they were now. Ike liked Glen and respected Mrs. Newman. He doubted either feeling would apply to the woman named Quinn.

Later on, this thought gained traction. When Quinn was introduced to his family, Ike didn’t like that she addressed his mother by her first name, or her flirty nature when meeting him and his brothers. More than once during the formal dinner, the quiet was interrupted by her raucous laughter as she sat at a table surrounded by men. When he saw her leave with one of the town’s notorious playboys instead of Mrs. Newman, with whom she’d come, that bothered him, too. He told himself it didn’t. But it did.

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A roaring engine mixed with a pounding bass brought Ike out of his reverie. He looked to his left, saw a driver speeding like a bat out of Hades and had just enough time to accelerate and sharply turn the steering wheel in an effort to avoid the car as it crossed the center line. The head-on collision was prevented but a crash was not. Metal crunched against metal. Ike’s car jumped the curb and struck a mailbox. The force introduced his forehead to the steering wheel, a meeting that rendered him senseless. He smelled burned rubber and shook his head to clear the cloudiness. Wrong move. Instead of clearing, his head began pounding, even as he heard voices and someone yelling to call 9-1-1. He looked over to see the car that had hit him, a fiery red Corvette with loud music still blasting. The driver’s head rested against the seat. Blood dripped from a nasty cut. It was the troublemaker Quinn Taylor, wreaking havoc again.