

## What readers have said about "The Sand Trap"

*"A combination of 'Tin Cup' and 'Hunger Games' for Boomers!! Mike (senior golfer)"*

*"Enjoyed it thoroughly – and I am not a golfer...found the golf competitions well-done and exciting for the reader. Now that we have Bubba Watson in the headlights...maverick golfers have become quite the thing. Timely! All the characters are likable, believable. I was impressed at the sex scenes – well done! Proof that I enjoyed it is that I went thru 2 printer cartridges to print and read it." Gerry (female, early sixties, book editor)*

*"I think the book is absolutely fabulous. Not being nice or polite but seriously. I laughed so hard when Melanie did Burt in on the course. I must complain that I woke in the middle of the night and was not able to get back to sleep. I was so pissed off at those guys. Even though I told myself it was fiction I still had trouble getting over it. You made it so real! I think both women and men will really love your book, particularly if they have rudimentary awareness of golf and a bit of a feeling about the west." Jerry (male, sixties, Retired Professional, single digit handicap golfer.)*

*I finished the novel yesterday and I could not put it down! The story is riveting and truly is a page-turner. Your style of writing is both intelligent and engaging, and the character development exceptional. I am truly honoured that you shared the manuscript with me and simply cannot wait until it gets published ... and of course hits the big screen! Marie, (President of her own marketing company.)*

*"The book is absolutely brilliant. It is guaranteed to be a best seller. I couldn't put it down!!*

*PS...Do you have this spatial relationship thing? When will you finish the next one?" Patricia (fifties, Vice President for a large corporation, non golfer)*

# *The Sand Trap*

A novel of love, murder and golf

D.G. Marshall

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**For advice with your golf game email Melinda at [talonlakepress@gmail.com](mailto:talonlakepress@gmail.com) or twitter at [@melindagolf](https://twitter.com/melindagolf)**

This book is a work of fiction and any resemblance to persons, living or dead, or places, events or locales is purely coincidental. The characters are productions of the author's imagination and used fictitiously.

### Adult Reading Material

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Many thanks to Jennifer, Wendy, Judy, Gerry, Richard, Patricia, Robin and all of the others who encouraged me and who helped edit and revise this story. A special thanks to Marjorie for her diligent and pervasive editing, and kind encouragement.

And much love to my spouse and lifetime friend Sheila for her understanding and patience as I indulge in yet another whim.

Cover design by x-height Graphics Inc.

Please note that I use Canadian spelling throughout. You will see doubled letters (e.g. focussed), ou's (e.g. colour) and 're' (centre) as well as a few other differences from American spelling.



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## **Prologue**

Even Chicharito would have been proud of the goal that Juan scored.

Juan Carlos Sanchez was eighteen years old and played for the Bravos, one of Nuevo Laredo's two entrants in the Mexican premier soccer league. He joked with his friends at every practice that he was as good as Javier “Chicharito” Hernandez, Mexico’s most famous soccer player of all time, and he figured that this goal would put the argument to rest. The Bravos’ crosstown rival was the Laredo Heat and the tensions were high when the two teams met. This warm March evening was no exception and the stands were full of screaming, exhausted fans from both sides of town by the time the teams were tied at 2-2 at the end of regulation time. Only two minutes were left on the referee’s calculation of extra time when Juan executed a perfectly timed leap, and headed a curving corner kick from Rodrigo Calderon, his best friend on the team, into the far corner of the Heat net. The Bravos fans went wild with excitement and as Juan slid to his knees in celebration he was mobbed by his relieved teammates.

It was the most exciting moment of Juan’s life.

But that was four hours ago, and now he and his teammates, their girlfriends and other friends of the owners and team sponsors were celebrating the win. Juan did not drink very much and Consuelo his steady girlfriend constantly blocked the groupies that wanted to touch the hero of the night. So while most of his teammates and the hundred or so other guests partied without restraint, he and Consuelo sat relaxed at one of the tables around the pool and slowly sipped their Dos Equis. They greeted the steady stream of friends as they congratulated him on his goal and the Bravos victory.

The pool that they sat beside belonged to one of the team’s sponsors and was located in a small, gated residential suburb of Nuevo Laredo, a small Mexican city not far from the U.S. border. The homes on either side of that house were also owned by friends of the

team, so the victory party was spread out among all three houses and revelers lounged by the pools, in the air conditioned living rooms and more than a few of his teammates found their way to the bedrooms with newfound admirers. It was a good party with many good friends and Juan was content. The young people laughed and loved and even when the members of the Heat showed up there were hugs and noticeable affection between the team members of the friendly rivals.

“Great game,” the captain of the Heat offered Juan as he gave him a hug. “We’ll have to watch you closer next time!”

Juan did not know the boy, who was eighteen as well, but had heard that his family was somehow mixed up in the Sinaloa Foundation, one of the rival drug operations that had turned much of the Tamaulipas area into a virtual war zone. None of Juan’s friends or teammates was involved in any of that business and the presence of some of the members of the Heat made him a little uncomfortable, but he graciously accepted the compliment.

“Sure,” he offered with a laugh. “You can watch me score!”

The Heat captain smiled and went over to a cooler beside the pool and pulled out a can of Pacifica from the quickly melting ice. “Well maybe. But here’s to you tonight anyhow Juan Carlos!” He snapped the tab on the beer and as it frothed over the edge of the can he held it up in a toast.

Juan Carlos tipped his own bottle of Dos Equis to the Heat captain and then turned his attention back to Consuela. He reached over and touched her hand. “Want to leave and find a quiet place?” His smile left no mistake as to his meaning.

Consuela slapped his hand. “You’re bad! I know what you want.” But she gave him an equally mischievous smile. “Later. Let’s just enjoy the party for a while?”

Juan faked a big frown and leaned over and kissed her and wondered why he was so lucky to not only be a soccer star, but also to have such a beautiful girlfriend.

Like the other young people at the party this evening, they were celebrating their friendships the way that young people everywhere would do. Their world was only as complicated as school, soccer and budding love could make it. And they were so intent on their celebration that none of them saw the seven black SUVs that snaked in formation up the road leading to the gate at the entry to the subdivision. They did not notice as, with

military precision, two of the SUV's took position so as to block the exit from the community. The police would later find the security guard at the gate with a single bullet hole in his forehead. The other five vehicles sped, still undetected by the revelers, towards the three homes. The front SUV and the back SUV stopped crossways across the road in front of the two houses to further contain any escape and the other three in the middle each chose a house and drove over the front lawns and up to the front doors. Each vehicle disgorged five men all dressed in black with red balaclavas covering their faces. Each man carried a machine pistol and each had a bandolier of spare clips strung across their shoulder. After they entered the house, two of the five took up a position by the front door, while three went straight through the living room and to the pool area behind each house.

Pedro Jimenez sat in the washroom located in the front hall of the house beside the one where Juan and Consuela were partying. When the screaming started, he took a quick peek out a crack in the door, saw the armed intruders standing at the front door and he guessed what was happening. Most residents of Nuevo Laredo had been affected in some way by the drug gang killings over the past several years. Pedro himself had lost two cousins and brother to gangland slayings by the Zeta and he had witnessed his brother's killing by two masked men on a motorcycle as they drove past the garage where they both worked. After the passenger strafed his brother Frank with bullets from an automatic pistol, the small Suzuki spun out on the gravel and, as it slid to the ground, the ski mask was ripped off one of the men. Pedro recognized the killer and now he was scheduled to testify in the trial next week. But now he concentrated on the sound of automatic gunfire as the two men at the entrance sprayed the living room and anyone who tried to run to the front door. That was followed by more gunfire and screaming from the pool area and the fear in his gut made him wet his pants. The bathroom had a small window that opened up on the front yard and he figured that he could squeeze through the window and get away from the intruders. He pried the window open, stood on the toilet seat while he pushed his torso through the opening and his feet followed as he tumbled face first into the flowerbed at the front of the house. As he slowly raised his dirt-covered face from the ground, his eyes met the elaborately silver inlaid toes of a pair of cowboy boots. He looked up a little further to see the barrel of a machine pistol just before a burst of three



shots entered his forehead.

Another man dressed in a perfectly tailored white suit and no mask emerged from the SUV and walked over to where Pedro now lay face down in the dirt, with his blood and brains seeping into the garden soil. The man motioned to one of the men and he turned Pedro's body over with the silver inlaid toe. "That's him," the white suit announced. "Let's get out of here." And he returned to the car as the balaclaved man spoke into a small microphone attached to his shoulder.

The first bullet that was fired in the pool area where Juan and Consuela were sitting went through the beer bottle in her hand and straight into her heart. Juan had only a fraction of a second to grieve until a second bullet entered just over his left eye and exited through the back of his head. By the time the call came to leave, the three gunmen had left a pool that was slowly morphing red and a poolside smeared with broken chairs, glasses, beer bottles and moaning bodies. The men in the living room and the front door had matched the carnage at the pool and along with the men outside by the SUV, had effectively stopped anyone from leaving any of the three houses while they went on their killing spree.

Each SUV quickly swallowed up their five balaclava-hidden passengers and with the same military precision that marked their arrival, they reversed their entry procedure and wound their way past the security gate and the dead security guard and sped away in seven different directions. The man in the white suit rode in the lead SUV and he opened his cell phone and pushed a quick dial button. "It is done." And he hung up the phone.

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The next morning, in a villa just outside of San Jose Del Cabo, Jose Gorges picked up the copy of the El Heraldo de Mexico that was folded beside his morning coffee and smiled at the headlines.

*"Zetas slaughter 17 schoolchildren in Nuevo Laredo".*

As he sipped his coffee, and took the occasional bite of the fruit on the plate that sat in front of him, he folded the paper over in half so he could read the full story. He read that seventeen young people, four of them young men from the two Nuevo Laredo football teams, were killed in the raid and many more, mostly high school students from the local secondary school were injured. Some critically. One reporter said that the police

counted 123 shots fired between the three homes, all from the automatic pistols of the intruders since none of the young people had any weapons of any sort. There was no mention of Consuela, but the paper wrote a full paragraph describing Juan Carlos Sanchez, the up and coming football star. There was a tearful quote from Juan's mother decrying the senseless violence. And a statement from the local Zeta leader disclaimed any responsibility for the massacre. The police said that they did not have any idea why the raid took place since these were all just young people celebrating after a football match and none of them had any connections to the gangs. They had no leads yet, but the city put up a reward of \$20,000 USD for any information that would lead to the arrest of the killers. The editorial railed against the senseless gang violence in Mexico and called on the country's president to do something to protect ordinary citizens. There was no special mention of Pedro Jimenez other than in the list of the dead, and as the editorial observed, no one was hopeful that the killers would ever be found.

"That's a fact," Jose thought smugly to himself as he put the newspaper down and turned his attention to the sweet papaya that his doctor told him was so good for his hear



## **PART ONE: MELANIE 1978**



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### **Part 1 - Chapter 1: The Caddie**

She was about to win another tournament and she could see that some of the parents, coaches and players from the other school were pissed off. She supposed it wouldn't have been so bad if it was a close match, but there was not a girl in the state who could get within ten strokes of her on a 36-hole medalist competition. In this particular match she had lost a little concentration and was only five strokes up with three holes to go.

“Your shot Melanie,” her closest friend and caddie Rebecca Freid announced. “A 5-iron?”

The shot was her second on a par five and, after a 260-yard drive; Melanie had 200 yards to go to the hole.

“A 6-iron, Rebecca. Watch the bunker on the left,” Melanie suggested with a grin.

She hit a sweeping draw into a large pot bunker beside the green.

“You did that on purpose!” Rebecca exclaimed. “You have to quit doing that. If anyone else other than me realized what you were doing you would be tossed out of the NCGA.”

Melanie looked over at her opponent who was approaching the location of her third shot that would be from 100 yards out, and she could see the hope in her opponent’s eyes. Her parents and fans were less controlled in their optimism.

“You’ve got her now, Mary!” Someone exclaimed from the gallery.

And, to a round of applause, Mary responded with a perfectly struck wedge to within ten yards of the hole.

Melanie felt just a touch of bitterness. No one was here to applaud her. In fact she often felt that the other coaches and parents resented her for beating their own little prodigies so badly. Every parent at the 1978 National Collegiate Golf Association tournament had country club nurtured their progeny from toddler age to be the next big thing on the LPGA. And here she was, this farm girl from nowhere Canada 'busting their balls' as Rebecca always said before a tournament. "Bust their balls girl," she would say as they walked to the first tee. When Melanie once pointed out that such a phrase didn't fit a women's tournament very well, Rebecca just replied that it "has a better ring than 'bust their boobs don't you think?'" They both laughed at Rebecca's corny humour but "bust their balls" it was.

“Ok Melanie. What now?” accused Rebecca. “Did you purposely plug the ball under the front lip of the trap as well? It's impossible to hit onto the green from there. For God’s sake Melanie, unless you have forgotten, this is the Regional Women's NCGA Championship. Not a time for your fucking around!”

“Look. I’m up five strokes. If I let her get close everyone will be happy and I can be a gracious winner. Give me the sixty degree.”

The ball was plugged against the green side of the bunker, under a steep lip. Even Melanie knew she could never get it over the lip and onto the green. If she tried to hit it towards the green the ball would probably just bury deeper in the sand. So she dug in her feet, took the most awkward, contortionist stance, aimed right at the lip – some in the gallery were actually trying to hold back their laughter – and and hit the buried ball

backwards without touching the lip, the bank or anything else. There were a few seconds of stunned silence from the small gallery and even the most reluctant applauded a shot that they would only see as a trick shot somewhere. The ball landed behind her with a good lie. She chipped up on the green and one putted for a five. Mary made the birdie and earned a stroke back, but no one remembered her birdie after Melanie's bunker shot.

"That made it more interesting don't you think?" she suggested to Rebecca.

"Well it didn't win you any new friends. So just don't play any more stupid games. Just win the fucking thing!"

Melanie grimaced. "Watch your language Rebecca. There's probably a cursing rule for this country club."

Rebecca Freid was Melanie's closest friend and caddy. They could not have been more different in most physical, social and intellectual dimensions. Rebecca was short, dumpy, unmistakably Jewish and purposely crude. Melanie was a half inch under six feet tall, slender and with a classic, yet rugged, Scottish highland beauty, mixed with some dark hues from a distant octaroonian native Canadian heritage that her mother had claimed. The latter gave her almost a Spanish look. With anyone other than Rebecca she was quiet to the point of pathological shyness. A strict Presbyterian upbringing ensured that no one had ever heard her swear.

The two of them had met at the formal freshman meeting for recruits to the golf team when Rebecca, who was in her second year, was assigned to be Melanie's "buddy". When Rebecca loudly asked that the name of the session be changed from the "fresh man" to "stale tart" session Melanie knew she would like this person. It turned out that they shared two things that brought them together for the duration of their college life; an upbringing that was on the outside edge of the established social order and, of course, golf.

Melanie's mother had been an itinerant farm worker and a hippy before hippies were invented. She left in 1964 when Melanie was four years old for the Hindu Kush with a stranger passing through town. Or maybe it was Halifax, no one ever knew. Her father, on the other hand, was just simply Scottish cantankerous. One year, while others were growing wheat and barley he tried planting five hundred acres of ginseng. The crop failed miserably but the citizens of Bumstead, Saskatchewan assumed that the prolific crop of

new geese the following year was solely due to the libido effects of ginseng on the transient geese population. He tried pumpkins. Acres and acres of them. But not just any pumpkins. He had heard there were contests to grow the largest pumpkins in the country and he sent away for some special seed. The seed providers must have thought they had died and gone to heaven when they received a seed order for enough seed to cover five hundred acres. Dougal McDougal had this eminently sensible notion that surely one of the thousands of pumpkins would get big. An early Saskatchewan frost killed them all. Then came his crowning glory. He decided to turn his five hundred acres of river bottomland into a golf course. It did not matter that he had never played the game. It did not matter that no person he knew in Bumstead played the game, or that, in 1964, no one in the city would ever drive seventy miles to play a game of golf. The fact was Dougal just didn't care. His great grandfather had left his Dad, then him, a sizeable trust that allowed him to follow any whim or fancy that his divergent mind could think up and golf made him angry for personal reasons. In the middle of one of the most prosperous decades North America had ever seen, and during Melanie's most formative, preschool young years, Dougal McDougal began to build a golf course.

Rebecca had a slightly different early life. Staten Island was a long way from Bumstead, Saskatchewan and a wealthy Jewish family was a long way from eccentric Presbyterian. Rebecca also knew from the toddler stage that golf would be a big part of her life. Even as a young child she knew she was neither beautiful nor visibly athletic. The former her family could easily endure, the latter not so much. Fortunately for her, belonging to the only Country Club that would admit Jews was a social prerequisite for her family. While no one else in her family really cared about the golf part of it, Rebecca found in the game a place where she could hide from the schoolyard and classroom abuse that came from her religion, from her mundane appearance and from her considerable intellect. While she figured she could not do much to change the first two twists of genetic fate, she decided her mouth would make up for them both and Rebecca Freid became what would be called, in her elementary school days, a loudmouth, and in her teen years, a filthy loudmouth. No one was immune from her sharp tongue and no amount of social coaching or remonstrating would curb the foulness. On the golf course, however, she was truly herself without the protection of the facades. She practiced, she

studied and she competed and by her early teens was one of the top ranked junior golfers in New York State, already courted with golf scholarships at two Ivy League schools.

And then the hormones kicked in.

In addition to a passion for golf, Rebecca found she had a passion for – well – for passion. She liked sex. Her early experiences at sexual exploration were, of course, self-inflicted. She did not even have a girlfriend to explore these feelings with. So not being instantly attractive to the other sex, she had to find a different route other than normal dating to get her quickly escalating sexual drives satisfied. She found it by instinct and sort of by chance. Near the end of a practice day on the range, just she and Dwayne Hochschild, a gangly but appealing thirteen-year old from her school, were washing their clubs before putting them away. She simply went up to him and asked him if he wanted to go into the garden shed beside the range and “do it.” It took him a moment to realize what “do it” actually meant and suddenly her short, dumpy body, homely face and grating character were all forgotten and they indeed did “do it.” Dwayne, of course, bragged to the whole school about his conquest and soon Rebecca was very popular on the range. “Doing it” became as regular a part of her routine as putting, 8-irons and drivers.

On the surface none of this explains why she ended up on a golf scholarship to Clapshorn College in Montana instead of Yale or Harvard and was now caddying for Melanie at the 1978 Montana State Regional Women's NCGA championships. In truth, it had not taken long for the Clapshorn sorority crowd to learn why Rebecca was at Clapshorn and not Harvard, and not long for Melanie to understand why no one would trust Rebecca to guard their daughter's honour. You don't get thrown out of one of the most prestigious Jewish private schools in New York state and expect the Ivy Leagues to come begging, no matter how rich your parents are or how good your golf talent. It was bad enough when the Principal of the school found out that Rebecca was shagging her son (it was not the son's fault of course). The situation turned even worse when the school found out she was doing half the senior class (men only, she kept emphasizing to her parents). Her golf was not good enough for Harvard to obviate her sins, so Ivy League was out and a small college as far from New York City as possible was in. At Clapshorn she did not even make it a competition. Golf took a distant back seat to parties

and promiscuity.

In her second year at Clapshorn she met Melanie and discovered their shared passion for golf.

“Now keep your mouth shut and be gracious,” Melanie lectured as she and Rebecca walked off the eighteenth green. “We won today remember, and one more infraction and you won’t be able to caddie for me at the nationals.”

“OK. OK. But you let that bitch off easy. Now they’ll be saying that you were falling apart and she could have won if the game was two holes longer blah, blah, blah,”

Rebecca whined. “And now I have to be nice to her? That’s bullshit.”

“Not her Rebecca. Just the coaches and the parents and press and anyone else who decides to congratulate us.”

It turned out not to be many. Most of the throng of well wishers and spectators, and even the press, were around Mary Proctor whom most thought was Montana’s next great female golf hope. Her supporters said it was just a fluke that the weirdo from Clapshorn beat her and she would get even at the nationals. And why not? She was cute, had an engaging personality, a picture perfect swing and was from a very old and wealthy Montana family.

Melanie and Rebecca enjoyed a few moments of glory while the state trophy was presented to Melanie for individual honours, but they were soon on their own as they headed to the parking lot and to Rebecca’s new BMW.

“You’ve got to quit doing that Melanie,” Rebecca admonished. “One day you’ll do it at the wrong time and lose a match. I mean really. Putting it in the sand on fifteen was bad enough, but hitting it in the water on eighteen just to see if you could recover was just silly.”

Only Rebecca knew just how good Melanie really was. While Melanie had yet to lose a match in either medalist or match play, Rebecca knew she had not even come close to her potential as a golfer, even though she had never played in a competition until she was in her first year at Clapshorn. “We’ve a couple of weeks before the nationals in California,” Rebecca announced. “Let’s drive down and make a trip of it. It’s only a couple of days from Billings to San Diego. It will be fun.”

“Ok,” Melanie agreed as she raced the big BMW out of the club parking lot. “But



we'll have to clear it with Coach first. They like the team to travel together. I'm not sure he sees you as a totally trustworthy chaperone for his star woman golfer.”



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## **Part 1 - Chapter 2: Clapshorn College Discovers Melanie**

Clapshorn College was one of a thousand or so similar four-year degree institutions spread across the U.S. Maybe a quarter were private, profit or non-profit in some way or another, and all competed vigorously for the top students and the highest performing athletes. College sports in the U.S. could mean big money for an institution if handled correctly. At 1800 students, Clapshorn was of average size for these institutions. It was a private, not for profit College, founded a hundred years ago by early Methodist settlers in the Billings area. It prided itself on small classes, a beautiful campus, distinguished professors and the most successful athletic programs in the state. As one sports writer wrote after Clapshorn soundly beat Montana State in a basketball show down, “This place punches way beyond its weight.” Sport was big money for Clapshorn. It had a generous alumni and gate receipts for most sports brought in far more than expenses. These expenses included a national recruitment and scholarship program that attracted athletes from around the country and sometimes the world. Its recruitment tentacles stretched inside an alumni network that stretched across North America.

It was that network that turned up both Rebecca and Melanie. Clapshorn had a reputation for attracting some unique athletes but since they were so small and relatively isolated-- not PAC 10 or NCAA Division One-- they had trouble attracting the best and the brightest. Sometimes they had to take the best and the marginal. Sometimes they hit the jackpot as they did with Brad Smithers, an exceptional basketball athlete from Yonkers that no Division One School would touch because of his youth crime record. He

came to Clapshorn, starred as a basketball player, obtained a good degree and was an all star in the NBA for ten seasons before becoming a Congressman. This kind of success did not hurt Clapshorn's recruitment efforts. But they had just as many losers. Young people who were recruited with athletic stars in their eyes and the promise of a fully paid college degree. The small print of the scholarship indicated that the full ride only came with the expectation of full performance as well, so if an athlete failed to make the team, or had a career ending injury, or failed out for any number of other reasons, some of them behaviour related, they were on their own for the annual \$40 thousand a year fee. Most of these athletes were only at Clapshorn because they received full scholarships, so as many young Clapshorn athletes headed home as headed for stardom. In Rebecca's case it did not matter since her parents were more than willing to foot the whole bill and more. It was a bonus if she played golf. In truth she was heavily recruited for women's golf as one of those "no one else will take her" recruits with signs of great athletic ability but some other personal challenges.

While Rebecca was well known and just a big risk, Melanie was one of those "discovered" athletes. Bob Philips, her high school Physics teacher was a Clapshorn alumnus. A lot of Canadians from the Western provinces went south of the border when they could not get a place in a provincial university. There is no significant private university system in Canada to take up the accessibility slack, so a lot of Saskatchewan and Albertan professionals have Montana or Colorado degrees. Bob was one of those. His marks were never high enough to get into either of the two provincial universities in Saskatchewan. However he was a standout as a junior golfer. Canadian universities offer minimal athletic scholarships and Clapshorn offered a full ride. He became one of the fortunate ones who turned the offer into a full four-year degree in Physics from Clapshorn and a teaching degree from Montana State.

He had met Melanie in her first year at Regina Collegiate Institute, but by her third year, like most others at the collegiate, he still knew very little about her. He knew she lived with her Grandmother in an exclusive part of the city. He could see she was attractive, but by no means beautiful. She had a rugged look, like she had been outside in a wind all her life. She was tall – six feet. There were rumours she had excelled at sports when she lived in some small farm town north of Regina, but she had never consented to

take part in any athletic teams at the Collegiate despite quite aggressive efforts by the women's basketball coach. She was quiet and kept largely to herself. She was academically adequate. In essence there was nothing out of the ordinary in Melanie McDougal's appearance or demeanour that would catch his interest as an alumni recruiter for Clapshorn College.

That changed the summer after Melanie's grade ten year, when he and his wife went camping on the North Saskatchewan River just outside of Bumstead. On the recommendation of the campground owner, Bob and his wife Helen decided to try a round of golf at the only golf course in the area. It was officially and pretentiously called The North Saskatchewan Golf and Country Club, but the locals, including the campground owner, referred to it as the "Folly" – Dougal's "Folly". Dougal, of course, was not the first farmer to decide to turn his farm into a golf course. There are potato fields all over North America that are fertilized with golf balls rather than nitrogen. But even by the quirky standards of golf course design, the Folly was unique.

The Folly was nine holes and each hole was basically only tee box, landing area and green, the latter two almost impossible to hit by the ordinary amateur. In between them were fields of wheat, corn, soy, barley and a new crop that McDougal had started to plant in the early seventies that was supposed to be healthier for those who cooked with it. The first hole was a 344-yard par four. The first 230 yards was a cornfield. At the end of that was a grass strip thirty yards wide in which the ball had to end up in order to have a second shot. The next shot, skill willing, would be a 100 to 130-yard shot over a wheat field to a green half the size of a normal one. All of the greens had more undulations than a roller coaster and were mostly surrounded by sand. Each subsequent hole followed a similar principle. Hit over a field planted with a crop of some sort to a small landing area and then to a small, ridiculously shaped sand encircled green. The first shot on the par 5 fifth, which McDougal called his signature hole, actually went over the complete 200-yard width of the North Saskatchewan River.

Early on in the course's operation McDougal recognized that lost ball hunters were tromping down his cornfields, so he established a few local rules to save his fields. The first was that a ball lost in a cornfield or other such crop was just a one-stroke penalty and a drop in the landing area. Still, he was surprised bad golfers would trample through a

wheat field to save one stroke and recover a twenty-five-cent Canadian Tire ball. They were making far too big a mess of his crops. . So he added another local rule. No going into his fields to get a lost ball. This worked even better for the health of his crops, but the complaints about people losing the ball their dying father had given them started to drive him crazy. Finally, he provided buckets of free golf balls, at the tee, at the landing area and beside the green. When players hit a shot into the wheat or cornfield or in the river, they just took another one from the bucket. It was an honour system. They could stuff their bag with McDougal balls if they wanted to, but other than the few kids who maybe did it once, this rarely happened. There was also no pro shop, no course marshals, no office, nor any place to pay for your round except a little box that looked like a bird house situated at the first tee that said:

*Welcome to the North Saskatchewan River Golf and Country Club*

*Green Fees: \$20 per day (you can play after dark but watch out for the killer bats that come out at night)*

*Please insert payment in the slot. Cash, Checks, or IOU's accepted.*

*Local Course rules:*

- 1. It is winter all year in Saskatchewan. Move your ball anywhere you want.*
- 2. All penalties are "lateral". One stroke penalty anywhere you cannot find or retrieve your ball.*
- 3. Stay out of the wheat, corn, soy and barley fields. There are poisonous snakes and grizzly bears.*
- 4. Don't go swimming after your ball in the North Saskatchewan. There are sharks.*
- 5. Use your own balls at your own risk. Free balls are provided at the tee boxes and the landing areas.*
- 6. No cursing, yelling or any sort of rowdy behaviour permitted before you tee off on the first hole.*
- 7. Laugh a lot.*

*Signed:*

*Dougal McDougal*

*Head Professional and Proprietor*

Melanie had been an integral part of the golf course since she was old enough to go into the corn and wheat fields to retrieve golf balls and refill the free golf ball barrels at each tee box, landing area and green. In the early days there were many of those balls since very few of the golfers that visited McDougal's folly could claim much golfing talent. The players were mostly local teenagers out for an afternoon of fun, or seniors and retired farmers who figured that somewhere in their sixties was the perfect time to take up the game. Neither group could hit the landing areas nor the greens and most never came back a second time, likely seeking out more ego-massaging courses to enjoy their golf. For the teenagers it was the new miniature golf just opened at the soft ice cream store in Bumstead. For the seniors it was more likely to be a \$10 municipal course in Sun City, Nevada rather than anything during the Saskatchewan summer. Consequently it did not leave much of a clientele to support Dougal's golfing vision. That did not bother Dougal or Melanie much. For Dougal it was not about the money or the player popularity of the course. He was content to carefully manicure his precious greens the way others massaged their roses. Cutting the grass landing areas was a simple once a month affair that Melanie started doing as soon as she could drive the small tractor, around eight years old on a typical Saskatchewan farm.

From the time Melanie started school, until she left for Regina to go to high school, she and her dad were quite content with the golf course operation and arrangement. He still ran a farm and she still went to elementary school. When they were not separately engaged in farming or schooling, they shared the golf course. It was theirs.

There were players who had discovered the course. They were mostly sent there the first time by one of the increasing number of campsites or bed and breakfasts around Bumstead. The occasional golfer who was driving across Canada and saw Dougal's "Cheap Golf" sign on the Trans Canada Highway sometimes showed up. Some of these golfers kept coming back. And back. And back. There was one couple from Winnipeg who planned their summer holiday around two weeks of golf at the Folly. There was one travelling salesman of veterinary products who made regular stops at the course. There

was a group of eight golfing buddies from Saskatoon who spent a week in Bumstead every spring, golfing at the Folly and drinking far too much at Johansson's, the only B and B in the region that would take eight guys and tolerate their partying. Whoever combined a love of golf and good sense of humour appreciated the Folly. The combination of quiriness and skill testing was simply irresistible to some golfers. But while both Dougal and Melanie often met the golfers who come to the Folly, neither interacted with them much. Dougal just did not care to spend much time around people and Melanie was shy, content to cut grass and retrieve balls.

It was not that Melanie was uninterested in other sports. Baseball and hockey were a huge part of rural Saskatchewan life and every community had teams in both sports that engaged in serious rivalry with neighbouring communities. While they played these sports in the playground at the Bumstead elementary school, the problem for Melanie was that there was not much in the way of organized sports for young girls. The teams were all for boys. Girls were simply not allowed to try out for the boy's teams.

This was a shame.

At baseball, there was not a pitch that could get past her. No matter how hard or fast the pitch she always made connection with the ball. She did not really try that hard. She just could not understand why the other players could not do that. When her classmates were awed she just quietly responded, "It wasn't that hard. The ball was moving pretty slowly." She did not mean it as an insult, but some of the boys who tried to pitch her out thought she was making fun of them and started bullying her and calling her "freak" and other names. So she just quit hitting the ball.

One day when she was ten the boys needed someone to go in goal in a game of pick up hockey. They thought it would be funny to put the "freak" in the net so they could hammer her with shots. The same thing happened. She stopped all of their shots. It was like she knew where the puck was going before it got there. By this time she had realized that she did not win any friends this way, so she let every third or fourth one in. She started to play a game with herself, letting in only the shots of the boys she liked, the ones who did not bully her or call her names. Some of them were not very good hockey players so their friends were amazed at the good day they were suddenly having, while some of the top scorers were inexplicably shut out.

Over the years she started to realize that not everyone saw things the way she did so she just started to hide her skills. She did not know why or how, but her brain processed things differently. She had never heard of slow motion at seven years old, but later she would say that is how she sees some things – in slow motion. Not really slow and jerky she would say, just apparently a little slower than most other people. She could hit the fastest pitch because she could get ready. She could stop the fastest and most curving slapshot because she could get in position. But at seven years old all she knew was that she was made fun of, bullied, taunted and ostracized.

But no one ever laughed at Melanie when they came to the Folly.

When Bob and Helen saw Melanie at the golf course in 1975 she was fifteen years old and had been living with her grandmother in Regina for the past two years while she went to high school. For over half of those years, the Folly and golf had been her passion and her refuge from a world that she did not understand. The feeling for the course itself came from her father, but the golfing part she just picked up along the way. Most of the Bumstead locals did not know much more about golf than she did, so she relied for her lessons on watching the odd assortment of visitors that came to the Folly on occasion. It was too bad there was not a collection of better golfers who used the Folly during those early days or her swing might have looked a little different. The best, at least the most enthusiastic, were probably the group of young Saskatoon guys who came each spring. One of those, Bert Rollins, was actually not a bad golfer and could break one hundred fairly regularly. One day before the others arrived for their daily game he gave an eight-year-old Melanie a club and showed her how to grip it. He even let her try to hit a teed up ball and was surprised when she actually hit the ball. It went directly into the cornfield thirty yards away, but she actually hit the ball the first time she tried. He remembered whiffing it most of his first year of playing.

From that day forward, armed with that one simple ‘grip it and rip it’ lesson, a 7-iron, putter and 3 wood she found in the wheat field one day (she had learned that golfers sometimes lost their temper and threw their clubs) and a stack of 1970 golf magazines (she fell in love with Hale Irwin), an eight year old Melanie set out to master the game. Seven years later she had done it, at least by Bumstead and the Folly standards. She could turn an iron shot into the prairie wind with a draw or a fade that would take the ball to

any spot she wanted to place it. Her golf skill was not a secret, of course. The boys from Saskatoon still came every year and Bert still gave her an annual lesson, but instead of her watching them play, the highlight of their trip was playing with Melanie. She had been beating them all since she was ten and was a Folly scratch golfer by thirteen. Those old elementary school bullies now tripped over themselves to not only play golf with her but to get her out on some sort of date. But she rejected them all just like she did the boys at the high school in Regina. She had her Dad, their golf course and by now a full set of second hand clubs. She went to school because she had to, but felt her life would soon be back at the Folly.

Bob recognized Melanie from the school and although he had yet to teach her he knew that most in Regina thought her a little odd. She dressed a little differently for a start, perhaps half hippy and half farmer and rarely in feminine clothing. She actually wore coverall Carhartts on occasion and flannel plaid shirts were her staple. Unlike other girls she never wore makeup or skirts and seemed to have no interest in the pubescent class of high school boys. She was a loner. She spoke when spoken to. She spent her time on her own. She was a competent but not outstanding student. He knew that both students and staff could be cruel when someone does not conform and some of them gleefully started all sorts of rumours. There were rumours about her sexuality, mostly from boys that she rejected. The girls she ignored made fun of her height and lack of cosmetics. Teachers who could not motivate her diminished her intellect. He knew she lived with her grandmother but did not know where she came from or any other personal details.

He was not even sure if she recognized him from the school; certainly the Melanie he saw that day was nothing like the caricature he had formed from the Melanie at the high school. A very friendly and outgoing young lady met them at the parking lot and asked if they needed help with their clubs. The only odd thing Helen noticed was that, despite this being 1975 she seemed to be dressed in typical men's golf attire from the late sixties. Melanie told Helen that men often left things behind – shirts, pants, clubs for sure, and even the odd pair of shoes. A teenager, Melanie was already close to 5'10", and she had quite a collection of items in the barn she could choose from. Strangely enough, other than it being men's clothing, it all looked quite attractive on an oddly attractive young girl.



They exchanged small talk while they organized their clubs and Melanie did recognize Bob. She told them how her Dad had built the course and now takes care of the greens while still farming, and she takes care of everything else. She goes to school so she is only here fulltime during July and August, but comes home most weekends in the spring and fall to operate the course. They don't get much business here in the spring and fall anyhow, she suggested, so her Dad can manage on his own. Bob and Helen also learned that like her mother, Melanie's grandmother had left her grandfather a long time ago, had never come back and only reluctantly agreed to let Melanie stay with her during the school year.

They learned this between the parking lot and the first tee, where Melanie explained the local course rules and wished them a good game. She and Bob had no children of their own and were both teachers and Helen immediately liked Melanie. Helen asked her if she played the course as well as worked at it. Maybe she would like to play with them if she had the time?

Bob scowled at his wife. For a start, he was not one for fraternizing with his students. Secondly, this was a strange girl. She was not acting at all like she did at school and this suggested some sort of bimodal behaviour that made him uncomfortable. More importantly, as Helen knew, he was a serious golfer. He had played on the Clapshorn varsity golf team that had won a state championship in 1960 and at one time he had notions of a golf career. Golfing with Helen was a sacrifice enough – she was a fair golfer but did not share his passion for the game – so to have to babysit a country bumpkin was a little much. Helen's returning scowl was enough to make him stow away his misgivings. This was a holiday with her after all, not a golf holiday.

Melanie agreed to give them a playing tour of the course. And the game began.

Bob went first and with a classic, rhythmic swing landed the ball softly on the landing area of the 344-yard, straightaway par four first hole. This was a good thing, since Bob refused to use the free balls that were provided and used his own brand of ball. They were special and expensive but Bob insisted necessary for his level of skill.

There were no "ladies" tees at the Folly, so Helen went next and hit from the one tee box available. She hit a free ball into the middle of the cornfield between the tee box and the landing area 200 plus yards away.

Melanie went next and both Bob and Helen could not help suppressing a snicker. She was an odd sight. A too big golf shirt adorned with the logo of a grain feed lot in Saskatoon. Pleated madras pants that fit at the waist, youth golf pants from somewhere that were three inches short for her. Well-worn golf shoes with the “fashion” tongue so popular in golf shoes at the time missing on one. The only non-golf part of her attire was the hat. Useful for wind, sun, rain and the occasional snowstorm, it was a well weathered and faded baseball hat with the name "Bumstead" stenciled on the front that fit snugly over her head of massive Gaelic curls. A Saskatchewan farmer's fedora as it was called.

And there were her clubs. They were chosen from the clubs left behind by visiting golfers. Some inadvertently forgot a club or two and were not likely to ever come back for it. More than likely these were golf clubs morphed into javelins for their unwillingness to perform as the owner expected. Salvaged from the corn and wheat fields, or even from the shallow parts of the North Saskatchewan, they were now Melanie's friends. While some were old and of a high quality, and others box store cheap, the clubs in Melanie's bag, a gift from a local farmer who decided after a round at the Folly that golf was not his thing, shone like new cutlery. For the first tee shot she chose a 5-iron for the shot that Bob had just hit with a 3 wood.

Bob started to say something to Melanie but Helen jabbed him in the ribs and quietly told him to “shut up for a change and let the girl do her thing. Can't you see the look on her face?”

The look was a mixture of pleasure and intensity. There was no shyness. No reticence to act or to move. Such was her obvious focus that Helen suspected that even if Bob did say something she was sure Melanie would not hear it. There was no practice swing. There was no pausing over the ball to mentally get ready for the starting gate of the swing. No multiple regripping of the club to build up the psychic momentum to move. The walk to the ball, the stance, the swing and the contact with the ball seemed to be all one continuous, fluid movement. The ball flew in a gentle drawing arc to land five yards before the wheat field on the far side of the landing area. Without looking up she reached down and picked up her tee and only glanced down the cornfield fairway in time to see the ball land right where she knew it would.

But Bob never even saw the ball's flight. His brain was still on her swing. He had

never seen anything like it. The only thing normal in his mind was the grip. The rest was a swing somewhere between Lee Trevino, Chi Chi Rodriguez and Babe Ruth. For a start she started her swing with the club head a good foot behind the teed up ball. Then she kept her left arm and the club in a perfectly straight line. No dropping the arms straight down from the shoulders like he had been taught. And her right shoulder was very low at address. The rest happened too fast for him to really grasp or analyze. But the result was unmistakable. She hit a perfect 5-iron draw farther than he had hit his 3 wood.

Neither Bob nor Helen said anything as they all picked up their clubs and headed down the path through the cornfield to the landing area. Helen took a free ball from the landing area bucket and hit another ball into the cornfield with a muttered, “Shit! Oops, excuse me, Melanie.”

“It’s OK,” Melanie suggested. “I work on a golf course. You can’t imagine what I’ve heard from the guys that come out here.”

Bob hit his 120-yard second shot into one of the bunkers near the green while Melanie used the same swing technique to hit a shot that landed fifteen yards past the pin and spun back ten yards to leave her a five-yard uphill putt. Bob hit out of the trap to twenty yards and missed his par putt. Helen just dropped a ball on the green and four putted from twenty feet. Melanie pulled out her putter and walked over to her ball. She did not mark it. She did not wash it. Or line it up from a prone position. Or pretend her putter was a plumb bob. With no practice swings she just walked up and stroked it into the hole. She picked up her ball from the hole, put the flag back in place and walked over to the next tee box as if this was as common as brushing her teeth in the morning.

“That’s an interesting putter you have Melanie,” Bob observed. “How did you come to be using that?”

In truth he was being polite. The putter she used could not have been two feet long and she had to bend way over -- almost to parallel to use it. And the grip was a fat piece of PVC piping that had been slipped over the shaft of the club.

“Most people don’t leave their putters behind and any who throw them usually wait until they can throw them into the North Saskatchewan, so I don’t have much choice for putters to play with,” Melanie explained. “One guy suggested I putt with a hockey stick. Be a real Canadian. I tried that – was not too bad. But this other guy wrapped his putter

around the only one big tree on the Folly, on number six, and broke it in half. So I just put an old piece of PVC piping over the top of the shaft for a grip and it seems to work real well. I don't think there are any rules about using a short putter are there?"

"No. Not that I know of. But you would certainly set chins wagging at the Regina Golf and Country club."

Halfway through the round both Bob and Helen realized they were witnessing something special. Melanie's shots on the first hole were not an anomaly. She consistently hit shots exactly where she wanted with the ball flight she imagined. The only way a player could hit the par three, sixth hole that ran along the river was to play a high fade around the only big tree on the course, and to approach the green from the left side. Any other ball would never hold the green and end up at best in a greenside bunker and at worst bouncing its way along the bottom of the North Saskatchewan River towards Edmonton. Bob's \$6 balls – he tried twice to hit the green, ended up in the river. Melanie's shot was a perfect fade that landed in front of the green and bounced up to the hole.

By this time Helen was just simply enjoying the spectacle of her sanctimonious golfing husband being severely trounced by farm girl with a mix and match set of clubs, a two feet long, PVC grip putter and the 'give away' balls.

Bob offered one of his good balls to Melanie once and all she said was "I don't hit the ball, I swing the club." He and Helen looked at each other and shrugged since neither had any idea what she meant.

Helen announced once at the end of a hole that Melanie had beaten Bob and Melanie just looked at her in a strange way and said, "I what?"

The only crack in her golf game showed up on the seventh hole. The Folly stretched down two sides of the North Saskatchewan and the seventh hole was the one that took players from one side to the other and it required an in air flight of 200 yards to carry the ball to the small landing area and two more shots to make the 300 yards to the par five green. Melanie made the first and second landing areas but her third shot landed in the longish grass beside the green. Bob had been missing the tiny greens all day but this was the first one she had missed and it took her three shots to get the ball up to the pin. Bob was puzzled by this until he realized she rarely missed a green and apparently had no

experience at ‘around the green’ play. He was sure she rarely had to hit a shot from a sand trap for example.

Whatever it was, it did not seem to bother her and she happily bounced over to the next hole, her one decorative tongue on her worn out golf shoes bouncing up and down with her stride. By the end of eighteen holes, even Bob was more intent on watching Melanie play than playing his own game. He was both intrigued and puzzled. Intrigued that a young girl could actually be so good and intrigued as to how she learned such an odd swing. It also puzzled him as to why no one in the golfing world knew her. He was already working in his mind how he would address the latter. It was only at the end of the round that he started to learn how she came to be good.

It was just after lunch when the three of them finished their round. Despite it being a beautiful prairie summer’s day – clear blue skies, a gentle breeze, low humidity and moderate temperature, they had had the course and Melanie totally to themselves.

“Are you very busy here in the summer Melanie?” Helen asked.

“Not much during the week days,” Melanie replied. “We get the odd tourist passing though. The odd campers like you folks. On the weekend, though, we get groups that come up from Regina or down from Saskatoon. They seem to have a lot of fun here. They certainly hit a lot of balls into the fields!”

“Do you ever play with them?” Bob inquired.

“No. I only play by myself. Or maybe once in a while with some of the guys that have been coming down from Saskatchewan once a year since. They are the ones who give me old clubs and stuff.”

Bob hesitated for a moment and then asked what he had wanted to all day.

“Are they the ones that who taught you to play?”

“Not really. Most of them are pretty bad. One guy taught me how to hold the club and he also brought me a sawed off 7-iron he had made for me to play with. He used to come every year but I haven’t seen him for a few years. But he left some golf magazines for me to look at so I learned from them. One had a bunch of pictures of a guy named Hale Irwin swinging so I tried to look like him”

“So, you think that you look like Hale Irwin when you swing?”

“Yeah, or maybe that guy Andy Bean. He is tall like me and he’s only six years

older than me!”

“I’m sure that they would both be flattered by your mimicry,” Bob suggested. “But surely someone else helped you with your swing?”

“Doesn’t your Dad play golf?” Helen inquired.

“Nope. He hates the game and golfers.”

Bob and Helen gave each other a surprised look. Bob interjected.

“But he built this golf course? It must have taken years? And you say he still takes meticulous care of the greens? We don’t understand.”

“He hates golfers because my mom ran away with a golfer. Some guy who managed to get lost looking for Regina and ended up at the Bumstead Hotel where my mom worked as a waitress. Mom and Dad were pretty poor before Dad got Grandpa's trust so when they were first married I guess Mom needed to work. I don’t remember much since I was only four years old, but I’m told that this guy got real drunk and started hitting golf balls down the middle of Main Street. My Mom dragged him back into the Hotel before the Mounties came and then they ran off together. So my Dad hates golfers.”

“But why did he build the course?”

“Well, if you’ll excuse the language, as my Dad would say, to piss off every golfer who ever thinks he can play the game. He went to the Regina public library and studied pictures of golf courses all over the world and then built the hardest course he could come up with simply to piss off and embarrass golfers.”

“Well it certainly did that for me,” Bob admitted.

“Yup. Except, as you have learned, the problem is, it just might be too difficult, or at least too unusual. I remember we had some pros come in the early years to try it out and most left shaking their head and never came back. The RCGA would never certify it as a real golf course. So now it is mostly locals and tourists and the odd city hacker who come for the scenery as much as the golf.”

“Didn’t you learn anything about golf from any of these pros?” Helen suggested.

“Nah, not many of them had any interest in a skinny kid. Except Moe. He helped me.”

Bob immediately perked up “Moe who?”

“I don’t remember his last name. Dad met the Moe guy when he chased my mother

down to Regina to that golf tournament the pro was looking for. He was the only guy at the tournament who would talk to Dad and they became sort of friends I guess. Moe lived in his car and Dad said he didn't eat very well so Dad bought him dinner and Moe listened to dad's story. But that was 1963 and I was very little, so this is all hearsay for me. Dad will never talk about it."

"Yes...Ok, but what did you mean when you said "all except Moe?"

"Well, I guess it was there at that tournament when Dad thought up the idea for his revenge golf course. Moe told me later that Dad drank way too much Canadian Club and Dad announced he would build this course. And Moe announced that he would come and try the course when it was built."

Melanie continued to silently clean their clubs.

"What happened?" Bob urgently prompted.

"Moe won the tournament. Dad built the course. When it was done four years later Moe came and visited for a week. Even though I was only eight years old, I played with him every day," Melanie replied in a curt fashion, suggesting the story time was over. And she walked towards their car with their clubs on each shoulder, done with the story and finished for the day with them.

Bob was not finished however and started to ask another question, but Helen pulled him back.

"Enough, Bob. She's told us more than I think she has told anyone for a long time. Let's leave it there for another day."

So Bob left Melanie with a generous tip and they drove away. But, for Melanie the story was far from over. Bob Philips – and soon Clapshorn – had "discovered" Melanie McDougal.



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## **Part 1 - Chapter 3: Melanie Makes the Team**

“Ok. Let’s go,” Rebecca announced. “Coach says it’s fine.” People around Clapshorn just called him Coach and most of the players did not even know he had a name. “We can meet the team there. But he says that you have to drive.”

It was well known that Rebecca was a terror on every drivable road within a hundred miles of Clapshorn College. She had more speeding tickets in her "Beemer" than the whole student body combined, as well as three accidents, all minor fortunately, and one DUI. While the erratic driving quirks were mostly tolerated by Coach, the college officials and her parents, the DUI was not and she had received a strong sanction from all of them after getting picked up by the state police while drag stripping some local cowboys on a Montana back road. Those sanctions had included a loss of her license for three months. Most galling at the time to Rebecca was the suspension from the golf team for two of the ten regional tournaments.

That was over a year ago, and while she had not stopped driving fast or had not stopped drinking, she had at least stopped doing them at the same time. And the suspension from playing had changed her life.

“How did you ever get Coach to agree to let two innocents such as us drive a thousand miles on our own to California in...”Melanie paused and then pretended to gag. “No, you’re not ... give me a break! He’s married!”

“All the better. They tend to keep it to themselves.”

“Keep what to themselves?” Melanie admonished. “That you will fuck anything on two legs. That’s hardly a secret around campus.”

“Oh! You hurt!” Rebecca exclaimed with a mock pained expression. “Not ‘anything’ my dear sweet, naïve, virginal friend, just those who will give me either some special pleasure or some special advantage. I assure you that Coach can do the former and the permission to drive proves the latter. So get your bags and you can thank me for it later.”



The naïve and virginal comments were a good-natured tease, but the truth of the comments often cut. Melanie had indeed never been out of Saskatchewan before she came to Clapshorn as a walk on try out for the golf team. While she had spent her high school living with her grandmother, she always made it clear she was from Bumstead, Saskatchewan. When asked the name of her home Country Club she would proudly announce that she actually lived at the North Saskatchewan Golf and Country Club and that her Dad was the head professional. The truth was that there was far more country than golf where she lived, and her Dad was really a professional farmer. She learned that you had to be from somewhere, so while this little white lie served its purpose, it also contributed to the naive, country hick persona. However, she was indeed a virgin, though not from a lack of normal teenage hormonal urges. She had dated occasionally in both Bumstead and in Regina, and she remembered being in love at least twice. What most boys initially mistook for shy and willing was, in fact, shy and resolute. At high school she did not talk a lot, and the more aggressive boys thought this was the kind of confidence lack they could exploit. What it was, in fact, was a purposeful effort to simply not stand out. She fell in love with Robbie Wilson in grade six but he lost interest in her after he discovered she could both beat him up and hit a baseball better than he could. She thought Norman Patterson really liked her when he visited the Folly with his parents in the summer after grade nine, but he lost interest after she trounced him at golf.

She quite simply had yet to meet a guy that liked to be beaten at soccer, golf, baseball and most other sports by his girlfriend. So she left the dating scene pretty much alone in high school.

She and Rebecca had worked out this mutually agreeable arrangement. Rebecca would caddy for Melanie on the golf course. Melanie would “caddy” Rebecca through the other parts of her rambunctious life. While Rebecca helped Melanie avoid the odd bogie, Melanie helped Rebecca avoid college suspension, expulsion or county jail, whichever came first. They had been together with this arrangement for over a year now; ever since Melanie showed up at the first year golf try outs, and Rebecca began her DUI punishment.

It was not love at first sight for sure.

Rebecca was royally pissed that she had been suspended and as part of her

suspension had been assigned to help out the rookies trying out for the team. Each of the rookies was given an upper year “buddy” to help out. Show them the practice routine. Take them to the club house of the local golf course that was the “home” of the Clapshorn Gophers golf team and make sure the new girls to town did not get lost. As she described it later to a reporter, when she had randomly been assigned Melanie, “I pissed my pants laughing and crying. Laughing as this gangly kid dressed like a young Hale Irwin walked up to the practice range and pulled out a 5-iron that I figured Ben Hogan had made in his garage as a teenager. There was a new driver in the canvas bag that still had a Canadian Tire sale sticker on it! The crying part was that I was feeling pretty sorry for myself that I had to be her golf buddy.”

In fact the attention of everyone was on Melanie that day as she stepped up to the practice range that first time. Most knew least a little about her. Bob Philips had convinced Coach to give her what was called a provisional athletic scholarship, a fancy description of a scholarship that was conditional both upon making the team and upon subsequent performance. Philips was not worried she would make the team. He knew her talent first hand. A broken leg or some such dramatic injury was not likely from golf. Although she was an outstanding goalie in her hometown, he had made her promise not to play hockey. But he was worried her ability to socially adapt might be a problem and that is why he had asked Coach to assign a good mentor or buddy to help her out.

Coach had no such confidence in her potential to make the team. He and Bob had been teammates at Clapshorn, and he remembered Bob as competent at the game but by any means not of the pro caliber that Bob envisioned. And Coach was not used to taking the advice of Physics teachers in Canada when it came to offering scholarships, but the College President thought it might be a good idea to get some more Canadian girls coming down to Clapshorn for athletics. There were no private universities in Canada that could offer big scholarships and some teams were able to raid the Canadian high schools with abandon. The Clapshorn hockey team was mostly Canadians. In addition, the governing board and the NCAA athletic commission were giving him a little grief about gender inequality. So Coach relented, offered Melanie a try out and killed two birds with one stone. He managed to get both the President and Philips off his back.

When he saw her walk out onto the practice range his stomach turned over.

“What the fuck is that?” he exclaimed to his assistant coach, as they watched all the girls walk to the tee boxes.

“That is Bob Philip’s Canadian prodigy,” Stan Smith sarcastically pointed out.

“Yeah, well this is going to be embarrassing,” Coach suggested as they both moved closer to the range so that they could watch the spectacle.

For her part Melanie was oblivious to the chatter, the twitters and the attention that she had at the range that day. A shy and taciturn young girl without a golf club magically transformed into a focused and warmly comfortable individual with her old canvas bag over her shoulder. She knew she was dressed just the way good golfers dressed in her magazines and she knew she was good at the game. No one had beaten her in the last six years at the Folly. Bob had tried to give her new clubs and Helen had tried to get her into some new female golf attire, but Melanie would have none of it. None of the spectators could see it, but she was grinning inside from ear to ear. Without a warm up or a waggle she hit her first 5-iron. The swing was the same as the first time that Bob saw it several years ago and the ball took that same elegant draw as it climbed and descended to hit the five-foot square sign that indicated 200 yards.

Rebecca was standing behind her and was still a little awestruck by the swing she had just seen. “Too bad – you hit the sign.”

Melanie turned and saw Rebecca for the first time and with not the slightest indication of guile or cynicism quietly announced, “I was aiming for it.”

“Can you do it again?” Rebecca asked with raised eyebrows.

“I can try if you want me to?”

“Please do,” Rebecca requested with not a little sarcasm in her voice.

Out of the twenty-five balls that Melanie hit in rapid succession, as fast as she could tee them up, she hit the sign fourteen times and barely missed it on the other eleven.

“Can you do that without a tee?” This time Coach was right behind her.

So she hit twenty-five more balls from the manicured ground of the Clapshorn Golf and Country Club, ground that to Melanie was just like a tee box back home. Sunbaked prairie turf rarely let you take a divot. This time she hit the sign fifteen times.

“Wherever did you learn that swing, Melanie?” Coach asked.

“Hale, Andy, and Moe,” She replied in a quiet deadpan.

The two coaches looked with disbelief and awe. One by one, each girl on the driving range went to their bag and pulled out a favourite club. There were 3-irons and some had the new metal woods. A few had some old Persimmon 5 woods and some even tried to match Melanie's 5-iron. And the 200-yard sign became the target for thirty or so teenage girls all trying to make the Clapshorn Women's golf squad. The odd shot hit the sign and when this happened big cheers went up from the crowd of parents and other interested onlookers. But most missed and many did not even come close.

Coach realized that he was losing control of his carefully scripted golf try out session. People were crowding around Melanie looking at her clubs and asking her where she was from and who inspired her original clothing. Melanie was clearly bewildered by this attention and flustered only a few replies that no one understood. Rebecca realized that this young girl really did not know what was going on.

"Grab your clubs and come with me," she insisted as she grabbed Melanie gently by the arm and led her off the range and toward the parking lot.

"Where are we going?"

"We're going to have a drink and a chat." Rebecca insisted. "Now."

On their way to the parking lot they passed a group of boys coming into the clubhouse with their clubs.

"Hey, Rebecca! Who is this? Another new member of the hole in one club?"

"Fuck off Chad. This one isn't for you to play with," Rebecca spat back.

The other boys oohed and awed and guffawed at Chad, their obvious leader.

"Looks to me that the only playing she would be good for is on Halloween night. Where did she get those clothes?" That elicited more laughter as Rebecca hustled Melanie to her car and they drove away.

Melanie was clearly bewildered by what happened at the range and on the way to the car. "What just happened and why didn't we stay at the range?"

"Well, that ...as you refer to it...was Chad Willigen, the captain of the men's golf team and the NCGA state champion. He is our strongest hope for Clapshorn to win a place at the NCGA nationals in California next year. "

"He's very good looking."

"He's an asshole. Thinks he is king shit on the golf course. Acts like it."

“Is he good?”

“Yeah, he is good. He has been state junior champion a number of times. He even played in the US Amateur last year based upon his performance in the NCGA tournaments.”

“If he is so good why is he at Clapshorn?” Even Melanie had picked up that Clapshorn was not the top ranked school in the News Magazine national ranking of U.S. colleges and universities.

“You’re not as dumb as you look little girl. Two reasons.” Rebecca announced holding up a finger, “One. He is dumber than one of those Saskatchewan fence posts that you have. His SAT scores would not get him into any place that had any academic conscience at all. Two,” she added a second finger, “his mother is a Clapshorn.”

“He is cute though isn’t he?” Melanie mused.

Life changed dramatically for Melanie over the next few months. She received both a full scholarship and Rebecca as a constant companion. Rebecca was suspended from playing, but she could help Melanie. Despite Melanie’s obvious talent Rebecca discovered that there were holes in her playing form. She had no course management sense. She just “went for it” with every shot. She had never heard of the concept of laying up. She shot for the pin no matter how dangerously it was placed. Rebecca also discovered that Melanie had no short game at all. She was a disaster with any shot within twenty yards of the green. She was hopeless from the sand. While her ball striking was inexplicably brilliant, her putting was simply ordinary. She putted with this crazy two-foot stick with a piece of plastic on the end that most mini putts would have thrown out long ago. Coach had to do some research to see if it was in fact legal. It was, and he continued to let her use it. Rebecca was well aware of the abuse that Melanie took behind her back for the putter, and in fact the other entire oddball clubs in her bag. Even early in their relationship Rebecca was smart enough to know that Melanie had some special attributes. While others started to call her freak, and Coach continued to simply shake his head and ignore her, Rebecca knew something unusual was going on.

Rebecca once asked Melanie what she does to hit the ball so well and Melanie simply replied that, “I see the club head as it meets the ball.” Rebecca had no idea what she meant since the club head is probably moving in excess of a hundred miles and hour

as it meets the ball. By the end of the first week of try outs, while newcomers still gawked at Melanie's swing and precision, most of the other players were leaving her alone and had moved on to working on their own games. There had not been any tournaments yet, so most still viewed her and her golf in a freakish way, like they would watch a sword swallower at the circus, or someone who does trick shots on the basketball court. Few viewed her as a serious threat to their own golf position. Most of the college players, men and woman alike, had all come from country club backgrounds, schooled in the science of the golf swing from an early age. How could anyone with a swing like that, not to mention the clothes, ever be a serious golfer? But they did play some matches that week. Her scores were impressive and no one ever beat her at either match or medal play. At the end of the try outs the coaches announced the team. Melanie was named to the women's squad. At the same time, Rebecca announced that she was quitting the team. She did not need the scholarship and she had discovered a new interest in life.

Rebecca and Melanie spent most waking hours with each other during those two months, far more than Rebecca's buddy assignment called for. People were already starting to call them the odd couple. The truth was they simply liked each other. At the start Rebecca was simply fascinated with this strange young girl. She started to like spending time with someone so confident and apparently stable and who did not care much for social niceties. Though she seemed to have a thing for Chad, she did not drool over every boy that walked by. She cared nothing for the sorority group and in fact severely ticked them off by not accepting a single invitation to pledge. But Rebecca's interest in her returned to an intense fascination as she started to realize that Melanie was athletically unique.

The instances where she saw this would not be obvious to observers who were not looking for them. The first was just a pick up, mixed gender, soccer game in the residence quad. Melanie informed them that she had never played the game before. Apparently in 1977 it was not a big sport on the Canadian prairies. With various resigned grunts they let her go in goal. For the first twenty minutes she stopped every shot that came her way. Impossible shots. Great curving penalty shots. Shots by the most skillful of the men, including a penalty shot by a new student from Brazil, recruited to the school specifically for soccer. It all appeared easy to Rebecca who was watching from the

sidelines and avoided participating in any sport that required her to sweat. But that was not the only interesting part to Rebecca. Just when it appeared to the others that Melanie was doing something different, the goals started to go in. Shots that she had stopped with ease a few moments ago started to go past her into the corners, the top, and one even went between her legs. The great stops of the first twenty minutes were soon forgotten and the players focused upon their own great goal scoring athleticism. As Rebecca watched the rest of the game it suddenly struck her like a lightning bolt that Melanie was carefully selecting the saves and the goals so no one would notice either that she could stop anything she wanted, or was purposely letting people score. Rebecca looked around her at the others watching the game to see if anyone had seen what she had, but there was no buzz or looks of shock or awe, so she was careful to hold her blank expression.

The second instance occurred the evening after that pick up soccer game when most of the residence students swarmed at Mart's bar and grill. Rebecca had to talk Melanie into going, telling her that there will be men there that she should meet. In actual fact there were men there Rebecca wanted to meet and she just felt she had an obligation to drag Melanie along. Although it was against her nature and her experience, Melanie reluctantly agreed. She had started to trust Rebecca. At first she was just glad to have a friend to show her around the campus and the golf scene. As confident as she was on the course, she knew she was not socially aware. She had few girlfriends growing up and even fewer boyfriends. It was not unwillingness on her part. It just seemed that as soon as she played hockey, or baseball, much less golf, people left her alone. She was not naturally talkative, and she lived either with her Dad on the farm or her grandmother in the city, so she eventually became content with the company of her golf and herself. On the other hand Rebecca was outgoing, friendly, knew everyone and did not seem to care if Melanie could beat her at golf. In fact she seemed to revel in it.

So off they went to Mart's together.

The gathering was a typical first year student social, with its mix of adventure seeking frosh mixed with a smattering of upper year students looking for an opportunity to help initiate young students into the complex social life of college. These events were supposed to be dry but "Mart" the owner (he was actually named Richard and Mart was his long dead grandmother) tactfully turned a blind eye to the myriad of flasks and bottles

that stayed for the most part under tables and chairs and inside jackets. Melanie did not drink. Not just because of her age; most young people in k what they wanted from twelve years old onward, but because she did not like what it did to her sense of her surroundings. After only one drink she became ultra sensitive to the sights, smells and sounds around her to the point where it was uncomfortable. So while she would learn to manage these feelings later in life, as a teenager she just left the stuff alone. Rebecca had neither such sensory problems, nor any such inhibitions, and she poured liberally into her coke glass from her flask of bourbon. Melanie just drank straight coke and no one really knew the difference between what they were drinking.

Everyone was friendly but distant to Melanie. The golfing group still did not know what to make of her even though most of the girls by now had at least one round in a foursome with her. Rebecca was well known and was clearly popular, at least with the men of all years. Melanie wondered if she had dated every man at Clapshorn in her first year.

By the time the restaurant bar was ready to close, Rebecca was quite drunk, although she could still manage a reasonably straight line as she and Melanie walked out of the front door. A group of the guys from the men's golf team were hanging around outside, talking golf and leaning on shiny new cars that came with their family pedigree. One of them, Burt Van Royan, a junior champion from California, was the first to see them.

"Hey there Rebecca," he yelled! "How about you and your new friend joining us for some fun over in the men's dorm?"

Rebecca knew all too well what "fun" meant to these guys and while she had taken liberties with most of them at one time or another she was not interested tonight with Melanie walking beside her.

"Get lost Burt," she slurred. "Your driver isn't straight enough for me!"

The others thought this was hilarious and all pointed at Burt's crotch. Burt did not seem to have the same sense of humour as the rest, and from less than ten feet away fired an empty beer bottle directly at Rebecca's head. Rebecca saw the action but had no time to react and subconsciously waited for the bottle to hit her forehead. It did not get there. When she opened her eyes, Melanie was holding the bottle in her hand and the guys were looking at each other, all a little relieved that a beer bottle had not rearranged Rebecca's



forehead, but clearly surprised at where the bottle ended up.

The first to say anything was Chad, the men's golf team captain.

“Nice catch kid. Maybe you should try out for the powder puff baseball team instead of golf.”

That produced more laughter as the guys walked away to their cars and a tottering drunk Burt glowered back at both of them.

In her inebriated state, it took a moment for Rebecca to realize what had happened. “How did you do that?” she asked. “You caught the bottle!”

Melanie still had the bottle in her hand. “I just caught it that’s all. Come on. I’ll get you home.”

Even in her drunken stupor, Rebecca was starting to put some things together about Melanie. Later, in her life as a Psychology professor at Harvard, she and some other sports researchers would identify what they would call “spatial awareness” and deduce that many great athletes had a degree of awareness greater than normal. Babe Ruth was one. The hockey great Maurice Richard was another. Pele from Brazil. Jerry West. Wayne Gretzky. The list went on. These researchers studied playing footage of many athletes, and listened to recordings of their comments on their abilities, like Wayne Gretzky’s observation that he skated to where the puck was going. Or Ted William’s observation that he could see the seams on a ball as it was pitched to him. They determined that heightened “spatial awareness” turned ordinary physical specimens into extraordinary athletes. But, in 1977, a sophomore Rebecca Fried had only deduced that her new best friend simply had reflexes that were faster than her own or most other people she knew.

By the end of the first two weeks of school, Melanie had met one of the few people in her life she could talk to. And Rebecca had decided she had a new role in life – the care and feeding of Melanie McDougal. Rebecca concluded that Melanie was going to be a golf star and she was going to be her caddy. And now they found themselves, a year later, heading for the National Collegiate Golf Association, the NCGA championship in California. They were a golfer and caddy team who had never been beaten in over thirty rounds of golf.

Their only deviation was when Melanie lost a match play event against Chad when

Coach put her into one of the men's regional NCGA match play events. There had been quite a fuss at the state golf association level when they realized that M. McDougal was a young girl, but as hard as they searched they could not find any rule prohibiting her playing on the men's side. At any rate, they did not suspect she would get far against the top men of the state so they avoided the kind of nasty protest about women's equality that was springing up all across the country and let her play. The format was match play and concerned officials watched as Melanie and Rebecca walked over every man they came up against. The worst trouncing, or best, was against a private club champion from somewhere in New York State who knew Rebecca's history and made some remark about her giving the whole New York contingent a "putting" lesson back at the hotel. Melanie smashed him eight for ten. As he gave up and walked off the tenth tee Rebecca yelled some insult to his manhood that made statewide television. By the time Melanie and Chad met in the one day 36-hole match play final, sportswriters were writing descriptions of the eighteen-year-old with the unusual swing, the odd clothes and the fowl mouthed caddy who together had beaten every man they had taken on.

Chad won on the final hole when Melanie hit her approach into a sand trap and took two shots to get out. Rebecca knew that Melanie had purposely hit into the trap, had purposely taken two shots to get out and had thrown the match so she confronted Melanie. It had been perhaps the only really serious fight that they had over the past year.

"You threw that match didn't you?" Rebecca angrily charged after they returned to her car. "You don't have to answer that. I know you did. But you do owe me and the other young women in the state of Montana, maybe North America, some sort of explanation!"

Melanie said nothing. Just stared at her hands in her lap. From where they were sitting they could see the crowd of reporters and well-wishers surrounding Chad by the scorer's tent. The initial flurry of press interest in Melanie quickly disappeared after she lost and she and Rebecca had the parking lot pretty much to themselves. Melanie did not care. Rebecca did most of the talking to the press anyhow.

"You know they are now going to say this just shows that woman shouldn't compete with men?"

Melanie stared out the window at the crowd of reporters.

“I wouldn’t care if someone actually beat you!” Rebecca yelled this time. “It might even do you some good to know you aren’t so high and mighty.” It was an odd and cruel thing to say to Melanie since there was no one Rebecca had ever met who was so modest and so less self interested. The constant press jibes about her swing, her clothing, even the digs at being a hick from nowhere Saskatchewan never dug far under her skin. Melanie just cared for her own world of golf and not what anyone else thought.

Melanie looked at Rebecca and said in a quiet but firm voice, “I like him.”

“What did you say?” an incredulous Rebecca yelled. “You like who? Or whom? Or what the fuck are you talking about?”

“Chad. I like Chad. It would have really hurt him to lose to a girl or to lose period.”

Rebecca paused to collect herself before she responded. “Have you ever talked to Chad?”

“No. But I know he knows who I am.”

“Shit girl. Every golfer in the State knows who you are now.”

“No. I mean he knows who I am as a person.”

Another pause.

“And how would that be?”

“He has spoken to me several times; asked me where I was from, where I found my clubs, how I learned my swing. He wants to know me.”

Rebecca did not have the heart to tell Melanie that whatever she confided in Chad became the substance of locker room jokes. Like, “What do you get when you cross Melanie McDougal with a Vampire? Frostbite!” The guys would joke about whether she wore men’s underwear under her men’s golf pants. Whether she used her short putter for other things in her bedroom since she would never go out with any of them. The jokes grew nastier and nastier the more Melanie beat them all, both men and women, on the golf course.

“He wouldn’t like me if I beat him. I know that.”

“So let me get this straight,” replied an astonished Rebecca, “as a woman, you lost the men’s state regional because you have a crush on a boy.”

“I don’t care about winning, just playing.”

“But why do you beat everyone?”

“I don’t try and beat anyone; I just try and beat the course. If someone else does better or worse than me I really don’t care,” Melanie responded. “Except for today with Chad. Today I cared.”

Rebecca now realized several important things that altered forever her relationship with Melanie. Firstly, Melanie was still very much a little girl from the country. Maybe the taunts were right and she was just a hick. But whatever, there was a naivety that Rebecca was not sure she wanted to change. Secondly, despite her prodigious talent, she was totally non competitive, at least against people, not the golf course. As Rebecca reflected upon the wins so far she could see that the focus Melanie had was not a competitive focus but an intense focus upon only the golf course; its curve, anomalies and how the wind and local environment changed the way her ball would fly. It had nothing to do with beating anybody. Thirdly, Melanie did not see herself as a woman, or a man or anything in between. She was just a golfer. Any reference to representing the progress of womanhood in the battle of the sexes was totally lost on Melanie.

Rebecca gathered her thoughts and realized she would have to be the competitor in their relationship and she would have to look out for the interests of womanhood. It burned at her that the press, Chad and the others like him would be saying that women could never compete with men and she wished she had Melanie’s talent so she could shove their drivers up their asses.

“Ok Melanie,” Rebecca paused. “Look at me,” she ordered. “Here’s the thing. I can understand more than most the urge to mate with the opposite sex, but you and I are going to have to come to an agreement if you want me to keep caddying for you. You do want me to keep caddying with you don’t you?”

That perked Melanie’s attention.

“What? You mean because I didn’t win you would quit on me?”

“No. Not because you lost. But because you purposely lost. I won’t work with you, help you, advise you, do whatever I think necessary on the golf course to help you get better, if the next time your hormones surge you throw the game.”

There was no response from Melanie and Rebecca suddenly thought of something.

“Have you ever done this before?”

“I used to do it all the time at hockey and baseball. Otherwise no one would have

played with me.”

“No. I mean have you ever done this at golf? While here at Clapshorn?”

“Well I never threw a match, but I often didn’t win as much as I could have because it would have made some of the other girls look bad.”

Rebecca was incredulous and kicked herself for not seeing this before.

“Well, Melanie. My rule is this. If you can’t live with it you and I will part our golfing ways. You can play any kind of game you want with your shots; put shots in traps or into the water, hit a putter off the tee box, putt with your driver. I don’t fucking care. Just three things. Don’t ever think I don’t know what you are doing. I knew you hit it into the sand on purpose on eighteen. Don’t ever do it to make some guy feel better. Their egos rarely need your help. And most of all Melanie, and this is the most important--never, never play like this and lose a match.” She added a final “Never!” for emphasis.

“Are we agreed on this Melanie?” Rebecca put out her hand for a handshake.

Melanie smiled and took her hand.

“Agreed,” Melanie exclaimed, greatly relieved that after over ten years of golf, she now had a friend she did not have to keep things from or try and fool on the golf course or anywhere else. “Do we need to spit on our palms, or jab our fingers to mix our blood or something like that?”

Rebecca laughed. “No. Stupid, macho men do that. Women go off and seal their bond with a chocolate sundae! Start the car and let’s go!”

That was all a year ago now and Melanie had lived up to her part of the agreement and Rebecca to hers. As a team they had become a sensation on the NCGA women's golf circuit, each flamboyant in their own way and each doing what they did best. Melanie played golf courses and Rebecca played the crowds and the press. By the time that they had won the state women’s NCGA championship and were off to the NCGA national championships they both had national reputations. Rebecca was in her final year at Clapshorn and had already been admitted to grad school at Harvard. Melanie was much less an academic but after her third year she knew she would have her pick of Ivy League schools to continue her collegiate golf. A golf club manufacturer had approached her for sponsorship to turn professional, but even she knew she was not ready for that step.

Their infamy had had other side effects.

Bumstead, Saskatchewan was now known as the home of Melanie McDougal and there was a sign on the county road into town that said so. The Folly was suddenly getting golf visitors from all across North America as all tried their hand at the golf course that was intended to piss them off. Melanie's Dad quit farming and leased his land out to neighbours in order to devote his full attention to the course. He was even planning to build an even tougher second nine holes.

One golf magazine interviewed both Hale Irwin and Andy Bean about the "instruction" that they had given Melanie. Irwin was flattered that an eight year old Melanie had been "in love" with him, but neither ever remembered any circumstance where they would have influenced her golf. Once they saw videos of her swing they quickly distanced themselves from any responsibility, or credit, for her success.

No one in the U.S. ever asked who "Moe" was since most assumed it was just some local guy who played at the Folly. Some conscientious reporter actually looked up the 1963 Saskatchewan open where Melanie said her father met this guy named Moe, and discovered, for most Americans anyhow, Moe Norman, the winner of the 1963 Saskatchewan Open and the winner of the Canadian Amateur in 1955 and 1956, the Canadian PGA in 1966 and again just a few years ago in 1974, and many other tournaments. He was well known in Canada, but except for a few pros in the U.S., he was not known well to the American golfing public. The reporter could never get confirmation from Norman or anyone else that he actually visited the Folly after his Canadian PGA win in 1966, but one look at Melanie's swing showed some similarity to his unusual swing, so it could have been true. And he had as prodigious a talent as Melanie was showing. By the time of his death in 2004 he would have achieved fifty-five Canadian tour victories, thirty-three course records and seventeen holes in one. He would be called by one famous golfer as "the most pure ball striker alive today" and his ability to hit shot after shot perfectly straight earned him the nickname "pipeline Moe." Melanie could have had a lot worse instructors.

Much to Melanie's chagrin, Rebecca played loud and loose with the "great women's hope" card and told anyone who wanted to hear that Melanie would be a champion on the men's tour one day, not the women's. This blatant bragging ticked off both the men and women, but Rebecca did not care and Melanie left that stuff to her.

But by the time Melanie had beaten Mary for the state NCGA women's championship and they had jumped in Rebecca's 1977 BMW convertible and headed to California, there was no doubt they were something of a spectacle. So in truth, Coach was just as happy that they were making their way to California on their own and incognito. He was getting a little tired of the constant media attention on Melanie and Rebecca when he actually had a winning men's team, which he thought was far more important than the women's side. Two of his players were seniors and had already secretly signed endorsements for when they turned pro. Their victories and standing... Chad had won the State amateur last year and Burt had been third. That meant they had a lifetime access to the qualification rounds for any amateur event in the country as well as entry to qualifying events for either Q School for the PGA or the new nationwide professional tour. They could even enter the long series of qualifying rounds for the U.S. Open if they wished. They were good. They had done much for Coach's reputation in the golf world, and after his golfers did well in the nationals he would have offers from much larger schools for much larger paychecks. Melanie was in fact a little bit of a fly in his aspirational plans since he could neither take credit for her swing nor for her success. He was not sure he wanted to take much credit since her swing was so odd. She was basically uncoachable. He reveled in the fame that she brought to the school, but tried his best to deflect the attention to the star men golfers. He would be driving Burt and Chad down to California himself. A parent was driving the other female golfer from Clapshorn. To Coach's relief, Rebecca and Melanie were on their own.



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## **Part 1 - Chapter 4: California**

The trip was uneventful for both. Melanie drove as usual. Rebecca felt far safer with Melanie behind the wheel and Melanie loved to drive the luxury car and she loved to drive it fast. Rebecca called it Melanie's only submission to recklessness. She had been driving the old F150 on the farm since she was old enough to reach the pedals and like most farm kids had a feeling for machinery and driving fast on gravel roads. They stayed off the freeway system as much as possible, enjoying the back road scenery and emptiness. Rebecca grew up with massed traffic, not speed, so she was more than happy to let Melanie deal with the open roads of the Midwest.

Driving was a time when they talked.

"So, do you miss playing?" Melanie asked as they pulled off the I 15 for a parallel but quieter road.

"I still play with you."

"I mean the competition. You are still better than the other girls on the team. Coach was some ticked when you said you were quitting just to caddy."

"Look. First of all, Coach gets his rewards so don't worry about him. Secondly, don't say "just" when you refer to being a caddy. It's a brutal job to have to follow someone like you around all day, picking up your ball, carrying your clubs and getting you dates."

They both laughed since they knew Melanie's dating life was non-existent. "Come on, be serious," Melanie whined as she accelerated to pass a farm truck loaded with hay. "Don't you miss it? I don't know what I would do if I couldn't play."

"Surely you realize by now, my dear, that I am not like you. Apart from being considerably more attractive to the opposite sex."



“More available you mean,” Melanie interjected.

“What? You don’t think boys are irresistibly attracted to a perfectly formed Hassidic Jewish nose? And my figure? Not like your skinny little ass! I have something that they can get a hold of. Who can ignore my charming New Yoke accent and personality? What’s not to like and love?”

“Right. More available. But you aren’t answering my question.”

“Alright. Alright,” Rebecca turned serious. “Unlike you Melanie, I did not choose golf. My parents chose it for me. They both grew up relatively poor in the garment district of New York where their fathers had started a fabric import export operation, bringing in expensive cotton from Egypt and new synthetics from Asia. I gather it was tough going at the start. Understandably, the American textile industry was not keen on competitive imports. I guess they eventually did very well and while my grandparents never left the “district” as they called it, they bought Mom and Dad a big home on the Island as a wedding present. Dad took over the business. He was very good at both the business and investing, and now our family is quite well off you might say. However, even after they made lots of money, Mom and Dad both felt they were still considered those “upstart Jews from the garment district”. They figured that if we all joined the country club and all played golf and tennis as soon as we could walk, and graduate later in life to lawn bowling, we would become one of the gang. My older brother Herb was the designated tennis player. Don’t ask where he lives now. I was the designated golfer. Took lessons from the time I was five. Did all the junior tournament stuff, the club champion stuff, dressed the way I should and to my family's relief, I turned out to be pretty good at the game. By high school I was one of the best young women prospects in the state. My parents already had made a big enough donation to ensure my admission to an Ivy League university.”

Rebecca paused to take a swig from the can of beer that she held between her legs.

“Blah. Blah. I know all of this,” Melanie said. “You’ve told me many times how rich and good you are. How you only ended up at Claphorn because you blew the president of the country club’s fourteen-year-old son in the garden shed and followed that up with some sort of scandal at the private school you went to. But none of that explains why you quit playing.”

“Thanks for that reminder,” Rebecca stayed serious. “I guess what I’m trying to say Melanie, is that playing golf was never something that I chose to do. It seemed that my life was orchestrated for me either by my parents or some coach or other. The only thing I actually did have control over was what I did with my body and I liked that control and still do. But playing golf? It was just something I did, not something that burned inside me that had to be nurtured and fed. Until I met you and watched you play I didn’t think it was very important. It’s just a game after all.”

Melanie had the BMW cruising along the empty back road at over eighty mph. Trees and scenery were whipping by them in a blur while the long straight road seemed to lay unchanging in front of them. Soon they would be in the foothills of the Rockies and while the speed would go down, the twists and turns and elevations would partner with Melanie’s driving skill to make Rebecca shriek with either fear or excitement. But for now the road was straight and wide and they could talk as well as drive.

“I don’t understand Rebecca? How do I fit into this?”

“You mean apart from the fact that watching you helped me realize I will never be good enough to make golf a lifetime avocation? My poor parents will have to wait for some grandchild to have the next great golf hope. To be truthful, I’m not sure I totally understand it either Melanie. But now I know that I do indeed have something burning inside me that I need to feed. I feel the urge to know how you are so good at what you do, and I need to know how good you can actually get.”

They were both lost in their own thoughts for a moment, the silence inside the car blending with the warm thrum of the car’s engine.

After a long pause, Rebecca added. “And without me on your bag you would be a royal fuck up!”

Their laughter broke up the seriousness of the moment. Melanie had never heard Rebecca speak in such a thoughtful way when either describing herself or golf. She had simply thought Rebecca just didn’t want to play anymore and helping out with the team was a way of staying socially active as well as keeping some of her scholarship. She needed to know more.

“So your quitting the team was my fault?” Melanie was astonished.

“Right. So let’s talk about you Melanie. Maybe you will understand a little more,”

Rebecca offered. “Why do you think you are so good at the game?”

They had often talked about how Melanie developed her swing and they had a good laugh over Andy Bean and Hale Irwin. It was only recently a student sports reporter from Montana State actually found Moe Norman in Kitchener, Canada and tried to talk to him about Melanie. Norman had never heard of her and hung up on him, but as the reporter pointed out in his article, there was no mistaking the similarity between their swings. Melanie’s was more graceful and arcing, with a wider and more fulsome backswing. Nights in bed reading the golf magazines from the seventies, and staring at the Hale Irwin swing broken down in sequential photos had some influence for sure. Years of well meaning people trying to correct what they thought was wrong – only her grip was safe from attack – had changed some aspects of what her swing looked like as a kid who had watched Moe Norman hit a hundred “pipeline” irons. Being half a foot taller required swing adjustments. But she still had the one plane swing that started with a straight stiff armed address with the club starting a foot behind the ball, teed up or not. If she stayed in golfing very long, and continued the success that she had started in college, someone somewhere would analyze her swing for the things she was doing right rather than what she was doing wrong. There was certainly no question that whatever she was doing, the club head met the ball with incredible force and controlled consistency.

That’s not what Rebecca meant. They had been all over that many times and Rebecca had just accepted that whatever Melanie was doing it worked for her. She often argued that some of the legendary golfers like Arnold Palmer, Lee Trevino or Chi Chi Rodriguez, had swings that would hardly make them centrefold for Golf World magazine today. What she meant was that she saw many other instances where Melanie reacted in a way she could not. That day on the soccer pitch and the night that Melanie caught the beer bottle were just two examples. Driving was another one of them. More than once Melanie had seemed to anticipate an action by another driver that avoided an accident.

“I guess I see things differently,” Melanie offered.

“What? Like superman? Do you jump tall buildings, run faster than a locomotive as well?”

Melanie responded quickly and as angrily as Rebecca had ever seen. “Shut up. I’m not a comic book freak.”

“OK. OK. I’m sorry. What do you mean that you see things differently?”

“Well there are several ways. Driving for example, I can see that car coming at us will turn in front of us and I’ll have to be careful.”

They both paused and waited as the oncoming farm truck turned in front of them. It was not a dangerous move, but Melanie had to slow down a bit from 80 mph.

Rebecca was astonished. “My God, you can see into the future!” She exclaimed.

Melanie laughed. “No such luck or I’d know if Chad would marry me when we graduate!” she teased.

“It has taken me a long time in my life to figure it out myself Rebecca, but as far as I can figure it I am simply good at reading the signs and reacting. I think what I see is there for others to see, it is just that most either don’t see it or do not process it.”

“Give me another example.”

“Ok, the soccer game you mentioned. Each time someone shot at me they told me with their eyes when they were going to shoot and where. It was easy to anticipate and get in front of the shot. It appears to me that the shot comes at me in slow motion.”

Rebecca was more than curious now.

“What about the beer bottle that time Burt threw it at me?”

“That was easy. You were such a jerk I would have thrown a beer bottle at you too. I just intuitively put together Burt’s personality with the booze and the bottle in his hand and I knew he would throw it. His aim was better than I anticipated though so while my hand was already moving to stop the throw before he did it, I was lucky to catch the bottle.”

Then Rebecca moved to the question that she really wanted to ask.

“Have you thought about how this works with a golf club?”

“Partly,” Melanie replied. “I know I have a good sense of the grass, the wind and some of the other external variables that come into play on a golf shot. I am able to instinctively adjust my swing to these factors. I suppose that just comes from my days hitting an endless number of balls at the Folly and contending with the prairie wind that comes from one way one moment and swirls from another the next. But I still can’t explain why I can so clearly see my club head make contact with the ball. I used to think everyone saw this, but if that was so, no one would miss hit a shot. But most people do,

and I don't."

Melanie paused and Rebecca was uncharacteristically quiet and patient as she gathered her thoughts. Rebecca had never heard Melanie talk like this and she was not about to break the spell now. She knew she was onto something special, but if Melanie did not know what it was, or could not describe it, Rebecca knew that she could not.

After a few miles Melanie offered a final thought.

"So I guess the answer would be no. I don't know what makes me a different golfer than the other girls. Maybe I am a freak."

Rebecca sensed that this line of conversation had gone far enough for the time being.

"Yup," She offered. "But a very ugly one for sure! Let's stop at that roadhouse ahead for lunch."

As they approached the small town of Duckhaven, Montana, population 850, Melanie slowed to the speed limit since she knew that state troopers patrolled the edges of towns looking for drivers who failed to slow from fifty mph to thirty. It would have been too much excitement in their dreary cop lives to catch an eighty mph couple of Clapshorn Coeds. So Melanie slowed to what seemed like a crawl to both of them at this point and pulled over for lunch. The conversation of Melanie's golf skill was left in the car. But it never left Rebecca's mind as they continued on their journey to California.



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## **Part 1 - Chapter 5: Love and Other Things**

They arrived in San Diego the next day after twenty hours of driving from Billings. They had stayed the previous night in a motel just outside of Salt Lake City. During the second day Rebecca said that she wanted to stop in Vegas, only for a month or so she

suggested, but Melanie would not stop and they arrived in Ramona, California at dinnertime on the second day.

The tournament was actually at Cedar Grove Country Club just north of San Diego. Most of the collegiate players had seen the course on TV many times as both the men's and women's pro tour had a stop there. Most had not had the good fortune to play there, so the organizers had arranged for four days of practice rounds on the course before the three-day championship. The Clapshorn golf coach had decided that having his players staying near the course with over two hundred men and women from all around the U.S. was asking for trouble, so he booked a group of rooms at a public golf course just outside of Ramona, an hour's drive from Cedar Grove. It was fall so not high season for most golfers. The locals felt anything under 75 degrees Fahrenheit was not suitable for golf and the place had yet to be swarmed by the Canadian snowbirds who kept the California economy afloat. So the Clapshorn contingent – men and women players, plus a caddy for each, plus the coaches, plus some helicopter parents, plus one reporter from the Helena news – eighteen all together had the resort and the course much to themselves as they practiced and prepared for the championship. Since their golf day to practice at Cedar Grove was the third day; they had three days to enjoy the pleasure of the small town life and public links of Ramona, California.

The golf was the easy part for Melanie. It was a late sunny October and the temperature was still in the low seventies during the day. It reminded Melanie of early fall on the prairies. She liked the fall at home. The rush of the summer golfing was over and she would have the course to herself. The grass, including the greens, grew a little more slowly so there was less cutting to do. At this time of the year, she would have been in school, but the days were still long enough to play by herself for at least three hours after school and the weekends were all her own. When her father finished the harvest in early October he often took off for a week or two. He said he was going to Saskatoon to look at farm equipment, but Melanie had once found a hotel receipt for Edmonton, Alberta, so she knew that he was not going to, or doing, what he said. She did not really care as long as she was left on her own. Once when she was thirteen, her father reluctantly agreed to leave her on her own, but only if Hank and Mary Snowden, their closest neighbour agreed to drop in and check on her. They were good neighbours, quite

religious, and generously brought some food when they dropped in as well. Their son Bruce was only a year older than Melanie and he sometimes brought her dinner or just came over to check on her safety.

Melanie liked Bruce. Unlike many of the other boys he had never made fun of her and spoke kindly of her passion for the Folly and her own golf. She came across to other boys as cold and unapproachable, but it was neither. She was just basically painfully shy and in any conversation other than golf she felt totally inadequate, almost embarrassed to be around people. It became easy for her to simply play the hick from Bumstead. Nevertheless, she was hurt that the boys thought she was something other than a young girl with the same urges and interests as even someone like Rebecca, though she accepted that it was mostly her own fault for rebuffing the guys who came after her. Melanie was not unattractive. By the time she arrived at Clapshorn she was taller than most of the girls...slender but athletic...and her eighteen-year-old figure was showing signs of being more woman than girl. Despite her long black hair, her facial features were Scottish Highland rugged. One of the boys once called her an Amazon, and although at the time it was more a reference to 250-yard drives, it probably could have been an apt description of both her appearance and her character. Shyness did not mean weak as a lot of young men learned as they tried to romance an unreceptive target. There was one boy at Clapshorn who kept after her, and after months of rejection he gave up and started the rumour that she was gay. She spent so much time with Rebecca it was an easy rumour to start, except that Rebecca's sexual activity put to rest any notion of which gender she at least enjoyed. When Melanie confronted him one evening on the driving range after everyone had left, all she said was "Stop it." She glared at him and walked away and as he told his friends later, he was truly afraid of the "freak."

It certainly was not that she was uninterested in the opposite sex by any means. Or that she had not any experience with men.

Her earliest experience happened one day when her father was away and Bruce came alone to check on her. As they sat in the barn complaining about the teachers at their school, the friends that they liked and did not like, and other totally inconsequential things, he leaned over and clumsily tried to kiss her. She was so shocked she started laughing and fell off the milking stool she was sitting on.

“I’m so sorry,” Bruce apologized, turning beet red in embarrassment. “I just thought it was the right thing to do. I...ah...ah...”

Suddenly she turned very serious and Bruce thought for a moment she was going to cry. But Melanie did not cry. She looked up at Bruce from the floor of the barn and challenged him.

“I’ll show you mine if you show me yours.”

For a moment Bruce did not know what she meant and when he did he tripped over a tongue that suddenly grew thick, and he blurted,

“You first.”

Melanie proceeded to undo her pants and dropped them to the floor.

Bruce developed an even deeper blush.

“Underwear too,” he challenged.

“You drop your pants first,” she responded.

Bruce fumbled with his belt and undid the fly, but his pants caught on a bulge at his crotch. He wiggled and they went to the floor and Melanie could see that his penis, she assumed, was sticking straight out into his underwear.

“Now your underwear,” Bruce ordered in a very husky voice.

“Melanie did as he said and her underwear came down to her ankles, but she could not take her eyes off the bulge. At the same time she felt a warming sensation between her own legs.

Bruce could not help staring at the tuft of emerging reddish down between Melanie’s thighs, but probably missed the tinge of moisture showing at the edges of the hair. He dropped his underwear and Melanie stole a glance at her first male erect penis. The first thing that struck her was how he had much more hair than she did, but she quickly dismissed the hair thing when she saw how stiff and large Bruce had become. He was a large boy for his age but the size of this penis caused her to audibly gasp. She was a farm girl and knew how procreation worked, but she could not imagine how something that size could fit in her small opening.

They stood there looking at each other for a moment, Melanie transfixed on Bruce and wondering how a man could do this, and laughing to herself as she realized men really were not any different than her Dad’s old collie that she had seen mount a



wandering bitch one day. Bruce stared equally transfixed on Melanie's private parts and suddenly shuddered, bent over and obviously flustered, grabbed his underwear and pants and quickly shuffled out of the barn.

Bruce never brought her dinner again and it would be a while before Melanie would ever see an erect penis again. She learned two important lessons mothers were supposed to tell their daughters. Men are controlled by what their penis tells them to do. The warmth between her legs and her own imagination and the beautiful young men in the golf magazines could bring her pleasure.

In high school there had been a couple of boys who she liked and she let one fondle her immature breasts on a date at the local drive in theatre. She liked the kissing and actually enjoyed the bumbling attempts at fondling, but hated the notion that once a boy had touched her she somehow belonged to him. Consequently most of her encounters were one off events and that allowed her to explore her own sexuality without commitment. She learned she had the power to control. On the first date or the tenth, she discovered that most of the high school boys were willing to go as far as she would let them. By the time she arrived at Clapshorn, while still a virgin, she knew that playful sex was fun, she knew what boys wanted, she knew how to make them mess their pants and she knew how to be in control of the situation. She soon learned that the Clapshorn men were different than the pubescent farm boys in Regina.

In the first instance she quickly realized that, by and large, they were not as polite or considerate. She could get a Regina boy to stop when she wanted. Sometimes she let a boy in high school reach under her panties and sometimes she did not, it depended upon her mood. But she could control the when and the how. Most importantly she could stop the action whenever she wanted. She had learned, even from that first event with Bruce that boys quickly lost their aggressiveness and took their lives back from their penis once they "had release" as she started to call it to herself. She soon learned that a little quick hand action on her part ended the protestations of love and devotion and sent her home sooner than later. In most instances, like Bruce, she never heard from the boy again.

This tactic didn't work so well at Clapshorn.

During frosh week she agreed to a date with one of the other boys she had met when they were both trying out for the golf team. He was from New Mexico and a tall boy,

useful given her own height, and he reminded her a little bit of long ago Bruce. He seemed shy and nice at the golf range and dinner at a local pizza hang out was not too risky an adventure. He turned out to be quite talkative, also useful since life at the Folly and living with her grandmother had never taught her the art of small talk. She learned that his family was wealthy, his major was business, he aspired to be a golf pro and his dog and horse were his closest friends. The only thing he ever asked her was the standard “where did you learn that funny swing?” And she gave the standard answer “Hale, Andy and Moe.” He gave her an odd look and continued to tell her how cold it was in Canada and he knew that because he went fishing there one spring with his dad and brothers and they froze. That would never happen in New Mexico.

This turned out to be the pattern for any time she tried to date any of the men at Clapshorn, especially the golfing ones. They never really seemed interested in her as a person and like this first guy they just wanted to get over the niceties as quickly as they could so they could get to the real purpose of a date at Clapshorn. In this instance it was out to the covered box of his very large pickup and have sex. Real sex. Not the high school pet until you are hot and go home sex. But the real, get it inside her as fast as he could, sex. She realized what was happening when he proudly brought out a pack of condoms as soon as they climbed into the truck and she was too surprised to do anything except open the door of the truck and run. She realized she should have said something to him but words never came easily to her and the embarrassment of her action was too much to try and explain.

On the following Monday she was still so embarrassed that she would have stayed away from the golf practice if Rebecca had not forced her to attend. She imagined that Turk had told the other guys she was not only a virgin, but a freak, and they would all be laughing at her for just one more thing other than her clothes, swing and social reticence. It turned out the opposite. The guys were suddenly more friendly than usual and one even offered to help her with her bags from the storage in the clubhouse. She learned later that Turk, of course, in a defense of his New Mexican manhood told a very different story of the outcome of that first date and soon she was deluged with requests for dates. It took her two dates to effectively deal with the rumour Turk had started and after that the offers quickly dried up.

The only other difficult time she had was when, early in her first fall at Clapshorn, she reluctantly agreed to a date with Burt Van Royan, one of the men golfers. She really did not like him very much. He was a good golfer, maybe the second best golfer on the team, something of a braggart, a bully with the other younger boys and apparently from a very wealthy family. The latter was not unusual at Clapshorn. She thought they could talk golf at least. She did not grow to like him any more over dinner since all he talked about was how important his family was and how he was going to be a pro golfer. He didn't ask her one thing about herself. Afterward he became very aggressive when she refused to have sex and she actually had to fight him off as he tried to pin her down on the front seat of his car parked in a dark corner of the pizza joint parking lot. They had not even made out and she had not given any indication that she even wanted to kiss him. Which she did not. Fortunately he was not used to rejection and certainly not used to someone of Melanie's size, strength and reflexes. A knee to his groin and a palm to his nose and he was off her and she was out the door of the car to shouts of "bitch" and "cockteaser!"

The latter invective bothered her a little and made her rethink her whole approach to dating. But it was not important since she realized her dating days were going to be limited from that time forward. She was not beautiful. Ruggedly attractive maybe, but not beautiful. She was taller than most guys. She was not rich. She was not connected, as they said at Clapshorn. Her quiet demeanour kept anyone from knowing how interesting she actually was. She was considered something of a freak on the golf course. She was still a virgin and had no intention of letting that go. There was no moral or religious intent in that position. It was just that her body was under her control and she liked to be in control. Her virginity would go when she wanted, not when some horny, sophomore wanted it. Collectively, these factors did not make Melanie a very desirable fixture on the dating scene and that was fine with her and she devoted her life from the first few dating experiences forward to golf and her schooling. In the latter she found she had a passion and aptitude for languages and became a linguistics major in French and Spanish. Over the next year she left the dating scene alone and found success and fulfillment in both the golf and her academics and she was as content as she had been for many years.

The smell and sounds of the fall gave Melanie a comfortable, warm feeling and she smiled often as she and Rebecca worked at their game and played various match events

with the other team members, men and women alike. She felt ready for their day at Cedar Grove. The evenings had been pleasant as well. The Clapshorn group would meet together for dinner and the talk was all golf; the different grass on the greens, the prevailing winds, the effect of altitude on distance, who was their competition and so on. This was Melanie's world and as one of the top seeded women going into the national tournament she felt important and confident. She even felt that these people actually liked her. Coach had long ago given up trying to change her swing. Other parents had put aside their jealousy for the sake of Clapshorn. The other woman player that made the nationals was delighted she was on the team and Melanie's quiet, unassuming nature and the fact she was not much competition for male interest gave her good friends amongst the other woman golfers. She loved Rebecca and did not know what she would do without her. Their friendship had been the most important thing in Melanie's life over the past two years and as they all sat together at dinner at the Ramona Lodge, Melanie was content, in control of her life and confident of her golf. The only small dark side was with the men golfers. Burt had never been friendly to her after his aborted attack. While Chad had been polite and seemingly interested in her he had never asked her out. She understood that. He was one of the most desirable men on campus, taller than Melanie, classic all American good looks, from a very well to do family in California, a top ranked collegiate golfer and apparently a nice guy. He had dated many girls, mostly from the sorority, but so far she had learned there was nothing steady. In the back of her mind there was the nagging question as to why he was at Clapshorn and not UCLA, but there was enough girl in her to be as enamoured as the sorority gang over the prospects of a relationship with Chad. So she was very surprised when he asked to her to go to a movie with him after their dinner the night before the practice day.

The dinner was over and the staff was clearing the dishes. Separate conversations were starting as people rose from their seats. Melanie saw Rebecca say something to Coach and walk away and Melanie suddenly realized where Rebecca had gone each evening leaving her alone in their suite. Burt and Chad talked briefly before Chad came over to Melanie.

“Hey Melanie!” he greeted her.

“Hey yourself.”

“So how is the practice session going? You getting used to this California air? I miss it. You can smell the ocean sixty miles away here in Ramona,” he wistfully exclaimed.

“Fine,” She replied. ”California is nice.”

She immediately thought how stupid she must have sounded. California is nice; great witty reply that was.

But she was nervous and Chad did not seem to notice or care.

“Look. I’ve had enough golf chat for the day. Let’s go out to an early show at the local theatre in Ramona. Rebecca will let you use her car. It’s only a few miles. We can get away from this crew for a while and still get home before Coach’s curfew.”

Melanie had the car keys so she did not have to ask Rebecca, although in hindsight she had often wished she had told Rebecca what she was doing. Chad was one of the guys that Rebecca had never dated. She often said that he behaved strangely around women, though Melanie would just reply in a dramatically fake breathless voice “but he is so dreamy!”...dragging out the eee in dreamy. They laughed at this, but Melanie never took Rebecca’s whims very seriously.

So she agreed and they went to see “The Deer Hunter.” Afterward in the car going back to the lodge they even discussed and actually debated the meaning and impact of the post Vietnam War era movie on young people like them today. It had been a long time since any boy had shown any interest in her opinion or the fact that she was actually quite smart, not just a golfer. True to his word, they never even raised the subject of golf. As they drove back, Melanie was feeling emotions she had never felt before, emotions that went beyond the usual hormone driven reaction and went into human understanding and bonding. She felt that she and Chad were connecting very deeply and at a very different level than she had ever done with anyone except perhaps her father. She was amazed it was happening so quickly. It was true she had known Chad for two years, but the anticipation of what was happening to her at this moment made the moment all the more intense. When Chad suggested they go up to the suite he shared with Burt she immediately agreed, simply so she could keep being with him. She did not want the evening to end.

Each suite had two bedrooms, each with their own full bathroom, separated by a combined kitchen and living room. The units even had working fireplaces. Coach had

managed to get a great deal since it was off-season for the resort and he felt that more space and privacy would be good for the golfers. Melanie and Rebecca shared a unit similar to Burt's and Chad's and while she and Rebecca were great friends and got along well, their living habits were different. Rebecca stayed up late and liked to sleep late while Melanie was the opposite. So she was glad of the private space.

The unit was dark as they entered. Chad flicked the wall switch and Melanie quickly scanned the room to see that it was the same layout as the one she was in.

"Looks like no one else is here," she observed.

"Yeah," Chad explained. "Burt stays out later than Coach's curfew, but never seems to get caught or get in trouble."

"Rebecca too. She goes out at night and sometimes does not get back until early in the morning. Sometimes I am up before she goes to bed."

"You're a regular farm girl aren't you?"

Melanie was not sure if that was a question or a comment or if it was meant in a kindly fashion or not, but she did not have a chance to think about it before Chad quickly continued.

"So do you think you are as good as the guys at golf?" Chad asked as he poured a beer without offering her one.

Melanie hesitated. The conversation was not going where she thought it would when she agreed to come back with Chad. She took a quick glance at the beer, bubbles still rising in the glass and wondered for a second why he did not offer her a drink. However it was well known that she did not drink so that was probably it.

Chad saw the glance.

"Want a beer do you? Gonna start drinking like the rest of us? Here." He went to the fridge and handed her a bottle but did not open it.

"So answer my question farm girl," he demanded.

Melanie was getting a little bothered at his tone and responded defensively.

"I can beat anyone I want."

"Even me?"

Melanie did not want to respond.

"What's this all about Chad? I don't want to talk about golf. I went out with you

tonight and came back here with ...” she paused, and then blurted out “... to be with you.”

She did not know where that came from, but she knew it was true. Somewhere during the evening, during the movie as he held her hand, the drive back to the suites, or perhaps months before Melanie knew that Chad was the man with whom she was willing to go past the kissing and petting.

Chad smiled, put down the beer glass and pulled her over and kissed her. It was rougher than she had imagined, but by now her own willingness and Chad’s aggressiveness fed on each other and the kissing progressed very quickly to fumbling and groping of layers of clothing. Chad pulled her sweater over her head to expose her brassiere while Melanie fumbled with his belt and zipper. She saw the familiar bulge in his underwear and for a moment she was back in the barn at the Folly with Bruce. But this time she pulled down the underwear and Chad’s penis sprung over the elastic as she pulled the underwear down. She had a fleeting thought he was even bigger than Bruce. Still in her bra, Chad pushed her back onto the floor and undid her pants and belt and tried to pull her pants off by the cuffs but they stuck on her ass. She helped him, lifting her ass off the ground and moving the waist of her pants over her butt. He did the rest, pulling off the pants and underwear at the same time and throwing them aside. Then he lunged on top of her.

“Do you have protection?” she asked, slightly out of breath.

By this time she was very wet with anticipation. She had been waiting for this for what seemed like her whole life and she wanted it to be the sensual event she had imagined and Chad’s aggressive passion had filled sensitive parts of her body with a kind of urgent desire she had never experienced and for once she was losing control and she liked it.

Chad did not respond. He just looked down on her from a push-up position and with a hard push entered her as far as he could go.

Melanie gasped and her eyes widened as she felt the full sensation of a man’s cock inside her. There was no sensation of pain that so many romance novels had described would come with the first time. There may be blood. She did not know since her crotch area was so wet by now. She did know that the feeling was fulfilling and natural and she felt her body and her emotions rise with Chad’s thrusts.

And suddenly it was over. She had been so lost in her own arousal she was not sure what happened, but whatever it was, Chad was now out of her and starting to get up. Melanie grabbed his arm. She wanted him to stay and do it again. She was not nearly finished.

“Want more do you? Girls are all the same when they get a taste of the big dog,” Chad said gleefully as he pushed himself up from on top of her. “I’ll be back in a moment. Just going to the can.” He stood up and as he went into his bedroom to go to the washroom he turned off the living room lights.

As Melanie lay there in the darkness she was just starting to think about his comment and the fact he had not used a safe when she heard his bare feet padding across the floor and in seconds he was on top of her again and she felt his cock, already stiff again searching out her vagina and he was in again and thrusting hard. She sensed that something was different, but by now she was lost in her own passion and her powers of rationale or observation were lost in the thrust of her own, violent, release.

It was soon over again. This time she felt it as Chad spurted inside her for the second time and as she reached up in the darkness to grab his head to pull him down for a kiss she grabbed a head of hair that was wiry and fulsome while Chad’s was flat and smooth and she came to the sudden realization that this was not Chad who had just entered her.

She screamed. Not a scream of fear, but rather one of revulsion and confusion.

“Fuck, she knows,” the voice on top of her announced, a voice that she now recognized as Chad’s caddy Frank, a boy the same size and build as Chad but with very different coloring and hair. At the same time the light went on and she first saw Chad, still without his pants on and, she instantly thought, a very limp prick. Beside him was Burt with his pants off and a very stiff prick and his caddy Henry standing behind them still dressed.

“Hi Melanie,” Burt glared. “I’m next.”

By this time the full realization of what was happening hit Melanie so hard it irreparably damaged parts of her she did not know existed. She quickly scrambled to her feet. She was still in her bra and juices of various kinds were running down the inside of her thigh.

“It’s time you learned what we do with uppity farm girls at Clapshorn, “Burt



announced as he approached her.

For Melanie, it all started to move in slow motion. As Burt moved quickly towards her she lashed out with her foot and although aiming for the penis she caught him on the thigh. It was enough to slow him down but he lashed out with a fist that she easily ducked and pushed aside. Chad joined in and he tried to hit her and she ducked that easily as well and whacked him with an open fist on the side of his head.

“What the fuck!” he exclaimed as he reached up with his hand to feel for blood where she had hit him.

In the meantime her second kick at Burt hit home and he crumpled to the floor.

“Give us a hand here Henry!” Burt yelled at his caddy, who up until this point had been watching, stunned and wide eyed.

Both Burt and Chad were back on their feet and swinging fists at Melanie’s head as fast as they could and Melanie just kept ducking or fending them off, relying on her reflexes and instincts to stay away from the hits and at the same time scanning the room to see if Henry was going to start hitting as well, but he still just stood there frozen and stunned.

And then it was dark again. She had forgotten Frank was in the room and he had come up behind and put a pillow cover over her head and suddenly her world was back to normal motion and normal ordinary person time. As she reached back to get the case off her head she felt strong hands grab her arms.

“No, don’t hit her!” Henry implored, apparently stopping a fist that she could not see.

“What’s your problem? Burt sneered. “Don’t you want to have some fun too?”

The reply was hesitant, but clear.

“Sure I do. But unless you plan to kill her it would be prudent to not leave any marks.”

“Good thinking. That’s why you’re a caddy.”

By this time Chad, Burt and Frank had Melanie back down on the floor and as she kept struggling they ripped up a bed sheet and tied her hands and ankles to the four corners of the pull out bed in the living room, the pillowcase still over her head.

Burt went first. Then Chad again. And Frank again. And Burt again. She smelled the

beer on their breaths as they entered her over and over again, but she was not there. She was back at the Folly and teeing off at the first hole. Her tee shot was perfect, gently drawing into warm Saskatchewan breeze as it bounced in the middle of the landing area and rolled to stop in a perfect lie. By the time it all stopped and she realized she was back in a cheap hotel suite in Ramona, California, she had finished all eighteen holes with the lowest score she had ever had.

Chad leaned over her.

“Bitch, “he spit out. "I hope this teaches you I can take you whenever I want.”

Someone untied her hands. “Be gone in an hour or we’ll do it all again.” Burt sneered as he closed the suite door behind him.

And she was alone.



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## **Part 1 - Chapter 6: The Warm up**

Rebecca had been in her own bed for only a few hours when the alarm went off. She sat up in a panic, for a moment not remembering where she was, what she was or what she was supposed to do. For a moment she thought she had fallen asleep in Coach’s bed, but she quickly looked around the room and was comforted by the surroundings of her room in the unit she shared with Melanie. She and Melanie were to tee off at the course in an hour and the course was a half hour’s drive away so she had to be quick as she showered, dressed and went out to the kitchen for a cup of coffee. She never gave Melanie a thought as she knew Melanie did not need any alarm clock or any caddie to either wake her up or get her ready for the practice day. True to form, as Rebecca left her room and walked to the kitchen, Melanie was sitting at the kitchen table, already dressed to play.

“Let’s go.”

“Give me a moment to get a coffee at least, “ Rebecca whined as she poured a coffee from the Mr. Coffee carafe into a thermal paper cup and sweetened it with two packs of artificial sweetener. “What did you do last night?” she asked Melanie as she put a lid on the coffee cup.

Melanie did not look at her and did not say anything. She just stood in the middle of the living room, dressed in her madras, late sixties style, men’s golf pants and a too large men’s golf shirt. No amount of coercion by Rebecca, Coach and the other girls on the team could induce Melanie to change her outfit. By now she had several sets she wore on alternate days of golf. Today’s outfit was the green and blue madras pants with the red shirt. Her eye for fashion was clearly less acute than her eye for golf, yet her style was actually starting a fashion on campus as, instead of the other girls influencing her style, the others were starting to emulate her. Rebecca refused to join that particular movement.

Rebecca looked at her and saw, although she could not put her finger on it, that there was something different. Melanie was always fairly expressionless. Some said she was just a cold fish, although Rebecca knew differently. But this morning her expression was more than either resolute or cold. Rebecca shrugged it off and grabbed her coffee.

“Ok. Let’s go!”

Melanie said nothing as they drove to the Cedar Grove Country Club. This was not unusual behaviour for Melanie before she went on the golf course and Rebecca did not push her to conversation. She had her own thoughts to get lost in and soon they pulled into the parking lot and the bag drop area.

Coach was waiting by the bag rack.

“You guys like to cut it fine don’t you, “he exclaimed with an exasperated laugh. He was a pleasant person, but he seemed in a particularly good mood this morning. It was a beautiful sunny southern California fall day. He was at one of the U.S. top 10 rated golf courses. But most importantly, as the coach of a golf team from a podunk college from a podunk city in a podunk state, he had the two top seeded golfers in the national tournament. With any kind of performance by these two golfers his move up to higher levels would be assured, maybe even a Pac 10 or Ivy League job.

Rebecca picked up Melanie’s bag. She had been able to convince Melanie that a new

bag would not hurt her golf game and the new one was leather with the Clapshorn big horn sheep mascot embroidered on the front. It was certainly heavier than Melanie's old canvas bag, but Rebecca did not mind. Other than the putter, the clubs in her bag were the one's she had brought from the Folly. Rebecca had the pro shop in Billings make Melanie a new putter that was the same short length as her old one, two feet, but with a good grip and a modern head. It did improve her putting, especially on the short ones, so in a mock solemn ceremony, Rebecca and Melanie pretended to say some ancient Celtic prayers as they chucked the old one in a dumpster behind the clubhouse.

"You tee off in ten minutes on number four," Coach informed them. "You'll be playing with a couple of girls from back East, Massachusetts and North Carolina."

Both the practice day and the competition were set up so the women had the morning on the course and the men the afternoon. Sixty women teed off on this practice day in a shotgun start at 8 am and they had five hours to complete the eighteen holes before the men had their shotgun start at 1:30. Another sixty men and woman had gone the day before so that all 240 golfers had a chance at a practice session before the competition.

"I'll be going with you to help you with course management issues."

Melanie said nothing in response as she took off at a crisp, but to Rebecca it seemed a somehow awkward pace towards the fourth hole. Rebecca picked up her bag and Coach followed as Rebecca and Coach gave each other a questioning look and just shrugged. Melanie was known to behave oddly on occasion. It soon became clear to both Coach and Rebecca that this was not just any old odd occasion. She was abruptly polite with the other players, simply giving single or two word responses to anything. For the whole morning no one heard more than "good shot", "nice putt" or "thanks" when someone said something nice to her. There was no conversation. There was no bantering or laughter and when Rebecca commented that the rough was long this morning, or the greens cut shorter than normal, she just nodded her head and carried on.

But she did two things, other than her strange gait that struck Rebecca as very odd at the time.

Firstly, after every tee shot she walked back to the where the men would tee off, twenty to forty yards further back from the women's tee and stood and looked for a

moment. Secondly, and only Rebecca really noticed this one, each shot to the green seemed to end up on the hardest part of the green. If there was a spot on the green where the putt required a shot over two swales and three dips, that's where Melanie's ball landed. At least twice Melanie hit her ball into pit bunkers that left impossible shots to the green.

Her game was so unusual that at the end of the round Rebecca heard one of the other golfers say to her own coach "She's not such a hot golfer." But Rebecca knew what the golfer did not. Melanie had hit those shots on purpose and while she had not totally figured it out, she soon learned there was purpose in Melanie's action.

At the end of the practice round the girls and coaches shook hands and Coach, Melanie and Rebecca walked to the clubhouse where lunch was waiting for the women as the men finished lunch and were heading out to the course. Rebecca was still puzzling over Melanie's behaviour on the course when they met Chad, Burt and the caddies Henry and Frank coming out the clubhouse door.

"Well hello ladies, "Chad warmly hailed. "Did you birdies leave any birdies out there for us?"

There was only a split second delay before Melanie walked over to Chad and to his surprise and even greater to Rebecca's, she laughed, put her arms around his neck and gave him a little peck. "I'll always leave some goodies for you, Chad." And with a sideways walk and a coquettish smile as she glanced back, Melanie went into the clubhouse to change for lunch.

Rebecca shuffled after her, still carrying her clubs and caught up to her in the hallway and grabbed her arm.

"Ok girl. What the fuck was that? First the oddest eighteen holes I have ever seen you play and then that with Chad? Is there something I don't know?"

Melanie stopped and paused for a moment before she turned around. When she was facing Rebecca, she thought for a moment that Melanie had tears in her eyes. But it was only for a second as Melanie looked at her in the eye as straight and as resolute as she had ever done before.

"I want to play on the men's side in the tournament."

"What did you say?"

Melanie repeated herself very quietly and very firmly. "I want to play on the men's side."

"You can't. In case you haven't noticed recently. You actually are a woman."

Some other golfers passed them in the hall and glanced over at Rebecca's raised voice. Rebecca dropped the clubs and pulled Melanie into a closet in the hallway and closed the door.

"Ok. What's this all about?"

Melanie was even more resolute.

"I will play on the men's side and you will make it happen."

Rebecca was getting exasperated.

"How the fuck can I do that? You don't qualify to play!"

"Yes I do. All men's competitions in the NCGA are open to women. My second place in the state men's match play immediately qualifies me for the NCGA men's side."

Rebecca paused and thought for a moment. Melanie was right on both counts. She was eligible. But she still did not know why Melanie wanted to do this.

"But why Melanie?" she implored. "You are a shoe in to be the women's national NCGA champion. That gives you automatic qualifying for the U.S. Women's amateur, the Open and so many other things, maybe a scholarship to an Ivy League university? For God's sake why would you give that up?"

"I want to win the men's and I want you to help."

"But Coach would never agree to this and he would have to get the other coaches to agree and they would never agree to a woman joining the men's side."

Melanie had thought this out over a long and sleepless night.

"Rebecca ..." she paused and looked Rebecca directly in the eye. "I think you can convince Coach to do this."

Perhaps for the first time in their relationship, Melanie saw Rebecca turn red in the face from embarrassment. "What about the other coaches?"

"If Coach takes it to them they will certainly object. But all he has to do is point out the public relations affect of refusing to let a qualified woman play against the men. Cynics are claiming the new bylaw to allow woman to play in men's athletics was just a sop to the feminists on campus and did not mean anything. If they turned me down it

would make them look foolish and give the equal rights people a big piece of ammunition," Melanie explained. "And anyhow, none of them would think a woman could beat their men, so by letting me in they would think they are killing two birds with one stone, showing that the bylaw does mean something and showing that women don't belong in men's golf. They'll approve it."

Rebecca was stunned. At the demand Melanie had made. At her understanding of the relationship between her and Coach. At how she had so thoroughly thought this through. If either of the two of them were more inclined to social activism it was Rebecca. She was taken totally unaware of this sudden interest of Melanie's in women's equality. She knew Melanie was right. They would let her play. But she knew something else. She knew that Melanie could actually win.

Rebecca smiled, nodded her head in an all-knowing manner and told Melanie to go have lunch while she went and made the case to Coach. The look on Melanie's face told her there was no turning back for either of them. It was 1978 and they were soon to make history in the world of U.S. collegiate sports.

Things went much as Melanie had predicted. Rebecca had little difficulty with Coach. Even in 1978, affairs between coaches and students were frowned upon. But it was more than that. After a short rant Coach saw the same thing that Rebecca had seen. This was an opportunity far beyond just Melanie and he enthusiastically took the proposal to a meeting of all coaches that evening. While the decision belonged to the NCGA governing body, seven coaches elected each year by the larger coaching group, they would want to hear the views of the coaches with players in the tournament. As with Rebecca and Coach, the first reaction was from "This is a joke right?" to "She isn't eligible" to "She won't play any of my men that's for sure" to even personal comments "I've heard that she's a real freak. Do we want her to be the poster girl for golf in this country?" to "She's a Canadian for Chris' sake."

In the final analysis they really had to agree to let her play. There was room on the draw. The Alaskan men's team had been snowed in and had to withdraw at the last moment. She was eligible. And all understood the politics of the situation.

Coach found it interesting that the dozen or so women's coaches were the strongest opponents to the idea. They actually caucused during the discussion and came out as a

group against allowing Melanie to play, although he never heard their arguments. The most common argument to let her play was simply that it was no big deal since she wouldn't get past the first round anyhow. There would be some quick media interest when it was announced that she would play and it would all die down the second day and they could get on with the next three days of the tournament.

The NCGA national tournament was an unusual format. Most tournaments were either some sort of match play or some sort of medal play. This tournament was unusual in that it was a mix of both. The goal of the tournament was not team play like most collegiate tournaments, but to crown the national collegiate individual champions. With over a hundred golfers in each of the men's and women's side, ...two were allowed from each state, straight match play elimination would have taken too long. So the first day of the competition was medal play, and the top sixteen men and top sixteen women moved onto a pure match play format to get to the 'last golfer standing' as one reporter put it. Another called it 'October madness', a reference to basketball's 'March madness'. All other golfers moved on to the consolation round. Most of the coaches and the governing body agreed that Melanie would not likely make it past the first round and would not be one of the sixteen "men" vying for the national championship. As Melanie predicted, they figured this would show both that the bylaw has meaning and no purpose.

With a show of hands at the Board meeting of the NCGA, Melanie McDougal became the first Clapshorn woman golfer to make it to the NCGA golf championships on the men's side.



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## **Part 1 - Chapter 7: The Strategy**



Melanie was already at their resort room when Rebecca returned to let her know the Board's decision. Melanie was sitting in the exact same seat and position she was when Rebecca woke up that morning. She was dressed in the same way and had that same strange look on her face that Rebecca could not read.

"Ok girl. You're in," Rebecca announced. "You caused quite a stir with the coaches, but in the final analysis Coach said it went just as you predicted."

Melanie did not say anything, but the vacant look slowly changed to a smile. Not a happy one Rebecca determined, but it was better than the emotional vacancy she had seen all day.

"But it won't compare to the stink that we will hear when the guys are told they have to play against you. If you haven't figured it out yet, you're not exactly the most popular lady with the guy golfers."

Melanie spoke for the first time.

"Oh I get it Rebecca. I get it."

Melanie sat down at the table and pulled her chair up close to Melanie.

"I don't think you are going to tell me why you are doing this are you?" It was more of a statement than a question.

"No."

"Couldn't we have talked this out before you decided this?"

"No."

"Do you think you can win?"

Melanie turned and looked at her and no response was necessary to Rebecca's question. Rebecca knew the answer as well. She had become Melanie's caddy rather than playing herself because she had seen something in Melanie that made her a special person and a special golfer. It was not just her apparent unique physical traits that allowed her to do things athletically that no one Rebecca knew could ever do. It certainly was not her warm personality. It took a long time before Melanie warmed up and opened up to Rebecca and now Rebecca knew a young girl that had a resolve and self-confidence that matched her athletic ability. Over the past couple of years they had played together and won more tournaments in the history of the women's NCGA, but Rebecca also knew that Melanie was still in many ways a little girl. As she looked Melanie in the eye, it was this

emotional immaturity that now concerned Rebecca.

“Ok Melanie. Here’s the deal. I’m a little pissed that you didn’t involve me in this decision. Your behaviour today on the golf course was puzzling. Although I can now see why you kept walking back to the men’s tee boxes. That scene with that asshole Chad was beyond strange. I’ll not ask you to explain any of that. There have been occasions when I didn’t understand what was going on in that Canadian head of yours but I have given you your headspace. But now, if you want me to caddy for you tomorrow, in fact if you want to win this fucking thing, you are going to have to let me take control of whatever is going on between your ears. You are smart and in control of yourself and your emotions Melanie, but there is something going on with you that I don’t know, maybe don’t want to know, so, if you are going to pull this off, you need my head, not yours.”

Rebecca paused to let this sink in.

“Will you agree to this?”

Melanie looked at her, smiled her first genuine smile all day and nodded her head.

“Great. Let’s get started. Have you eaten today?”

Melanie shook her head.

“Ok, the first thing is food. Let’s order a pizza. I am going to go get a six-pack for me. I need a drink. While we are waiting for the pizza and I’m out, go have a shower. You look a mess. Take off those clown golfing clothes and put on something comfortable. We have some strategizing to do.”

By the time Rebecca returned with the beer, the pizza had arrived and Melanie was sitting at the table in her pajamas wolfing down what appeared to be her third piece.

“Hungry were we?” Rebecca asked as she popped open a beer for her and a coke for Melanie.

“A little I guess!” Melanie laughed. “Thanks Rebecca,” she said through a mouthful of cheese and tomato sauce.

“For what?”

“For being my friend. I’ll never forget it.” It was as emotional as Rebecca had ever seen Melanie.

Rebecca choked a little and cleared her throat. “Hell, I’ll never let you forget it

either! Let's get to work."

Something had changed again in Melanie while Rebecca was out. The melancholy and emotional blankness was replaced with an excitement and resolve that translated into incredible focus over the next few hours as they talked about the tournament starting tomorrow. Rebecca explained the format to Melanie and they considered the score that was probably needed to get into the top sixteen. Rebecca had looked at past tournaments and suggested that even par on this course would probably be the cutoff. The only unusual moment in the strategy session came when Melanie asked Rebecca if she thought Chad would make the cut. Since he was the top ranked men's golfer and had a -two handicap Rebecca thought he probably would unless he had a very bad day. Melanie quickly changed the subject to a discussion of what Melanie could score. This is when Rebecca took control.

"Melanie I know if your head and your will are in the right place you could shoot the lights out tomorrow. A round in the sixties is a real possibility for you. But I don't want you to do that."

Melanie looked puzzled and for a moment a little defiant. "You want me to lose tomorrow?"

"No, of course not. Ideally I'd like you to be number sixteen, just barely making it into the match play part of the competition."

Melanie was puzzled. "I don't understand? It bothered you when I played with my score on purpose. Why have you changed now?"

"Look Melanie. The real game is the match play game and that is not a game against the course. It is not a game that means you are just oblivious to the other player as you normally are. It means that you are competing hole by hole against the person, not the course. Except for that time with Chad, this is a new concept for you. But you have to realize that match play is as much a head game as a skill game. Each of the final sixteen will have the skill to win. We have to fuck up their heads."

Rebecca continued.

"After your performance on the practice round today and just simply because of the male ego that the coaches displayed, no one really thinks you have a chance to win. You and I know otherwise, but we have to keep that from them as long as possible. After you

get into the final sixteen the best thing would be for the press to say you are lucky and not that you are good.”

Melanie was starting to get the idea. “So I keep the fact that I can beat them a secret for as long as I can?”

“That’s the idea. Remember many of these players and coaches have not seen your crazy swing so they will never want to believe such a golfing abomination could beat their swing perfect players.”

They both laughed at the reference to Melanie’s swing. They had become quite accustomed to such derogatory comments and had just responded by crushing the opposition.

“The one fly in this plan might be the press Melanie,” Rebecca warned. “That reporter from the Herald back home is here and he knows you better than you probably know yourself. He might start writing stories describing your winning record and get all the others worried that you might win. So let me do all the talking with the press.”

“ So what score are we aiming for tomorrow?”

Rebecca thought for a moment.

“How about this scenario? You have a disastrous front nine, say a four or five over par. Miss some putts. Hit some sand traps and so on. At the turn we can check out the leader board and see what tenth place looks like and you can aim for that on the back nine.” Rebecca paused while Melanie thought about the plan. “Can you do that? It is risky but necessary I think.”

“No problem. Do you know who I am playing with?”

In medal play the playing partners did not really matter since it was playing for score, not against the actual golfers. Foursomes had been chosen by a draw at the end of the Board meeting that afternoon.

“Yeah, I know who you’re with,” Rebecca hesitated before she responded.

“For the men it’s an afternoon shotgun and you start on the first hole. You will be playing with Howard Rushton, a senior from Texas, Will Cummins, a sophomore like you from New Hampshire, and ” she took a deep breath. “Burt.”

Melanie gave a look of anger and surprise.

“A draw eh? I suppose it is one heck of a coincidence that I start on the first hole and

every reporter and parent in the country will be watching – and the person in all of Montana who seems to resent my golf the most is in my foursome?”

“Coach said the first hole thing was a genuine coincidence. Most of the coaches and players want the publicity. Remember, most seem to think they have a pro career in front of them so any way that they can get the attention of potential sponsors is a good thing. Apparently there was even some effort to bump you to another hole. But the Burt thing? Strange that. There is a provision for players to appeal their starting hole and Coach said he saw Burt’s parents talking to the Chair of the Board, so something may have gone on.”

Melanie was lost in her thoughts for a moment. She quietly informed Rebecca that, “He wants to be the one to embarrass me on the golf course.”

“Does it bother you Melanie? He has been rude to you in the past and people have witnessed it. We could ask for a change?”

Melanie looked Rebecca straight in the eye. “Not on your life. You strategize on the golf. Leave Burt to me.”

By the time they finished their pizza and talked more about their strategy for tomorrow it was late and they prepared to go to their separate bedrooms. As they got up to leave the table, Melanie touched Rebecca on the arm and when Rebecca turned, Melanie gave her a warm and firm hug. “You know that whatever happens Rebecca, you are the best friend I ever had. I love you.”

Rebecca hugged back. “I know kid – me too – let’s go to bed.”

But neither was quick to sleep.

Rebecca kept running the events of the day back in her mind, trying to put together the pieces that led to Melanie’s decision to compete on the men’s side. That greeting and kiss for Chad was simply bizarre. Melanie had something of a crush on that asshole, but was too shy to even talk to him. That round of golf; it was like she was punishing herself with each shot. One moment she was a resolute and confident adult and the next seemed like an eight-year-old. Even her attitude to Rebecca was different. They had become close friends over the past year or so, but that was the first time that she had seen such a display of emotion from her. They did love each other as only good friends can, but why Melanie chose tonight to say it was not clear to Rebecca and she fell asleep with no answer to the puzzle.

For the first time in her life, Melanie was crying herself to sleep. In her whole life she could only remember physical response type tears and never emotional ones. A broken arm in the third grade hurt and she cried. The time she walked into a hornet's nest in the wheat field looking for balls brought tears to her eyes just remembering. But the inside pain never brought tears, only resolve. She was only four years old when her mother left and there was pain, but she did not cry. She had her share of adolescent heartbreak, maybe more than her share, but she never cried. She had endured endless, petty teenage girl teasing and bullying, but no matter how hurt she was at the cruelty of talk, she never cried. But tonight as she sat on the edge of her bed, she cried with the pent up intensity of every event in her life that had deserved a good cry. And it wasn't the raw pain between her thighs that brought the tears. A lifetime of teasing, bullying, rejection and loneliness came pouring out in sobs of self-pity that Melanie did not know she had. She had viewed herself as emotionally strong and immune to the silliness of the rest of the world. She had felt she was in control of when or whether she would feel something ... anger, love, hate, pity. Now she was crying uncontrollably and with each tear she felt a little bit of that control and self-confidence drip onto the carpet at the bottom of the bed. Tonight she did not know who she was or why she was doing what she was doing or what she would do tomorrow.

For perhaps the first time in her life, Melanie McDougal was afraid.



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## **Part 1 - Chapter 8: The First Day of Play**

As usual, Melanie was up and dressed ready to go before Rebecca was out of bed. By the time Rebecca entered the kitchen, the coffee was on and a hearty breakfast of toast, bacon and fried eggs was waiting.

“Ugh. You know I can't eat that shit in the morning,” Rebecca exclaimed. “Any pizza left over from last night?”

Melanie knew that she was joking and put the plate of eggs in front of her. "Eat up girl. You and I have a big day before us. I don't want you to drop my bag by the twelfth hole."

Rebecca looked up at Melanie a little puzzled and not a little surprised. Apart from the feeble attempt at uncharacteristic humour, Melanie was never much for small talk. Melanie was physically different this morning.

For a start, Rebecca noticed for the first time that she could recall, Melanie wore women's golf clothing. On a whim, Rebecca had gone out when they arrived in California and bought a whole modern golf outfit for Melanie. She had left it on Melanie's bed with no great expectation that Melanie would reform, but here she was dressed in a pale blue pleated skirt, an off pink sleeveless golf shirt covered by a bright red cashmere golf sweater. She even had the golf half socks on her feet instead of the work socks she normally wore in her men's golf shoes. Rebecca wondered if she was wearing the underwear she had bought her or still had on the Stanfields that Melanie said all self-respecting Canadian farm girls wore. But the real shocker was her face and hair. Rebecca did not even know Melanie had any make up. She did not, but had snuck into Rebecca's bathroom early that morning, and here she was with a delicately made up face, lipstick, eyeliner, the whole package. Her hair was still a mass of Celtic ringlets, but arranged in a clean and fresh way that was controlled chaos.

Melanie was actually beautiful or at least as attractive as a woman her size and features could be. But Rebecca now thought, beautiful. She was stunned.

"Something wrong Rebecca?" Melanie asked. "You're staring."

Rebecca recovered herself. "No. No, just thinking."

Rebecca somehow had the sense and instinct to not mention this sudden metamorphosis from farm girl to Vogue model and just dug into her eggs and coffee. Melanie continued to chatter incessantly through breakfast, talking about everything from the weather in California to the local sports news and how the coach of the UCLA basketball team had a hole in one and a double eagle on one round of golf and still didn't break eighty. She thought that was very funny. Rebecca just listened and nodded her head and was totally confused at this sudden reversal of their usual conversational roles. She was attentive and laughed at the right places, but was inwardly nervous and worried

about Melanie's behaviour.

The change in behaviour continued when they arrived at the golf course. Everyone who knew her stared at her change in appearance. The reporter from the Herald was there and as Melanie actually posed for a photo which she had always refused to do, he actually wolf whistled and she threw him a kiss. The only anomaly in her attire was her golf shoes. Not only was it unlikely that Melanie would have found a pair of size eleven women's shoes on short notice, but new shoes for a round of golf would not have been a wise idea. At the bottom of all the wonderful feminine clothing and alluring make up, she still wore an old pair of Dexter men's golf shoes. To Rebecca it was her only apparent concession to her past, but to Melanie it was her anchor to the soil and a previous life and previous emotions. Today she needed that anchor.

On the practice tee she was talkative and friendly and introduced herself to the other members of her foursome with an "I'm very delighted to meet you and honoured to have the opportunity to play with such men of talent like you."

The senior from Texas was distant but polite. The sophomore from New Hampshire was three inches shorter than Melanie, obviously very shy and was instantly awestruck by her stature and greeting. He struggled and stumbled over a "Same to you!" and quickly went back to the tee mat.

It was when Burt arrived that Rebecca really began to worry that Melanie's state of mind was going to be a problem. Burt did not walk anywhere. He sauntered as only the progeny of old money and social stature learns to do at an early age. His size, his dress, his equipment and his entourage all spoke of confidence and poise. He knew he was a good golfer and he pranced towards a practice tee mat with Henry his caddy struggling behind him to keep up.

"Hey Burt!" Melanie cheerfully teased. "We all thought you had seen who you were playing against today and decided to give up!"

The spectators around the range laughed. For those who knew Burt and Melanie the laugh was a very nervous one, Rebecca's included. For others it was simply a reaction to good-natured golfing banter.

"You look tired though Burt," Melanie continued. "Sure you are up to this today?" She put special emphasis on the 'up' part.



Both Coach and Burt's parents had warned him to cool his mouth today. Back home he was not only outspokenly rude and dismissive to Melanie, but in general to women golfers. He referred to her as the hick from Canada, a cold bitch, a freak, ugly as a toad and other epithets that Melanie had heard all her life from bullies like him. Her usual reaction had been simply to ignore him and play golf. Today, under the scrutiny of national press and the golf world, he was under orders to cool it. But he was totally unprepared for Melanie's greeting.

"Listen you bitch ..." he started to say, but before he could get the next word out Melanie put her arms around his neck and gave him a peck on the cheek. "Have fun today Burt," she whispered in his ear. "The whole world is watching." And she left him momentarily stunned and went back to her practice session while he went to the far end of the range to do his own warm ups.

Rebecca was really worried now. None of this, the dressing up, the makeup and the coquettish friendliness was part of the strategy they had worked out. Her unease was not relieved when they reached the first hole.

Melanie had won the toss and she was to hit first. She smiled and went over and shook the starter's hand after he announced her to the small, but growing crowd that was starting to gather. The news of a woman player in the men's championship had started to spread and Melanie was now officially the curiosity she had been all her life. The group included a number of reporters for local and national media and as she watched Melanie saunter to the first tee, Rebecca suddenly realized that Melanie was playing to the crowd. Melanie walked over to Rebecca and without saying anything or even looking at her, pulled out the driver, and while it had been regripped several times, it was still the steel shafted, persimmon head driver that a tractor salesman from Saskatoon had given her earlier.

The first hole was a long, straight away, par five, a little over 600 yards from the back tee, and it required a tee shot down the left side of the fairway, missing a collection of bunkers at the 240 mark. This was a shot custom made for Melanie's gentle draw, so she was surprised when Melanie hit her drive into the farthest trap on the right.

There was a collective "ah – too bad" from the crowd.

Melanie just smiled and as she walked back to Rebecca and her bag, announced to

the crowd, "Gee. That wasn't very good."

Rebecca stood shocked while Melanie put the club back. Not because Melanie missed the drive, but because for the first time in the whole time they had been golfing together Melanie used a normal swing. In fact, not just a normal swing but a perfectly normal, textbook, the way pros teach it to look like a real golfer type swing.

"What are you doing?" she whispered hoarsely to Melanie.

Melanie cheerfully replied. "I think I'll be Hale today." And she stepped back and watched while all three of the other players landed their drives on the fairway, and the game was on.

Melanie and the young man from New Hampshire both bogied the first hole, he from some nervous putting and she from a wasted shot on the fairway getting out of the fairway trap. The others parred the hole.

Rebecca figured that the New Hampshire kid would be out of it soon and she was right. He had potential for sure, but was not used to the attention from a following gallery. He certainly could not handle Melanie. She was extraordinarily pleasant to him, chatting with him as they walked down the fairways. Complimenting him on the good shots and commiserating with him on the bad. Even after a string of bogies that would essentially take him out of the top sixteen he was clearly enjoying himself. When Rebecca asked Melanie why she was so nice to the kid, Melanie just said that he was the nicest guy she had met in years. She liked him although she was probably not good for his golf.

The senior from Texas was good. He was a scratch golfer and by the fifth hole he had played to that level. He was not spectacular, simply steady at all aspects of the game. She figured his weakness might be around the green but she was not quite sure. He was also a gentleman, courteous to Melanie and apparently not bothered in the slightest that there was a woman in the foursome. Rebecca liked him; she figured he was not a tournament winner, but was a potential top sixteen. He was one that Melanie would have to at least equal in score to ensure a place in the sixteen.

Burt was another matter entirely. He had talent for sure or he would not be here. But he had two major flaws that were amplified on the golf course. He was stupid and he was arrogant, stubbornly arrogant. He would never take his caddies advice or Coach's for that

matter since he thought he knew it all. He was not a pleasant person to play with, taunting in an arrogant way the mistakes of others and prancing around after his own successful shots. There was no mistaking he knew a lot and was a very good golfer. Chad was the only Montana golfer who could beat him. He had been playing golf at a private California club since he was four and had, in fact, played Cedar Grove many times as a youngster working his way up in the state rankings. He viewed the route to get into the final sixteen as a cakewalk for him and the gallery full of parents and people from his home club felt the same. Being able to play with Melanie and embarrass her on the course was simply icing on the day's cake to him.

He had one other flaw that he had kept hidden from many at Clapshorn. He liked to get his way and was not a good loser. He had a temper that when displayed on the golf course could actually turn violent. He had embarrassed his parents on many occasions and in one instance as a twelve-year-old he had attacked another player with a nine iron when he lost a hole and had been banned from that particular course. Today was not likely to be at risk to be one of those days. He did not see any of these players as a challenge for the final sixteen and with a target score of even par or maybe one under, all he had to do was shoot his handicap to get into the real fun competition, the head on head match play. The fun of today for him was that, while he knew that for medal play he was playing the course and not the other players, he was going to play Melanie – and crush her once and for all. By the end of the fifth hole it looked like he was well on his way to do so. Even Rebecca had to admit that he was playing brilliantly and Melanie very badly. He was two under and she was three over. After each of her mistakes that led to bogies, he would look over at her with a smug “take that bitch” look. Melanie just smiled and continued to compliment him and the others on their good shots.

By the seventh hole, Melanie was five shots behind Burt, three behind Texas and even with New Hampshire. All were on the green except Melanie who had hit another trap on the 180-yard par three.

As they walked to the green Rebecca ran up to Melanie and whispered. “Ah... Melanie, you've shown how bad you are. Don't you think it's time you recovered a bit? We're half way through the round for God's sake!”

Melanie showed none of the pleasantry she gave the other players. “Just tell me at

the end of nine what you think the cut off score will be.”

Melanie bogied the par-three while the others parred it and they kept that position through eight and nine. At the turn, Melanie was six shots behind Burt and five over par, five or six shots off the projected final sixteen cut off. Play was a little backed up so they had a break after nine. Melanie took the opportunity to go to the washroom while two reporters cornered Rebecca, the regular from the Herald and a new one she had never met from one of the golfing magazines.

The Herald reporter started.

“So what’s up with this girl?” he demanded. “Where has her swing gone? And what’s with the clothes? Is she out of this thing?”

Rebecca gave an answer that would be repeated months later in a national story that won the reporter an award for investigative reporting in golf. “Melanie McDougal is the finest female, no, the finest of any sex, golfer this country has seen since Babe Zaharias or Ben Hogan.” She paused while they both scribbled in their notebooks. “I suggest that you wait a few days and answer the question yourself.” And she walked away, refusing to answer any more questions. Inside her golf shirt the sweat was running down her armpits, because she had the same questions as the reporters and she did not know the answers. She was as nervous as she had ever been in her life because other than the fact that Melanie was apparently following her orders to not look too good, to just make the cut, she had no idea what Melanie was doing. She panicked for a moment with the realization that maybe Melanie was actually losing this first round.

When Melanie came back from the clubhouse and joined her at the tenth tee, there was no such look of melancholy or concern on her face. “Ok,” Melanie cheerfully announced. “Let’s go bust their balls girl.”

They started the back nine.

The bogie on seven meant she was last to tee off. The tenth was a difficult hole. It was not a long hole, 310 yards. It was a long sweeping dogleg left with water all along the left curve and out of bounds on the right. Most players in 1978 did not have the 280-yard driving distance needed to make the green, so most used an iron to get in good position for a second shot. The three men did exactly that.

Melanie went over to Rebecca and asked for her driver and at that point Rebecca

knew that her concerns were baseless. This back nine was going to be fun. As Melanie walked to the tee with her driver there was a murmur from the crowd of followers that by now had grown quite large. Burt actually laughed as he said to his caddy loud enough for the whole gallery to hear.

“Looks like she wants to clean her golf ball in the pond!”

Even the unobservant could see the resolve in Melanie’s eyes as she teed up the ball, took a stance most people there had never seen before. Arms straight out and club head a foot or so behind the ball. The crowd watched as she hit a long high gentle draw that landed ten yards in front of the green and rolled to within ten feet of the cup.

New Hampshire gleefully applauded. Texas just smiled and shook his head. Burt, again so loud that everyone could hear, just said to his caddy. “Fuck. Lucky bitch.”

As they all walked down the fairway to their balls, Melanie caught up to Burt and they walked alone to Burt’s ball. “Burt,” Melanie whispered with a very pleasant smile on her face. “Did you know that you have the smallest prick of any man I have ever seen?” As Burt’s jaw dropped and as he tried to respond she quickly moved aside and went back to chat with Rebecca.

“Watch this,” she announced to Rebecca.

Burt’s shot was a relatively easy 9-iron from 130 yards. There was water on the left and Burt’s shot hit the steep bank on the left side of the green and rolled into the pond. He slammed his club into the ground, threw it back to Henry to pick up and with a malicious glance back at Melanie tromped off to the green.

The others hit their balls to the green. From this point on the other golfers, the gallery, Rebecca and all except Burt realized that this was now a game between Burt and Melanie. None of them understood what was happening or why, but all realized they were witnessing something unusual. Burt bogied and Melanie sunk her putt for an eagle and three strokes were instantly cut off her deficit.

The next hole was a 550-yard dog leg par five that once again required a lay up drive since it took at least 260 yards in the air to get over the corner and a miss meant at least a stroke to get out of the thick bush, or worse, a lost ball meant stroke and distance. Since Melanie won she went first and once again with her driver, her unusual swing and stance she hit over the corner and was rewarded with a short 180-yard shot into the green. Texas

and New Hampshire applauded again and hit the appropriate lay ups.

Burt, last to hit, just glowered and took out his driver. Henry tried to stop him since he knew Burt could rarely hit that far. “The bitch can do it. I can do it,” he announced as he yanked the driver from Henry’s hands.

It was a good swing and one of the smoothest and most powerful that Burt could do, but it was not enough, and while Burt and his fans watched, really only his parents at this time, the marshal down the fairway signaled that the ball was in the trees. Burt slammed his club into the tee box grass and hit a provisional shot short of the hazard as a layup. The whole group went looking for Burt’s ball in the woods. While they all were looking in the thick California mesquite Melanie slowly worked her way up beside where Burt was looking.

“You know, Burt, your dick was so small I didn’t even feel it in me.”

And before he could react to her, she yelled, “I found it!” as she pointed out Burt’s ball under a bush. “These balls of Burt’s are so small – and so hard to find!”

Burt had to take a drop and a penalty. He ended up three on the fairway, four on the green and two putted for a six. Melanie had a tap in birdie.

From that point Melanie did not have to say anything, just look at Burt and smile. Once when no one was looking she threw him a kiss. Her golf was doing all the talking that was necessary. She outdrove the other players on every hole, hit approach irons and par three shots that were laser guided to the hole. By the eighteenth hole she was nine under for the back nine and on her way to a nine-hole course record. Her six over on the front nine gave her a three under and no matter what happened on eighteen she had a sure spot in the final sixteen.

Burt on the other hand approached the eighteenth without a single par on the back nine shooting six bogies and two doubles. He had tried to match Melanie’s shot making and had been outperformed on every occasion. By now he was beside himself. They all hit good drives on the final long straight away par four and as usual Melanie’s drive was twenty yards or more past the rest. As they walked to their balls Melanie walked up beside Burt and whispered; “Your drives are as short as your cock.”

Burt exploded. He had the iron for his second shot in his hand and he turned around and took a swing at Melanie’s head. The crowds watching would later say it was a

miracle she was able to duck the swing and then fall down as she backed away. He did not get his second swing away as Texas stepped in between them and grabbing Burt's club with his left hand and planted a right hook on Burt that sent him to the turf – out cold.

Texas stepped back and helped Melanie to her feet.

“You OK?”

“Yeah fine thanks.”

“You ready to finish this thing?” He walked over to Rebecca and picked up her clubs. “I'll take over these.”

He picked up her clubs and explained to an astonished Rebecca. “That roundhouse will disqualify me from this tournament. Besides, I think I broke my hand, so I might as well get a little glory by being a part of this lady's round.”

A crowd was gathering around Burt as he shook his head and lurched to his feet. He started to make a lunge towards Texas and Melanie, but Henry, Coach and a man who Rebecca figured was Burt's father held him back and dragged him off the fairway.

“Come on everyone. Clear the fairway. This lady has a round to finish,” Texas announced. He and New Hampshire both sent their caddies away; Texas holding his broken hand and New Hampshire recognizing that eight over would not make the cut, They followed Melanie as she finished her round with a tap in par and a huge applause from the now very large gallery.

Melanie went up to Texas and New Hampshire and gave each of them a warm hug. “Thank you guys,” she offered through tears. “You don't know what your behaviour means to me. You are both gentlemen and both great golfers. Best of luck in the future.”

“It was a pleasure to watch,” Texas replied with a smile. “Good luck in the rest of the tournament.”

New Hampshire was at a loss for words at the hug and just mumbled something about how great she was.

Texas went on to become one of the finest professional golfers to ever come out of Texas and New Hampshire became a State Senator. Both would often tell the story of their time with that girl from Canada with the unusual swing.

By this time Rebecca was back in control of the situation. She grabbed the golf bag

with a quick thanks to Texas and New Hampshire and pulling Melanie by the hand tried to get her to move quickly away from the eighteenth green and the crowd that was starting to gather. The crowd now included NCGA board members and officials, too many reporters and either some security people or police, Rebecca was not sure which. But they had uniforms and her instinct told her to get away as fast as possible.

“Let’s get out of here,” she ordered Melanie as they headed for the parking lot without even getting their things from the clubhouse.

For once Rebecca drove while Melanie just stared out of the window and said nothing. “So that was a real nice job of laying low girl. That display will certainly ensure that we can sneak up on the others over the next few days!”

Even the sarcasm did not get any reaction from Melanie.

“Hello in there?” Rebecca shot as she took a turn in the county road too fast and drifted over onto the shoulder. “Don’t you have anything to say?”

Melanie slowly turned towards Rebecca and when she glanced over she was shocked to see tears running down Melanie’s cheeks. The look on Melanie’s face was anything other than that of a winner. She stopped the car on the side of the road, put the car in park and reached over to give Melanie a hug. She did not know why, or what was wrong, but the Melanie she had just looked at was not the confident young woman who had just set the golf world on fire, but a very young girl with some set of emotions that were in a jumbled mess. Melanie sobbed as they hugged.

“I’m sorry Rebecca.”

Rebecca gently pushed her away and looked her. “Melanie. I can’t imagine what you have to be sorry for. Not your golf. Not for being you. Certainly not for Burt. You never have to apologize to me for anything, You’ve never listened to my advice anyhow so my feelings are hardly hurt.”

Melanie straightened up in her seat and wiping the tears from her eyes and cheeks was suddenly grown up again and serious. “Whatever happens over the next few days Rebecca, I am sorry. Not to anyone but you. You’ve been the best friend a person could have and I’ll always love you.”

Melanie smiled and Rebecca thought she was going to tear up but Melanie saved her. “Ok, Caddie.” Melanie’s cheerful tone broke the emotion of the moment. “What do



we have to do to win this whole thing?”

Rebecca put the car back on the road. “Well, first of all, let’s pick up some Chinese take out for dinner. You do not want to be around anyone tonight. I want you to stay in our suite. We can talk a little strategy and maybe watch some TV. But no reporters, no anyone. Maybe we’ll get Coach to spend some time with us.”

At the mention of Coach, Melanie looked over at Rebecca and raised her eyebrows.

“Hey, he's not such a bad guy you know. He's not that much older than us and he can help us now.”

“Yeah sure,” Melanie replied skeptically. “Whatever you say.”

And they both laughed at the not so secret fact that Rebecca and the coach had more than a player coach relationship.

When they arrived at the resort there was already a group of reporters waiting for Melanie. Rebecca pushed them aside and with both of their arms loaded with take-out containers they went up to their suite. Rebecca told the reporters she would come back down to talk with them, but Melanie would have nothing to say at this time. And she did come back down and she knew from experience the questions that would be asked.

“Says here on the player listing she comes from Bumstead. Is that a joke? Where the heck is that? I couldn’t find it in a U.S. Almanac.”

“In Canada you bonehead. There is another world beyond the U.S. borders you know. Saskatchewan to be precise.”

“It says here that her home course is the North Saskatchewan Golf and Country club, who's the head professional.”

“Melanie’s father. Dougal McDougal Junior. He’s also the course architect.”

“Where did she learn her unusual swing?”

“Hale, Andy and Moe.”

“Who are they? The three stooges?”

They all laughed, except the reporter from Clapshorn who had heard the answers before. “Rebecca, I have two questions. First, how is she feeling after the attack by Burt? It might help her to know that after the incident I did a little snooping and found out this wasn’t the first time he had done this thing.”

“Thanks for that question John. And thanks for your concern. Clearly being attacked

on a golf course by a club-wielding monster was an unsettling experience. But this is a young girl who, while growing up in the Canadian wild, has faced wolves, polar bears and wild Indians, so she can handle herself.”

That quote received national play and even sparked a comic sketch by one of the late night TV talk show guys.

Reporters scribbled and John continued. “Rebecca, today was interesting, but most will see that nine holes as a freak event, especially after her front nine. Do you honestly think she can win?”

Rebecca wanted to pump her fist in victory at his question. It was as if John was playing into her strategy. “Well there are clearly a lot of outstanding young men in the final sixteen. She is just happy to be included in that group and will take each day on the golf course from here on as a bonus. I’ll just quote what one of you wrote after it was announced she was going to play on the men’s side. ‘How can any eighteen-year old girl from duck’s ass Canada ever think she can compete with the top young men golfers that the complete U.S. has to offer?’”

At that Rebecca put her hands up and stopped the questions.

“That’s all for now guys. See you tomorrow,” and she went back into the resort.

Coach was waiting inside the front door. They gave each other a quick hug when they were sure no one was looking. “How are you fairing through all of this?” She asked in a genuinely caring voice.

“Well, I suspect that my career at Clapshorn is coming to a close. I knew about Burt’s background and I took him on anyhow just to have a winning team. It’s good that Burt isn’t pressing charges against the kid from Texas. Will Melanie press a charge of assault against Burt do you think?”

“I doubt it,” Rebecca suggested. “She is acting very strangely. I think that for some reason she thinks she is to blame for something.”

“I saw her say something to Burt while they were walking on the course. Do you know what she said?”

“All I ever heard her say was ‘nice shot’ or something to that effect.”

“Well at any rate, the school is in deep shit for admitting an academically unqualified athlete with a history of violence. The NCGA is considering a probe into the

school's admission procedures. I knew about him Rebecca, and actually recruited the guy, so my ass is on the line for sure.”

“Won't you be exonerated if Melanie and Chad do well?”

Chad had posted the lowest score, a six under, of all golfers that day and was the top ranked player of the sixteen.

“It's a mixed bag there. Some Alumni, mostly friends of Burt's parents are saying this is what happens when you let a woman play with the men.” He paused and addressed her in as serious a way as possible. “And Rebecca, promise me, trust me on this, you will keep Melanie away from Chad.”

At that point the others from the Clapshorn group started to arrive and Rebecca and Coach broke off their conversation as Rebecca quietly told him to come up to their suite after the group dinner to help them strategize. By the time Rebecca returned to the suite, Melanie's portion of the Chinese food had been eaten and the door to Melanie's room was closed. Rebecca listened at the door and heard only the sound of the TV tuned into a game show. She decided to just leave her alone. If Melanie wanted to talk, she would come out. Coach did come up to the suite later, quietly knocking at the door as an expectant Rebecca let him in. They did strategize, but it was not about Melanie's future.



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## **Part 1 - Chapter 9: Match Play**

On the first day of the elimination round, Melanie enjoyed some of the best golf she could remember. For the first time in her life no one laughed at her swing and she felt she did not have to apologize for her special attributes and unique talent. She was playing against the lowest handicap young golfers in America in 1978 and she was totally in her element. After winning her first match three and two against the NCGA Eastern region

champion the rest of the field knew that she was not a one shot wonder. Both Rebecca and Coach had talked to her about strategy when playing such good golfers. It was not complex. Don't play for a great score; rather play to win more holes than the other person. No, "going for it" over the trees. Halving a hole is better than losing it with a chancy shot. Just be a consistent par-birdie golfer and the other player's mistakes will let you win. They were sure with her ball striking consistency she could have bogie free rounds, and even win the odd hole with a birdie. Consistency and patience would win the day.

The strategy worked like a charm to get her into the final eight for the afternoon match. Her opponent matched her birdie for birdie but bogied three holes to her pars. She did not crush the guy; but it was an impressive win.

She followed the same strategy in the afternoon match. It was tougher than the morning since the guy made only two bogies so she only won two and one. The win meant that she was now in the final four and would play in the morning's match before the championship eighteen in the afternoon. She pretty much concentrated on her golf during the day and only peripherally noticed the crowd that was gathering around her. She did hear cheering from Texas and New Hampshire and once she waved and smiled at them. But other than that it was all golf and that was a world in which she was more than comfortable. So it was a good day.

However, there were a few things she learned at the end of the day that gave her mixed emotions.

The first and worst was that Chad was also in the final four. She had very mixed feelings about that. She realized now the potential existed for them to meet in the final match play. Part of her wanted to embarrass him just the way she did with Burt. But that match had exhausted her beyond anything anyone else could imagine. She knew it was the only realistic way she could get back at Burt, Chad or the others. She could have gone to Coach and told him what happened but in the end it would be their word against hers. She was far too naïve and uninformed at that time to understand rape kits and other such ways of proving her story was true. But the fact was, she blamed herself and was ashamed and she did not want her Dad or her Grandmother or Rebecca or anyone else to know what had happened. It was her fault. She should never have lost control of her

circumstances and let Chad take over the way he did.

It had felt good to do what she did to Burt and it had been calculated and planned. She had no such plan for Chad and even if she did, she wasn't sure she could even beat him. When she really examined her feelings she knew she was terrified of meeting him in the final match. While she had no intention of not winning her own match tomorrow morning, she secretly hoped that Chad would lose and she could keep playing with the kind of fabulous men she had played today. They were both gentlemen and simply accepted her as a golfer and not as an anomalous woman freak. Neither were bothered in the slightest that she beat them, and the one from North Carolina actually asked her out on a date when the tournament was over. She politely declined, but she was having fun playing with people who respected her for her golf and did not care about her unusual anything.

Playing with Chad would ruin that.

The other thing she learned was that her success had now reached all the way to the Canadian media and a television team from CBC had gone to the Folly to see just where this golfing freak came from. Her Dad knew nothing of what was going on and said they could only stay if they paid golf fees and played the course or else he would sick the old collie on them. Brutus the thirteen-year old Border Collie was not much of a threat, but the TV crew from Toronto still had the time of their lives losing balls through a full nine holes at the Folly and it was captured on video and played for the nightly CBC news. The Folly would never be the same again.

To her embarrassment, she learned that someone had called Hale Irwin and Andy Bean again, the American media still had no idea about the Moe part of her swing coaching, to congratulate them on the success of their student. Although both had been following the NCGA championships, neither knew a Melanie McDougal, but thanked the reporter for the compliment anyhow.

So as she went back to the resort for a strategy dinner with Coach and Rebecca, she was both pleased and nervous and maybe a little afraid for the first time in her life that she could remember.

Rebecca listened to Coach's advice and kept Melanie away from the other golfers, especially Chad. He had won both matches that day and was holding a loud court in the

restaurant with the other male golfers, a smattering of parents and a few reporters. As she went past him on the way to the lobby, she heard a reporter ask him how he felt about possibly playing his female classmate from Clapshorn. His answer was as correct as it could have been, praising Melanie for her golf and saying what a great day it would be for Clapshorn and women's golf if the two of them were to meet in the final match. He quickly turned the conversation back to his own game and his future professional prospects. He was popular, Rebecca had to admit to herself, and unlike the time she played Burt, if they ended up playing each other the crowd would mostly be with him, not her. Even Coach would have to be neutral. She was glad for now that she and Melanie could stick to themselves and she did not have to figure out just what it was that she did not like about him.

The strategy they devised was the same one they had worked out the night before and that had worked so well today. Play to beat the other player, not the course. But they were down to the top four young golfers in the country so it was less likely that one was going to make an error that would lead to too many bogies; simply relying upon Melanie's consistency might not be good enough. Coach went over each of the holes with Melanie, pointing out where it was possible for her to take a chance in order to win a hole.

"Remember," he cautioned her. "One stray shot in match play might only mean the loss of the hole, not the match. So if you take a chance and blow it just move on."

Melanie listened carefully to what they said but quickly realized they were simply talking because they were more nervous than she was and talking about strategy made them feel better. There was really nothing either of them could help her with at this point. She liked them both and was glad they were there. She wondered why Coach was with her and not with Chad and only partly attributed that to the apparent relationship between him and Rebecca. Despite the fact that Coach was married and six years older than her, Melanie liked him. He was attentive, kind, sensitive to others around him and good looking. He had once planned on a pro career after a stellar college record, but a ski accident had destroyed selected ligaments, tendons and bones in his right arm and ended his hopes of professional golf. Melanie thought he would make a great teacher one day, and one day he would indeed be known as one of the world's premier golf instructors.

For now he was just Coach, sitting at their kitchen table lecturing her on the characteristics of the young man she was playing tomorrow morning.

“Enough you guys! I’ll let you two do the thinking and I’ll just do the playing! I’m going to bed,” she protested as she moved to go to her room. On the way she picked up the fake leather folder on the counter that held the resort writing paper and envelopes. If either Rebecca or Coach noticed, they did not say. They said goodnight and continued their own conversation.

Melanie did not go to sleep right away. In fact she was not sure if she slept at all that night as emotions churned her head and her stomach. Once she woke up and went to the bathroom and using the mirror above the sink she awkwardly examined her ‘private parts’ as Grandma used to call them, and wondered, illogically she knew, if she was damaged. Once when she fell asleep for a moment she dreamt that Chad, Burt, Frank and Henry were all lined up in front of her naked with their penises stiff in front of them and she walked down the row snapping each of their cocks in half. She thought a lot of the Folly and her Dad and the friendly guys from Saskatoon and she softly cried. She was not quite sure why; because she was homesick or because she wondered if she would ever see them again. She shivered when she envisioned Chad kissing her and entering her.

The writing helped a little.

When Rebecca woke and walked out of her bedroom, Melanie was at her usual place at the kitchen table dressed and ready to go. She had on the same feminine golf wear and the makeup was perfect. Rebecca thought she did look tired but it was the look in her eyes that bothered her. Rebecca had seen it before. It was a look that suggested Melanie was with you in body but her mind somewhere else and it was when Melanie played the best golf. It was there when she played that back nine against Burt. It was there when she drove sometimes. It was there the time she fended off the attack in the bar parking lot. It was there this morning.

“Good morning,” Rebecca cheerfully announced. “Ready for a big day?”

“Yup,” Melanie had a resolute tone to her response. “Let’s go bust their balls girl!” And Melanie was suddenly standing by the door with a small travel bag in her hand.

“What’s in the bag?”

“Some spare clothes. I might want to change at lunch.”

Rebecca did not recall Melanie having any decent spare clothes but thought the idea was a good one anyhow so she rose from her chair with her coffee still untouched and they headed to the car.

“I’ll drive,” Melanie announced as she took the keys from Rebecca.

When they arrived at the practice range, the other three golfers were already going through their warm up routine. Chad had the largest entourage since he was a California boy and many of his old friends and much of his family had come to watch. As the top seed in the tournament he also had the largest press following. The other two men were from Florida and Iowa universities, so there was not much in the way of family to cheer them on. But there was a large crowd waiting for Melanie. One group had a large sign on a stick that said:

LEAVE GOLF TO THE MEN – GO BACK TO THE KITCHEN

They called themselves the ‘Arizona Men for Equal Rights’, or something like that.

There was a group that called themselves the ‘Real Women of America’ giving an interview to a furiously scribbling reporter about the need for woman to recapture their rightful place in the home and not the golf course.

Others took sides in what to Melanie’s great discomfort was apparently becoming an issue greater than just golf. All she cared about was golf.

There was a group of woman all with short men’s style hair and dressed in men’s suits with a poster that just said:

GO GIRL GO – FOR THE REST OF US!

There was even some guy with a long beard dressed in a flowing kaftan who was proclaiming Melanie the Virgin Mary and the second coming was soon upon us.

Melanie bitterly laughed to herself at that one. The virgin part was not going to work.

The golf course and tournament officials were trying to control the growing crowd. While there were rules concerning crowd noise or anything else that could be distracting to the golfers, signs were not in that category and anyone who had bought a ticket could follow their favourite golfer. To all who watched the golf that day it was clear it was not going to be a usual day at the NCGA championships or at Cedar Grove.

Much to the crowd’s disappointment and Rebecca’s and Coach’s concern, Melanie



skipped the warm up and just walked over to the first hole where her match would start. Thankfully she and Chad were not matched up in this semifinal round and he started on ten, so there was little chance that they would cross paths in the morning. She was early to the tee box, so she just sat on the bench and stared at the ground and ignored the taunts and cheers from the crowd that had now followed her. When her opponent, a tall lanky guy from Florida joined her on the tee, she went over and shook his hand and genuinely apologized for the circus. "I'm so sorry," she offered. "I just want to play golf. I have nothing to do with any of this."

He sensed her genuineness and responded in kind. "Don't worry Melanie. Whatever happens, the sun is shining, the wind is cooling, a perfect day on a golf course that will test our skills. Let's ignore them and go have some fun."

Melanie wanted to hug him and her relief was palpable. She was sensitive enough about being seen as a freak, but now with the weird groups making her their *cause célèbre* she was even more uncomfortable. He put her at ease and despite the furor around them the match was one of the most enjoyable she had ever had. She did win the match, although at the time that would not have mattered. They were both superb golfers and they battled hole by hole. As they walked up each hole they shared their views of their schools and laughed at their respective family stories and compared their golf aspirations. She learned that he came from a very poor farm family in Alabama and he only learned his golf as a caddy and hitting balls into his father's fields with thrown away clubs. She laughed as he told her he only had ten balls so he had to go and find them in the field after each ten shots. His break had come when one of the wealthy members at the club where he used to caddy asked him to play along one day when he was caddying and the member saw some potential. His game progressed to the point where he received a golf scholarship to Florida State. Golf would be his way of helping his whole family out of poverty one day.

Melanie easily described her life at the Folly. How her mother left when she was four and her Dad built this crazy golf course that no one could play. She was two up after the seventeenth hole. She did not even remember how. She just hit and putted and chatted and then the match was over.

"Melanie, it was a genuine pleasure to have played with you today." He offered his

handshake as he conceded her putt on seventeen. “All the best in wherever you go with your golf, or your life. Maybe we’ll meet again sometime and I’ll have the chance to even the score!”

Melanie suggested that would be great and she would look forward to it, although she knew now that was very unlikely. As soon as she left the safety of the green and fringe, Rebecca and Coach took her arms and hustled her through the crowds into the locker room of the clubhouse. As the only female in the final match she had the room to herself and she was instantly grateful for the silence and the peace.

“Why don’t you guys just leave me here? We have an hour before the afternoon match. Rebecca can you can bring me a sandwich here?”

Rebecca agreed and the two of them went out to deal with the press and the others gathering for the afternoon match, believing that an hour of quiet was the restful thing for Melanie right now. Melanie sat on the change bench between double rows of lockers and stared at the floor. She was there twenty minutes later when Rebecca returned with an egg salad sandwich and a coke.

“Hey. You OK?”

Melanie glanced at Rebecca and the sandwich.

“So Chad won his match didn’t he?” It was more of a statement than a question.

“Yeah. Five and four. He crushed the guy and is outside letting the whole state know it.”

Melanie did not react except to go back to staring at the floor.

“What is it about this guy Melanie? I know you had a crush on him and I know you threw that final at the state amateur. So what’s up? Are you going to throw this afternoon?”

“I’m a freak Rebecca. You know that by now. I have a gift that I’ve used to play this game and for nothing else. Now all it has done is cause trouble. For me, for other players, for Coach and now for a whole bunch of causes that I don’t even understand.”

She paused.

“It’s just a silly fucking game!” and she started to cry.

Rebecca was not sure if she was more surprised at the tears or the fact that she just heard Melanie swear for the first time.

“Rebecca, I have met and played with some of the nicest people I have ever met. New Hampshire asked me to marry him.” They both laughed through the tears. “Florida? I wanted to ask him to marry me!”

They laughed again.

“But each person out there with their own cause has made this more than a game and I’ve only now realized that was how it was for guys like Burt and Chad. For them it was more than a game. It wasn’t beating me at golf. It was beating me and whatever it looks like I represent. I didn’t realize that before but now it all comes together and explains a lot.”

“Explains what? What does it explain? I don’t understand?”

Melanie did not answer right away, but she turned to Rebecca and with a very confident smile announced. “I am just a country girl from Bumstead, Saskatchewan. I only play golf. I can’t do anything else. Give me a few moments to get something to eat and refreshed and I’ll meet you at the first tee.”

Melanie gave Rebecca a hug.

“Thanks for what you have done for me Rebecca. I love you.”

And Melanie got up and walked into the washroom.

In later years Rebecca would go over that conversation many times and realize that if she were not so caught up in the moment of competition she would have noticed the pattern in Melanie’s comments and questions. But instead she went out to the first tee area to deal with the press and wait for the start of the final match.

Chad and his entourage were already waiting at the tee box even though the tee off time was still fifteen minutes away. Rebecca noticed that he and Frank were having some sort of argument and Frank dropped Chad’s clubs to the ground and walked away, clearly angry and upset. One of Chad’s old high school friends came out of the crowd and after a big high five picked up Chad’s clubs. Rebecca deduced that this was not a spontaneous decision, but she felt it was no concern of hers.

Coach walked nervously back and forth between the two caddies, making sure that they both knew the rules although both caddies were experienced at the bag and the play. The NCGA official was waiting for the match time nervously fingering the coin that would determine the tee off sequence. The crowd was held well back from the tee box

and while still waiving various signs, was mostly quiet since they knew noise would risk them being thrown off the course. The afternoon was a perfect California fall day, blue skies, gentle breeze and moderate temperature.

They were all waiting for Melanie to join them and they were soon rewarded for their wait. A buzz in the crowd told those gathered on the tee box that she was coming, but did not warn them of the Melanie that was on her way through the crowd making her way to the box. The women's golf attire and makeup were gone and in their place were old-fashioned men's madras pants. A too large golf shirt with the logo of a Saskatoon grain elevator topped the pants and on her head was the baseball cap with the frayed brim and the faded word *Bumstead* stenciled on the top. Everyone in the crowd not from Claphorn simply stared. Rebecca and the coach groaned. These were the clothes they had convinced her to abandon a year ago. Chad and his new caddie openly laughed.

Melanie sauntered nonchalantly up to the tee box, apparently quite oblivious to the stares and whispers. She went straight to Chad. "Hi Chad." She greeted him warmly, reaching up to give him a peck on the cheek. "What a great fall day for golf! I hope you enjoy the course."

He held her tight as she brought her face near his and with a smile on his face he whispered into her ear. "I know what you did to Burt, bitch. Won't work on me." Melanie gave him a puzzled look as if she did not have a clue as to what he was referring to. He let her move away from him and with a smile announced that it was indeed a great day. "Let's play!"

Chad won the coin toss and went first. He hit his drive only slightly down the right side of the fairly straight away longish 400-yard par four.

Melanie went over to Rebecca and refused the driver and instead took the 5-iron out of her bag.

"What are you doing? You need a driver here?"

"No Rebecca, I hit a 5-iron on the first hole."

Melanie put in her tee, placed the ball and in an unusual fashion for her, paused and looked out over the fairway. The first hole at the Folly was one of her favourites. The hole was relatively straight forward, but the combination of the rolling wheat fields and the endless horizon beyond the green gave her a tremendous sense of freedom and well

being. The tee shot was tricky she knew. It had to be 210 yards, not much more, not much less, or she would be in the cornfield looking for her ball. She stood up to the ball and with no more thought or practice swing hit a perfect 5- iron that landed within a yard or two or where she was aiming.

“Perfect,” she said to Rebecca as she gave her back the club.

“Whatever you say Melanie,” Rebecca quipped. But with Chad only 120 yards straight in to the green and Melanie facing a tough 185 yards she was not sure what Melanie was seeing.

As they walked to the ball, Melanie explained.

“You can see that if I had hit it any further I would be in the wheat field and have to take a penalty. From here a slightly fading 6-iron will get me to the middle of the green.”

And she did just that. A beautiful, high slightly fading 6-iron landed twenty yards from the hole and ended up only three yards from the hole.

“See,” she admonished Rebecca as they walked to the green. “It’s not hard if you know the course!”

Chad matched her shot and her putt and they went to two all square.

The second hole at Cedar was a par-three, 180 yards into a slight breeze with the pin tucked into the back left side of the green and protected by a deep bunker in front. When they arrived at the hole and saw it was a par-three, Melanie was confused for a moment. “Dad must have moved the holes around while I was away. This is normally a four?” She questioned herself. “No matter, it’s still the same hole.”

Chad hit a perfect shot to the middle of the green and Melanie congratulated him. “Great shot!” she announced. “Most first timers here can't do that so well! But watch this.”

This time she took an 8-iron and lofted it into the slight right to left breeze and with her draw spin brought the ball down twenty yards in front of the green. It bounced hard and rolled two yards past the pin.

The crowd following the match gave a cheer and applause. Melanie was momentarily confused by the reaction. She turned and saw Texas, New Hampshire and Florida all standing at the front of the crowd.

“Way 'ta' go Melanie!” they shouted as they applauded.

She was visibly pleased and commented to Rebecca that it was really nice that those boys could make it all the way here today.

Melanie was clearly enjoying herself although to those watching she was doing some strange things. Once, after a visible argument with Rebecca where Melanie kept insisting that she had to hit the landing area, she hit a 7-iron from the tee on a par five and still birdied the hole. On another par-four Melanie insisted that she had to hit a 250-yard drive in order to clear the water when there was no water on the hole at all. She put the ball on the green with her tee shot. Her golf was superb, so far half pars and birdies, and her spirits were high and confident. She was cheerful and friendly and once she accepted there was a gallery that day she chatted with them as she walked down the course. But by the seventh hole Rebecca was acutely aware there was something wrong.

“How do you like the prairie fall?” She asked one puzzled parent. “Nice eh?”

“Be careful not to trample my dad’s wheat. He gets real upset with golfers who do that!” she joked with another.

And to Chad she was not only friendly but also helpful.

“Watch this next green,” she helpfully told him on six. “You can't really see it but it slopes naturally towards the river.”

Chad just glowered and walked faster to get away from her.

At the end of the front nine they were still all square. Both had played fabulous golf and had matched each other birdie for birdie and par for par. Chad had played the course perfectly so far, with well coached club selection and wise shots to tough pin placements.

Melanie’s nine had been as weird as her swing and by the turn even the gallery knew there was something wrong. Chad and his caddie asked Rebecca to join them as they approached the tournament chair. “The girl is behaving like she is on a different planet. She is nuts,” he exclaimed to the official. “You can't let her go on. This is mockery. Declare her unfit and declare me the default winner.”

Rebecca was instantly on him. “You can't be serious Chad. As soon as someone matches you stroke for stroke you want them disqualified?” She was so angry she was spitting her words.

The chair seemed to be considering the issue carefully. It was true that this whole thing had not gone the way the board had envisioned. Not only had Melanie won, but she

was also becoming a crowd and a press favourite. After watching Melanie on the front nine he actually agreed with Chad. She was off her rocker but the public fallout from a disqualification would be immense.

“Let the match continue,” he decided. “If she is as unbalanced as you say I’m sure her golf will fall apart and there won’t be an issue.”

Rebecca gave Chad a murderous look and walked back to Melanie. Melanie in the meantime was entertaining Texas, New Hampshire and Florida and a gathering crowd with stories about golfing at the Folly. She arrived just as the crowd roared at her description of one golfer chasing a raven through a cornfield after the bird had stolen his bag of potato chips. She was just starting to tell the guys to watch her play seven, since it was the most challenging hole at the Folly, when Rebecca took her by the arm and walked her away to a quiet place near the tenth tee box. Rebecca was about to say something to her when Melanie announced. “Rebecca I am having such a wonderful day. I cannot tell you how much it means for you and this wonderful crowd to be here today with me. I wish Bob and Helen could be here and it would be fun to let Moe see how I’ve remembered what he taught me. But today is perfect,” she gushed.

Rebecca cautiously asked her what she thought her strategy should be on the tenth hole and Melanie wondrously described a hole that Rebecca had never seen before and only resembled the tenth at Cedar Grove in that they were both apparently par fours. “And isn’t Chad a real gentleman? I can hardly wait to have Dad and Gran meet him.”

Rebecca did not question her description, just reached up and put her arm around her shoulders. “I’m glad you are enjoying this Melanie. So let’s go bust their balls!”

While Melanie walked to the tee box and continued the chatter with the followers, Rebecca sought out Coach who had been talking to Chad. “He’s really pissed, Rebecca,” Coach offered. “He and his parents did not want to play her in the first place and now with her behaviour they think she should be disqualified. They may appeal later.”

“Do you think she has lost it?” Rebecca reticently asked. “I mean do you think playing the back nine will be bad for her?”

“I know you are closer to her than I am, but while she seems in a different reality or world, she looks pretty happy to me. I would think stopping her from playing and shocking her out of whatever world she is in might be tricky right now.”

“I agree. But help me to watch her over the back nine. As the coach you are the only one who can legitimately throw in the towel.”

The back nine was mostly a repeat of the front nine. Rebecca never knew what club Melanie was going to ask for since she did not have a clue what kind of hole that Melanie was playing. By this time she realized that Melanie thought she was back in Saskatchewan and they were all playing the course that Melanie had been brought up on. She resolved to go there someday to have a look for herself, but at this moment the circumstance made for some bizarre playing. Once Melanie took out her driver on the 165-yard fourteenth hole and to the delight of the crowd hit a little punch shot that rolled to the middle of the green. But Melanie never stopped smiling and never stopped shooting whatever shot was needed to par or birdie and Chad was clearly getting increasingly frustrated. He was playing superb golf and despite her antics, she kept matching him hole by hole. The crowds secretly distracted him. He was used to them being on his side. He knew how to behave on the course, and even today he had been careful not to show any frustration, congratulating Melanie after she made a good shot and smiling cheerfully as they moved from hole to hole. But the crowd had definitely shifted to her on this day and he did not like it. Sooner or later he was sure she would blow one of those ‘Hail Mary’ save shots and he would get a lead that he would never let go.

That had not happened by the end of the eighteen. To Chad’s and the NCGA's surprise, the match was all square after eighteen holes of regulation match play. The golfers had matched each other birdie for birdie and par for par and while the score did not matter in match play they had each shot a remarkable seven under, a pair of sixty-fives. The match would now go to sudden death extra holes. The extra hole was number nine, chosen because it was the number one handicap hole and they would play it over and over again until one player won the hole. It was a par-five that stretched as a dogleg to the left around the pond so that water ran the complete left side of the fairway. The smart shot was a long iron or fairway wood to the middle and two approach shots to the green for a possible birdie putt. That was how Chad had played it earlier in the day. Melanie had hit a beautiful drawing driver down the left side that set up an easy approach to the green. They both birdied, but Melanie had taken the more spectacular and risky



route.

Melanie and Rebecca walked together down the fairway to the ninth tee box. Melanie had not paid much attention to the discussion between the caddies and Coach after the eighteenth was over. “Which hole are we going to Rebecca?”

“The water one Melanie!” she joked. “Your favourite.”

“Alright!” she enthusiastically responded. “I love this hole. Although it cost my dad a bundle to buy a right of way from the County to allow golfers to walk across the bridge over the North Saskatchewan.”

“That’s too bad.” Rebecca had played along with Melanie and her fantasy for most of the back nine. Whatever she was doing or wherever she was, it was working for her golf game.

Chad hit first and hit a long iron to the middle of the fairway and Melanie told him, “Not bad Chad. A good shot but not long enough.” And she stood up to the tee with her driver and looked over the North Saskatchewan River as it ran west to the sun that was starting to push the horizon. She knew the shot on this tee box well. The seventh hole at the Folly was a sharp dogleg left with the first 200 yards being all river and the fairway running 300 yards left along the riverbank. A safe iron certainly put you in the middle of the fairway, but a long way from the hole. To have any chance of making the green in two, and all the golfers at the Folly tried it, you had to hit a very long draw that had to land perfectly on the fairway over the river and roll straight down the fairway to the left. She had hit it many times. The risk was an ‘over cooked’ draw that would land the ball on the fairway but roll into the river. She had hit that many times too, she laughed to herself as she went to the tee box.

In her usual fashion she put in her tee, took one look over the river and her shot started out low and piercing into the slight breeze. Every eye in the gallery followed her ball flight and there were ooohs and aaahs as it took a rising trajectory straight down the fairway and started a gentle draw straight left towards the hole. Melanie immediately knew she was in trouble. She had felt the western breeze on her cheek that rolled off the Rockies this time of year and she knew that wind would amplify her draw. She watched as the her ball landed on the fairway and rolled and rolled and rolled right into the rough on the edge of the fairway, just short of the North Saskatchewan.

There were loud groans from the gallery and a way too loud “shit!” from Rebecca standing behind her. Chad’s caddie gave a fist pump and he and Chad shared a high five.

Melanie just nonchalantly gave Rebecca her driver and said as seriously as she had done all day. “Hey, don’t worry. I’ve been there many times!”

Chad moved quickly to his ball and waited while Melanie, Rebecca and the tournament Marshal moved over to where her ball had rolled to the edge of the water. The water was a lateral hazard and the point of entry to the water was on the fairway side, so if the ball had gone in the water Melanie could take a stroke and drop the ball from shoulder height, any place on a line from the point where it went into the water, to the tee box. In this case she had come up short of the water and her ball was only two feet from the edge of the water in three-inch rough. She did have places to stand, but they were either very close to the ball or standing at the water edge and below the ball in some mixture of mud and sand.

“Can I have my driver please Rebecca?” Melanie asked in a very serious and quiet voice as she looked down at the ball.

“What the hell are you doing Melanie? You are 250 yards from the green. Take an iron. Take a lay up and go for the one putt birdie. Chad will likely hit it in three. Get the birdie maybe. You can be on in three, one putt and maybe save the hole.”

“It’s OK Rebecca. Moe taught me this one,” Melanie offered as she put out her hand for the driver. Rebecca looked down at the ball and saw what no one else could see and she realized what Melanie had been looking at. Her ball was sitting up on a one-foot square tuft of rough like it had been placed on a tee. The result was a perfect lie and this time when Rebecca looked at Melanie there was no sign of a vacant or distant mind.

“OK. But hit a 5 wood. It will come up short and give you an easy chip to a birdie. Trust me on this one Melanie.”

Melanie paused for a moment and then took the 5 wood from Rebecca. She walked carefully over the lip of the grass to the edge of the water, took a quick look down the fairway and swung harder than Rebecca had ever seen her swing. There was no doubt there was a solid connection between the club head and ball.

The gallery around the green could see from a distance as she carefully looked at her ball and took a club from Rebecca, but no one expected the shot to come anywhere near

the green. They had all been subdued when her drive went into the thick rough since she was the crowd favourite. When she hit the ball and they all realized it was coming towards the green the buzz grew louder. When the ball came up short and landed in the deep bunker on the right side of the green there was a spontaneous groan from the loud gallery on the left side of the green where Texas, New Hampshire, Florida and the other Melanie fans were watching. Rebecca looked over at Chad and saw him laugh as he exchanged the iron he had in his hand for a fairway wood. If she could go for it, so could he. She looked over at a smug looking Melanie. "Don't tell me you did that on purpose?"

"Actually I was trying to hole it. I missed," she laughed as they walked to the green.

Chad hit his second shot into the bunker at the back of the green and they all walked to the green to see what kind of lies they each had in the sand. When they arrived at the green, Chad's ball was clearly evident in a good lie in the trap. They could not see Melanie's ball. Rebecca went into the trap and started to rake where the ball appeared to land, but there was no ball. Rebecca turned to the small crowd on that side of the green.

"Did anyone see where it went in?" There was no response and she noticed that the crowd on that side of the green consisted of Chad's friends and relatives.

"Come on! One of you must have seen where the ball went."

The crowd just looked at each other and shrugged their shoulders.

Melanie grabbed a rake and jumped into the trap with Rebecca and started to dig in the sand. It did not matter if they hit or moved the ball since the rule was that they could simply put the ball back in its original position with no penalty if they found it and moved it with their rakes.

But neither of them turned up the ball.

The Marshal walked across the green and called to Rebecca. "You have three minutes left." A player only has five minutes to find a missing ball. Coach, Texas, New Hampshire and Florida ran out of the crowd, jumped into the trap and joined Melanie and Rebecca in the search by kicking the sand with their feet. By this time Chad and his Caddie friend had come over and were standing on the green over the trap, silently looking alternately at the excavation going on in the bunker and their watches.

"Someone took the ball!" claimed Rebecca to the Marshal in desperation. "One of those guys over there went into the trap and took the ball before we got here!"

“That’s possible,” Texas agreed. “We couldn’t see the bunker from the other side of the raised green.”

“Thirty seconds,” the Marshal ignored her and announced as he looked at his watch. All four resumed their furious digging and raking.

“Done,” he announced. “Time’s up. That’s a lost ball.”

They all stopped their digging and raking except Rebecca who kept shoving her rake furiously into the corners of the trap. Melanie walked over to her and touched her on the shoulder and calmly announced: “It’s OK Rebecca. It’s over.” Texas and New Hampshire helped Melanie and Rebecca out of the deep bunker and no one said anything until the tournament Marshal came over.

“So that ball is now declared lost. That will be stroke and distance. Young lady,” he looked at Melanie, “come with me and we’ll go back to where you hit the shot and do it again.”

Rebecca looked ready to cry. Texas, New Hampshire and Florida stared at the ground and did not know what to say. Melanie saw Chad and Frank look at each other, grin and turn and walk back to the bunker where Chad’s ball had landed. “Right. Let’s go,” she agreed and reached over to the golf bag and pulled out her driver. “My choice this time.” Melanie and the Marshal started to tromp off down the fairway to the spot beside the water where she had hit her last shot. Rebecca started to run after her but Melanie nodded towards the fans on the right side of the green and quietly said, “Stay up here Rebecca. Keep an eye on those guys.”

The rule requires that the ball be placed as close as possible to the spot where the original shot was made. In this instance Melanie would have to place her ball by dropping it from shoulder height into the original two inch rough. The spot was not hard to find since Melanie’s first shot with the 5 wood cut a quarter inch deep swath through the patch of grass. She dropped the ball and it landed in the swath from the previous swing.

Melanie looked at the Marshal and he nodded. She took her previous stance in the mud and sand near the edge of the water. “This one’s for you Dad,” she said to herself as she took a full, rhythmic swing. She watched as the Persimmon head came rushing at the ball and was amazed at how the club head could compress the ball so much before it sprung into the air on its way forward. She continued to watch the club head as it chased the ball

and, held back by the shaft, wrapped around her shoulder.

A reporter who was standing beside the ninth green would later describe the moment as surreal. Like the last shot, they could see Melanie drop the ball and take a swing from a stance mostly hidden by the bank that made her look like she was hitting from her knees. Like the last shot it appeared to be heading for the green. Unlike the last time there was complete silence; the reporter said even the birds stopped singing and the silence was like the void of noise just before a big thunderstorm.

And unlike the last shot this one landed on the green and rolled into the hole.

The silence continued for what seemed to Rebecca like minutes before the roar from the growing group of Melanie supporters totally drowned out the groans from the Chad fans. Texas, New Hampshire and Rebecca jumped up and down and hugged each other. Coach just stood beside the green with a stunned look on his face. Rebecca turned to Chad at the other side of the green and gave him a middle finger just as she saw him mouth “fuck” to his Caddie and jump down into the bunker with his sand iron. Without even waiting for Melanie or the Marshal to get back he hit his sand shot twenty feet past the cup. Melanie’s shot had given her a four, so he had to sink this putt to halve the hole and continue the match. Melanie and the Marshal arrived just in time to see the putt roll a foot wide of its mark.

When Chad failed to sink the putt it was all over. He took off his hat and walked over to Melanie who was standing a little breathless, but expressionless at the side of the green. He reached out his hand to her, but she reached up and as she pecked him on the cheek for the crowds to see, whispered in his ear, “I can take you anytime I want.” And then she quickly walked into the swarming well-wishers, laughing and giving high fives and yelling, “Washroom! Washroom!” Texas, New Hampshire and Florida emerged from the crowd and formed a phalanx around her. Texas and Florida took each arm and New Hampshire cleared the way in front as they headed to the clubhouse and the women’s locker room. When they reached the entrance she gave them each a warm hug.

“Thanks guys. I love you all. I wish you everything you want in life!”

And she quickly disappeared into the locker room.

When she had not come out of the locker room after twenty minutes, the guys became a little worried. New Hampshire stuck his head in the door and yelled her name

but there was no answer. Texas went and found Rebecca and dragged her away from the reporters who were talking to her while they waited for Melanie to appear. Rebecca walked quickly with him to the clubhouse and went to the locker area in the women's change room. Where Melanie had a locker there was no Melanie. But there were two neatly folded piles of clothes on the bench beside the locker. One pile was the new golf clothes that Rebecca had bought Melanie earlier in the tournament and the other pile was her old clothes from the Folly. On top of that pile was the frayed baseball hat with *BUMSTEAD* stenciled on the front. But there was no Melanie to be found.

Rebecca ran outside to the guys and ordered them to start searching the clubhouse and the grounds. "She isn't there. But she can't be very far," she pleaded.

They all went in different directions asking questions and looking for any sign that Melanie had been there. Rebecca ran through the main clubhouse asking everyone if they had seen her and as time passed she started to get a sick feeling in her stomach. By this time Coach had found Rebecca and was helping look as well.

"My God – what have we done?" Rebecca was close to tears.

Coach gave her a hug and did not seem to care who saw. "It's OK. We'll find her," he comforted as they went out the front door of the clubhouse.

Rebecca saw it right away.

Her BMW had been parked right at the front door and it was gone. She remembered Melanie had specifically asked to drive this morning so she had the keys and for the first time she started to realize that whatever was going on had been preplanned by Melanie.

"Quick, get your car," she ordered. "She's probably gone back to the resort."

As the other searchers came around the corner of the clubhouse she quickly told them where they were going and asked that they stay here in case she came back. Rebecca and coach roared off in his old Datsun with only half a muffler to try and find Melanie back at the resort. When they arrived the BMW was nowhere to be found.

"Look Rebecca. Let's go up to your room. Maybe she left a clue as to where she went?"

When they entered the room it was empty and nothing had been touched since the morning. Melanie's other clothes were still in the closet and drawers, and the dirty dishes from last night were still in the sink. They were starting to leave when a knock came at

the door and when Coach rushed to the door with the hope that it was Melanie who had forgotten her key, they were disappointed when they saw the desk clerk.

“Sorry to bother you Ma'am. But your roommate asked me to give this to you when you came back.” He handed her an envelope, the kind of resort envelope that was in every room, with her name on it in Melanie’s handwriting.

Rebecca sat down on the chesterfield. Her hand was shaking as she ripped open the envelope and started to read the first of over a dozen hand written pages. She sobbed uncontrollably as she read the pages and handed them over to coach one by one, and he soon cried like he had never done in his life.

*My dear wonderful Rebecca,*

*First of all, my sincere apologies to you for doing this to you, but I have thought it through very carefully and I don't have a choice. I hope that you will understand. You have been the only real friend that I have ever had in my life; the first that didn't care that I was different and knew me and I know liked me for what I was, not what I could do. I know now that golf can never be a part of my life and in many ways that saddens me but in other ways it frees me from a burden that until this tournament I really didn't know I was carrying. I am so sorry for not letting you in on my strategies to beat Burt and Chad. The fact is the one for Chad didn't work. He never broke during the whole eighteen holes despite my apparent insanity and it was just a fluke that I ended up winning the match. Of course I'm glad for you, Coach and the women who put so much weight on this silly game. Please enjoy and revel in the place that I leave you.*

The letter went on to describe in full detail the evening with Chad and the events that followed. Rebecca had to stop reading and as she continued to read Melanie’s description of the rape, she leaned over and threw up on the living room carpet.

Coach just kept saying “Oh my God ... Oh my God ...” over and over again.

It appeared that Melanie had written all the descriptive parts of the letter earlier and added the comments on today sometime in the last hour. The last page gave Rebecca some directions.

*Rebecca I'm telling you this not so that you will take legal action against these boys. Without me around to testify I know that it would be your word and this letter against theirs and since everyone now thinks I am totally bonkers it would likely be thrown out.*

*And I do not want my Dad, my Grandma or anyone else in Bumstead to know what happened. I don't need anyone's sympathy. It was really all my fault anyhow.*

*I think that this letter will be enough to get them thrown out of school. Their loss to me at golf and the indignity of expulsion should be enough for now. I have the feeling that Burt's caddy, Henry, might crack fairly quickly under some questioning so Coach or the President might give him a go. But I do not want anything public on this Rebecca. I couldn't endure that people would only remember me as a rape victim.*

*I do have some other favours to ask.*

*Please talk to my Dad, Granny and Bob and Helen. Tell them I am fine.*

*At reading this Rebecca's heart skipped a beat.*

*I know that Granny will understand running away. You can tell my Dad that he raised a girl who can take care of herself.*

*Tell them I love them and wish them well.*

*Your best friend*

*Melanie McDougal*

Rebecca read the letter but she did not know what to do. Should she look some more? But where? She suspected that with a plan this well executed it was unlikely Melanie would easily be found. Later she would find her car at the San Diego bus terminal but no one inside remembered seeing someone of Melanie's description or selling her a ticket. For now she just sat on the chesterfield with Coach's arms wrapped around her as she cried until there was nothing left.

It would be a very long time before anyone associated with Clapshorn would ever hear of Melanie McDougal again.



*PART TWO: GORD 2012*



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## **Part 2 - Chapter 10: The Job**

He had to time his absence from the student recruitment fair just right. Too soon and there would be too much time for the police to focus upon people at the fair. Too late and he would not get back before the fair finished for the day.

“I’m going to take a break – bio , tea and maybe a walk around to see what the other institutions are up to,” Gord Salmy announced to his assistant Monica Findley. “You can handle the booth for a while.”

Gord and Monica had worked together on these recruitment fairs for eight years, so she was used to his disappearances at these things. For an “old guy,” as she teased him, he had trouble sitting still at the best of times and sitting in these recruitment booths for sometimes ten hours at a time was simply beyond his attention span. He was a good boss though, and she never minded covering for him and sometimes he would disappear for hours. Who would know except her anyhow? They were always operating the booth at some student recruitment fair somewhere in the world that was very distant from the university’s home in Ottawa, Canada.

“Sure,” she responded. “Just be back before the fair closes. Remember this is last day so we have all of this stuff to pack up.”

“No worries mate, “he announced, faking the accent of the Aussies in the booth beside them. “Be back before you can sing a verse of waltzing Matilda!”

Monica laughed at his corniness. To the surprise of a Korean family waiting politely to talk to her, she threw a university brochure at him as he squeezed past the booth table and took off down the alley between the three hundred or so post secondary institution booths from over eighty countries who were at the recruitment fair to sign up Korean students to their institutions. So far this year Gord and Monica had been to Saudi Arabia – tough on a woman recruiter Monica remembered. She loved the shopping in China since she could never afford the real thing. Sao Paulo rocked at night for a twenty-eight

year old. And Spain – it was good thing that Gord spoke Spanish, and Italian, and Mandarin, and Arabic and maybe more. But Korea was a good fair. She really liked the Korean people, loved the food and the shopping was great. Seoul was a safe city for a young woman like her to walk around at any time of the day or night. The only problem was the language and since most cab drivers only spoke Korean she had to take a little card from her hotel to make sure she could get home.

This was the last day of the fair and the last fair they would attend this year. Soon they would be back in Canada, and with the end of the school year coming, they would have a break from the travel and the international work. She was looking forward to the break and maybe starting some sort of social life back home. She knew she was a very attractive young woman. People described her as pert. They said she looked like Melanie Griffiths; blond, petite and with a mischievous but attractive face. Gord told her she was the university's most appealing asset in far eastern and Asian countries. The young men lined up at their booth just so they could talk to her. Since they travelled so much together there was talk back home about her and Gord having a thing going and she had to admit to herself that on a lonely night or two in India or Ecuador or some other distant place, the thought had crossed her mind. Who would ever know? He was a good-looking man -- for someone fifty-eight anyhow. Gord was a great guy, very kind and considerate, but he was also a little strange in some ways. Despite his skill at a dozen languages he was a little nerdy. He could not sit still for more than ten minutes. He never seemed to care for the political or social issues in the countries they visited and dressed like his mother might have dressed him in 1956, all baggy and without style and looking most of the time like he had slept in them. She had tried to buy him some clothes once in China but he just said he was comfortable in what he wore. “Got me this job didn’t they?” he would reply to any effort to change what he wore. Even a new tie or two at Christmas proved fruitless.

She would always reply. “Sure. But it cost you a wife!” She often joked it was because he was such a bad dresser that his wife left him and they both laughed because they knew that was not true. Like Monica’s own relationships that could never endure her long and frequent absences from Canada, Gord’s wife just grew tired of being lonely and moved in with a single person who lived in the house next to theirs in Ottawa.

Apparently, at least initially, there was no yelling, no tears, and no anger. They just

parted ways. Their two children were grown up and gone. Monica knew that both were older than she was, although Gord rarely mentioned his kids. Apparently each child just went on with their separate lives.

All Gord would ever talk about other than work was blues music and golf. No wonder his wife left him. Monica couldn't think of two more boring topics in the universe than these. She would die before she would ever take up golf. She needed something far more active, but she guessed that for old people like Gord it was OK. And blues? That was for old people as well. She was not into listening to somebody in a smoky bar play their rendition of a sharecropper's "I'm hungry, lonely and sick, lost my love..." song written in the thirties. The first thing Gord did when they landed in a new country was to seek out the local golf course or driving range, and then find the grungiest blues bar. He played both whenever he had the chance and on their days off he left her to her shopping while he went off to play a game of golf or play his bass at an open mike blues club. He was such a klutz she often wondered what he looked like on the golf course. He was no Freddy Couples she was sure. At any rate that was all fine with her as long he didn't expect her to do these things as well. He never did and thus they travelled together very well.

The Korean family was patiently waiting for their turn at the booth so she put on her recruiting smile and turned her attention from the escaping Gord to the hoping-to-escape Korean student.

"I'm too fucking old for this anymore," Gord muttered to himself as he hurried through the large presentation hall where the booths were crammed side by side and the passage way clogged with young Koreans and their families with their bags of brochures and give away swag – key chains, miniature LED flashlights, iPad cleaning cloths, mouse pads, innumerable pens – all with an institutional logo of some sort. Gord Salmy had been the Vice President International at Pierre Trudeau University in Ottawa for over twenty-five years now. It was not always named such and one of his jobs was to let the world know that the new Pierre Trudeau University established in 2009, was the same one as the hundred-year-old Ottawa River College it had replaced. He liked the name though. Like most Easterners he had admired Trudeau, so to name a university after him was more than appropriate from his perspective. It was not the same across the country

though. He had read that an initiative to rename a small elementary school in Calgary after Trudeau, was shot down in the still hot flame of memories of 30 years earlier when Trudeau the Prime Minister had dared pass legislation that put dirty Federal fingers on dirty Alberta oil. But Gord liked the name and was proud to have served the Canadian government ever since the days of Trudeau when he was recruited fresh from a Ph.D. in linguistics to government service. Gord had a couple of special talents which at least one branch of the Canadian government liked. Learning foreign languages was one of them and he was happy to have found a way to use his skills for the good of the country.

At this moment it was his Government role, not the University Vice President job that he felt he was getting too old for.

He glanced at his watch and figured he had an hour to get everything done. He walked briskly, but not too fast to be noticed, out the front entrance to the large conference hall. There were a lot of people. Even if most were not a six-foot tall, skinny, slightly balding Caucasian he didn't think anyone would take notice of one more foreigner heading to the washroom. And indeed, that was where he was headed. The conference centre where the recruitment fair was being held was part of a large rambling set of buildings in downtown Seoul that included a Sheraton Hotel, an underground market full of stalls selling everything from men's suits to live snakes, and a quartet of bank buildings that housed Korea's most influential banking families. They were all joined by underground passages that allowed the human traffic to bypass the vehicular traffic that clogged the capital city arteries. People flowed in this subterranean world between the buildings like a river of slightly viscous oil. Gord joined the flow of one such river and he only branched off when he arrived at the washroom. It was part of the shopping concourse below the bank building, on the opposite side of the street from the conference centre. Gord checked that the washroom was empty and waited until a father helped his young son get his pants done up and his hands washed. When he was alone he reached into his baggy jacket, pulled out a sign in Korean that said "*Washroom Out of Service*" and hung it from the door. He went over to one of the washroom stalls, broke off the float in the back of the tank so the water wouldn't turn off and at the same time plugged the toilet with towels. In no time the toilet was overflowing. Anyone who discounted the sign and came in would see and smell the result right away and leave. He

had to be back before the water crept out the door alerting a mall official who would come to check. He pulled some schematic diagrams from under his shirt, pulled a facemask and rubber gloves from another pocket, climbed up on a sink and removed a ceiling vent grate. With a quick and very athletic move that belied his klutzy reputation, he pulled himself up into the air vent above the washroom. Once in the vent passageway he quickly stripped from his suit jacket and pants, folded them into a small plastic bag and put them aside. Underneath he was dressed in a full body suit that looked like shiny long underwear that fully covered him from toe to nose and hair. With a miniature LED light that he pulled from his pocket and strapped to his forehead, he started crawling along the vent passageway. If the schematics they had given him were correct, the bank building was directly above him and in 30 feet he should find the bottom of the elevator shaft for the building. In just a few moments he was there and just as quickly he crawled to the top of one of the elevators that was still on the first floor. Seconds later the elevator started moving up. This was the unpredictable part. His target was the 23<sup>rd</sup> floor, except he had no idea what floor the people in the elevator were going to, and at worst he might have to go up and down until someone chose 23. The passenger was going to 21. He figured this was close enough, so when the elevator stopped he jumped off and began the two-story climb inside the shaft to 23. When he reached that floor, he went back into the air vent shaft and, examining his schematic as he went, he crawled forty meters to a grill covered vent that looked over a small but elaborately furnished office. He glanced at his watch and saw he had been gone from the washroom for thirteen minutes. This was going to be close. It would be a complete waste of time if Sool beat him there.

Their intelligence had told them that Sool spent between 4 and 5 pm each day alone in his office, heavily guarded from the outside, drinking very old scotch and practicing his putting. Despite being one of the richest bankers in the country, he had two weaknesses. One was that he was a crook. It was estimated that he had defrauded the country and the banking system of over eight billion dollars over the past decade and it was getting to the point where he was becoming an embarrassment to his fellow bankers and the country. The other weakness he shared with many other wealthy Koreans – he was obsessed with golf. Now as Gord looked through the grate covering the air duct at Sool's office he could see the putter leaning against his desk. The putting machine was

about fifteen feet away at the far side of the room. What he was looking for was the glass and bottle of scotch that partnered with the putter to give Sool his hour of respite from the rigours of international banking. Gord spotted the bottle and the single glass on a side table directly below the grate he was looking through. He quickly removed the grate and lowered himself into the office. He took a small vial the size of half a cigarette and dumped the powder into the glass, checking by holding the glass up to the light of the window, that the powder wouldn't be noticeable with cursory examination. Satisfied, he pulled himself back up into the duct, replaced the grate and waited. Two minutes later, right on time, Sool entered his office alone, went directly to the scotch bottle and poured himself two vertical fingers of a thirty-year old Macallan. Then he put the glass down, picked up the putter and began his practice ritual. Gord wanted to yell out "Keep your head still!" but instead he very carefully started to make his way back down the duct. Within half an hour of emerging from his putting practice and as Sool walked over to the boardroom, the specially formulated and concentrated Veratrum, Corn Lilly extract would cause him to have a sudden and massive deadly heart attack. Since he was a very overweight sixty-one, no one would suspect this as anything but an unfortunate but natural event. Gord had assured his bosses back in Ottawa that with the ten minute decay rate of the extract, even if they were suspicious, they wouldn't find anything.

The timing gave him thirty minutes to get back to the booth before the alarm bells rang at the bank building, so he quickly turned his attention to getting out of this ventilation system and back to the recruitment fair before the building and maybe the whole square were locked down. Until they verified a heart attack, his guards and the other bank Board members would assume some sort of assassination. He was not a well-liked man and there had been other attempts on his life. Gord was surprised, in fact, how easy it had been for him to actually get close to Sool. It had been arranged for the infrared scanners that gave warning of any warm blooded creature in the walls or ceilings of the windows, to be down for repair for the one hour time period that Gord would need. This suggested to Gord that the bank or perhaps the Korean government itself was backing this assignment and the Canadian government was just cooperating. He laughed at the thought that he might be the first hot commodity in the new Asia- North America free trade pact.

The first part of his escape went well. The hardest part was not making any noise as he turned around in the ventilation shaft and breaking Sool's putting concentration. However, despite being considerably less flexible than he was when he started these assignments twenty-five years ago, he managed to get back to the top of the next elevator that came to the 23rd floor and he was down in the ventilation shaft leading to the washroom within ten minutes. When he reached the bag that had his clothes he was at twenty minutes and it was a five-minute walk back to the convention hall leaving him a few moments to spare before all hell broke loose. Then he heard the voices coming from the washroom and he muttered a "fuck!" to himself. He carefully slid over to the vent entrance and saw what he thought were two maintenance men leaning over the towel stuffed toilet. There was no way he could get down and out of the washroom without being seen. He thought for a moment and then quietly removed the screen from the duct entrance and holding his bag of clothing jumped down to the washroom floor, still dressed in a black, full head covering body suit and a facemask. Essentially only his eyes were showing and he had a fleeting thought that it was too bad since they gave him away as Caucasian. As soon as he landed, the closest worker looked around too surprised to do anything but stare. The second worker had time to react and to Gord's surprise jumped over his colleague and took a martial art stance.

"Fuck, just my luck to get some amateur Korean Tae Kwan Doer" Gord thought as he easily blocked the worker's first swing and tried his own which was also blocked. He knew it was unlikely that anyone, much less some mall worker in Seoul would ever take him down. While he was fifty-eight years old, he still had reflexes that were well above the norm. He knew that because he had been tested when he joined the service. What they found out explained why he had excelled at any sport that relied on speed. There was no punch or kick this guy could put out that Gord would not see in plenty of time to react. This man was a nuisance and he wanted to end it quickly, but the guy just would not cooperate. He was good. As good as anyone Gord had fought in his years of working for the government, although, in all honesty, all of his fights had just been practice bouts at the annual training camp with people of similar skill from other agencies around the world. While his specialty was exotic poisons, he had received training in martial arts and other weapons, but in all the years of his part-time job with the government, he had never



had to fight anyone for real. This really sucked. A fight to the death in a dirty underground mall washroom in Korea? How would he explain that to his kids?

Gord made a move with his left fist, which was blocked, and the worker slammed a heel into Gord's thigh, just missing his knee. That was a fortunate miss since it was the knee that had put him out of competitive hockey thirty years ago and it was now very arthritic. Even a glancing blow would have sent Gord to the floor and that thigh kick was hard enough to hurt. Gord returned the kick and it was only partially blocked. They paused and looked at each other for a moment. The scene would have been funny if Gord wasn't so worried about his timing. A six-foot tall ninja facing off against a five-foot nothing in dirty overalls while both stood in a puddle of water and shit. Gord saw the determination in the guys eyes and had to finish it. He took a sweep with his right leg and as the guy jumped, Gord feinted with his right hand. As the Korean reacted to block it he landed off balance and slipped on the wet floor. He lay there stunned. Gord just pointed his finger at him to say, "Stay there." The maintenance man nodded. The other guy was still cowering in the urinal with a stunned look on his face. Gord wondered momentarily if he should kill the two workers but he had never faced anyone he had killed before and they hadn't done anything wrong. The one guy had actually put up a good fight. Besides, it wouldn't make any difference if they were alive or dead, this incident would raise suspicions about the circumstances of the banker's death and the police might even find some minute evidence of the powder. If that happened his boss would not be happy since they only used Gord when they wanted a death to appear natural.

Over the years he had perfected a number of ways to make a death appear natural and beyond any suspicion of action from any outside source. This was supposed to be one of those. A natural death of the banker would lead to a natural and honest succession. A murder would lead to a severe disruption of the Korean banking system.

He could not do anything to fix that now.

He pushed the now compliant worker into a stall and pointed again to say, "Stay there" and closed the door of the stall. He climbed back up on the sink and replaced the grate to the vent, took off the mask and put his suit back on over the black tights. With any luck neither of the workers had seen him jump down from the vent and if they mentioned anything it would just be a crazy story of a ninja coming into the washroom

and attacking them. One would have the bruises to prove it. But so would he, he thought as he rubbed his thigh where he had been kicked. "I'm getting too old for this shit," he announced to himself as he slipped out the washroom door and joined the flow of people heading back to the conference hall. A glance at his watch told him he had taken twenty-six minutes from the time he had put the powder in the glass. As he walked through the convention centre entrance he heard alarms ringing from the bank building across the road and as he greeted Monica he was cool and collected.

"How has business been?" he inquired.

"You missed all the excitement!" she announced.

He looked over to where she was pointing and saw a phalanx of Korean police just down the hall from them. His heart stopped for a moment.

She continued. "Some guy wouldn't leave the Irish booth. He kept yelling something in Korean. Someone told me he was saying he would not leave until he was given a scholarship."

Gord could see now that half a dozen police were roughly handcuffing some skinny kid with long hair.

She looked at Gord strangely. "You'd better wipe the cobwebs from your hair."

Gord reached up and pulled some air vent cobwebs from the front of his hair. "Wonder where these came from? Maybe I'm just not moving fast enough these days!" he joked. "This fair is over. Let's pack up and get out of here."

They quickly packed up their display materials. Fortunately the load was lighter than when they came in having handed out hundreds of brochures and booklets describing the benefits of paying huge foreign student fees to attend their university. Still, the load was cumbersome and awkward for both of them as they made their way to the taxi stand at the front of the conference centre.

Once outside the building they could see there was some commotion across the road at the bank building.

"Wonder what's going on over there?" she asked.

"No idea," Gord replied, as he walked with a visible limp to the first taxi in line.

"Damn," he announced as he struggled to get the rolled up display with a large photo of Pierre Trudeau University into the back seat of the taxi. "I'm getting too old for this

fucking job.”



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## **Part 2 - Chapter 11: Retirement**

“I’m quitting,” Gord announced to his lunch companions.

“What do you mean ‘quitting’?” one of the four men around the table cautiously replied.

“Quitting everything – the university ...” Gord paused and looked out the window at the eighteenth hole of the Valley Golf and Country Club, and repeated with finality.

“Quitting everything.”

He had just finished his usual Saturday lunch that had followed his usual Saturday golf game with the usual foursome. They had all been golfing together for over twenty years, and one, Richard Fairfield, had been golfing with him every Saturday when Gord was in town, for over twenty-five years, ever since they had been graduate students together at the University of Toronto.

It was Richard who asked the cautious question. “I see, and just exactly what are you going to do once you quit” he paused, “everything?”

To be honest, that was not a question that Gord had considered much. He just knew he had to change his life. While the other two regular playing companions were just long time friends, one a lawyer and one a bureaucrat in the federal government, Richard was, in fact, his boss, although no one around the table knew it. Richard’s formal title was Vice President Operations for the CIDC, Canadian International Development Corporation, a small government operation that according to its website “*monitored economic activity around the world to provide Canadian businesses with up to date*

*information that will enhance their global competitiveness.*” To their credit they actually did put out some good material in this regard. That wasn’t what Richard did for them and that was not the real purpose of the office. It was, in fact, a covert arm of NATO’s intelligence branch. They operated under the watchful eye of CISIC, the Canadian International Systems Information Corporation, Canada’s own intelligence agency, but were totally independent of any Canadian oversight, political or otherwise. Someone in NATO twenty-five years ago figured quite correctly that no one would look to polite and diplomatic Canada for such a black ops and CIDC had consequently been operating quite efficiently and secretly since then. Its business was not economics. It was killing. Or assassination. Or threat elimination. Whatever Richard wanted to call it was OK with Gord because for him it was now only about killing and he had grown a little tired of it. They had already had that discussion on the golf course the week after Gord came back from Korea. They only met during their weekly golf game and it was the only traceable link between the two of them.

“This wasn’t an easy one Richard,” Gord had offered. “Shit. I got trashed by a washroom maintenance man!”

“Yeah, well it turned out that your ‘maintenance man’ was a highly trained undercover operative for the North Koreans and we figure the only reason he backed off from killing you was he was afraid of being caught himself if you continued the fight in the washroom. He was identified on a security camera walking down the tunnel to the subway shortly after you left the washroom, so he didn’t stick around to tell the story. The other guy could not really remember anything so you were lucky this time.”

“Right. I was lucky. Sure. Tell that to the big bruise on my thigh. Actual fighting isn’t exactly my thing. Hell. I’m just getting too old for this,” Gord suggested as they walked down the fairway. “Besides, don’t you think some data wiz somewhere will eventually link my presence to the jobs we have done?”

“As for the fighting, it’s true that’s a little bit of a stretch for you, but that’s why you get training every year – for that one time you might need it. And remember, you were identified in the first place because of your unique spatial relationship skills that kept you from getting crushed this time. And the data wiz thing? That’s not likely. You only do a job for us once every few years so it would be a stretch to put it all together. The records

are kept in deeply buried very secure files. Too old? Are you too old to take the healthy retainer we give you to be available?”

Since his recruitment, the Agency had paid Gord an annual tax-free untraceable retainer that was larger than his annual salary from the university. So far he had only used the money judiciously – university tuition for the kids, a winter retreat in Anguilla, a new car – all feasible on his university salary if you did not look too closely. He had put enough away to maintain his lifestyle for some time if the retainer dried up.

“Fuck the money Richard. I just can't do it anymore.”

Richard stopped him in the middle of the fairway and put his hand on Gord's arm. “Gord when you joined you knew we were the Hotel California.”

“Is that a threat of some sort Richard?”

“Not at all. I just suspect that you and I, the Agency, are not done doing things for each other. But come on. Hit your shot. Let's see if you are too old to play golf.”

Gord had dropped the topic. The conversation for the rest of the day bounced from golf and family and the weather to when they were going south for warmth and golf this winter. None of the guys shared Gord's music interest so that rarely came up in the conversation and Gord showed little interest in their incessant political prognostications. Golf was pretty much the conversation of their Saturday lunches.

“So Gord, “Harold Bailey, the lawyer asked. “If you retire from the university what will you do?”

Gord was tempted to say “Kill some more people”, but as he pondered a response he looked up at the flat screen TV on the wall of the bar and watched the golf game in progress. It was some sort of senior event and Freddy Couples and Tom Watson were teeing off. “I think I'll try and make it to the senior tour,” he blurted without much thought.

The table broke into loud enough laughter that the other tables looked over annoyed at the disruption to their own conversation.

“You are good Gord,” Peter Hailey the other member of their foursome observed. “But a three handicap won't make the professional tour!”

Gord was immediately defensive. “Come on guys. Everyone at this table is over fifty and everyone a single digit handicapper and which one of you hasn't fanaticized about

being on the senior tour?"

"It's a long way from fantasy to action," Richard observed. "I fantasize about a night with Angelina Jolie but I'm not quitting my job to look for her. Brad Pitt looks a little tough for my liking."

They all laughed.

"No, seriously guys," Gord continued, getting into his spontaneous idea. "How many times have we all sat here after our Saturday round and watched some tournament or the other and either said, or thought, that with a little time to practice and work on our game we could be that good?"

They all agreed they had indeed had such silly notions.

"Ok," Gord announced. "So – so no wife, kids gone, a little money tucked away, still healthy, well mostly – I am going to quit the university and take a year off from anything but golf to try to qualify for the senior tour."

There was silence.

"You're fucking serious!" Peter exclaimed.

Gord just nodded his head slowly.

"Damn!" Harold proclaimed. "That deserves another drink." And the four friends, even Richard, spent the afternoon dissecting Gord's golf game to try and find the road to the senior tour.

As Gord left the club that afternoon he wondered to himself just what he was doing. He knew it was time for change in his life. Fifty-eight had not been a banner age and for the first time he remembered he actually felt like he was growing older. He had kept good care of his body, partly because of the role he was called on to occasionally play for the Agency, partly because he had been proud of his athletic ability and did not want it to diminish, but mostly because it just felt good.

It felt good to exercise. He still did a hundred push-ups and a hundred sit-ups each morning. That was just one of his obsessions Gail was constantly ridiculing since she lost her appetite in her fifties for fighting age with anything other than a surgeon's knife. She once tried to talk him into having liposuction on his double chin but much to her chagrin he demurred. He mostly ate right. One of his other obsessions she ridiculed was oatmeal every morning. Not the quick Quaker kind but the raw Scottish steel cut that he cooked in

large batches for hours and warmed up in the morning. He even took pouches of it when he travelled since steel cut oatmeal was not a hot ticket item in places like Japan or Saudi. He liked fruit, fish and vegetables and only enjoyed red meat on occasion; so he didn't think it was fair that he should be showing the signs of old age.

His genes were good so he figured he was safe on that account. Both his parents had led active, relatively healthy professional lives. Both were university professors and in retirement they worked and travelled extensively with CPSO, Canadian Professional Service Overseas, a group that sends retired professionals on volunteer work in developing countries. His mom had some minor heart problems and at eighty-nine his Dad's arthritis was kicking up. They were a pair of quite healthy octogenarians when they were killed two years ago in a car accident in the first winter pile up on the 401 between Kingston and Toronto. Gord was an only child, he had been close to his parents and he missed them. Neither of them knew exactly what he did for the Agency, but they were very bright people and they knew their son was more than a sales agent for a small university, although neither of them ever questioned him too deeply concerning his travels. He didn't figure it was fair that he felt arthritis so soon. His doctor just called it "aging" and told him to take a Naproxen Sodium based product whenever it hurt. The injury-related aches and pains he just stoically accepted. The wonky knee had destroyed his hockey career. The minor restricted movement in his right shoulder he considered a blessing after the crushing it took after falling down a precipice skiing at Mount Tremblant. Two surgeries later and his golf game looked safe, although his shoulder aches became a very accurate predictor of weather pressure changes.

And he needed reading glasses. That was a recent addition to his human frailties and it severely pissed him off. He needed glasses to read restaurant menus, pill box labels, golf score cards and the Globe and Mail and he never had a pair when he needed them. He bought literally dozens of the right magnification from COSTCO and left them all over the house, the car and his office.

That was another thing that ticked off Gail.

Fortunately none of these human frailties interfered too much with his three passions in life.

He was a professional caliber bass player. He had actually been a music minor in his

undergraduate days before moving on to the study of linguistics for his masters and doctorate. Over the past twenty years he had focused on blues and was a well-known fixture on the blues bar circuit, often sitting in with local and travelling bands at local blues bars. The biggest thrill in his music life was sitting in one night for a whole set with Downchild when they played a guest appearance at the Rivertown Pub in Hull. He often sought out the open mike sessions in blues bars across the world. But mostly he just put on headphones and played along with one of the two thousand blues songs he had in his music album. He had a nice set up in one corner of the basement where he could go to play and leave the cares of the real world behind.

That pissed Gail off as well.

To the casual observer it looked like Gord was a Tai Chi guy. Wherever he was, he did a set of slow moving Tai Chi motions where he pushed imaginary walls, slowly lifted imaginary weights and turned on one foot too slowly to face imaginary friends. To anyone who knew, it was obvious that while he did series of slow Tai Chi like movements it was not Tai Chi. Once when he was practicing early in the morning in a park opposite their hotel in London an elderly Asian lady came up and observed and just smiled and watched a while before she began her own routine. Gord could tell from the wistful smile that something in her past brought back knowledge of just what it was he was doing. During his first training session with the Agency they taught basic self-defense. The theory was you were never supposed to get yourself into a situation that needed it, but if you did you would know where to hit someone so they would stay down. It had to be something you could practice without raising eyebrows. A university VP who chopped bricks in half, would be noticed. However Tai Chi was a growing fad and the Agency taught two very old forms of martial arts that took basic Tai Chi non-violent movements and completed each move to attack specific pressure points on the body that would incapacitate, or even kill. The Agency gave its 'recruits' the choice of learning either forms; one an ancient Korean martial arts form called Kwa Hang Do, the other was called Wing Chun, from China. Gord chose the latter since Bruce Lee had practiced it and he was a fan of Bruce Lee movies. Although he never gave any thought to actually using it in a real situation. As was his nature, Gord became obsessed with the "art" and, along with his one hundred push-ups and sit-ups, practiced Tai Chi movements for an



hour beside the bed each morning.

And that really pissed off Gail.

He had now decided he would put aside these other obsessions for his third passion – golf. His parents had loved the game as well. At least his mother did and his Dad went along for the fun. They belonged to a private Country Club in Ottawa. Gord could not remember a time when he hadn't played golf, from the first cut off clubs his Dad made him when he was four years old through to the club junior championship and then as a top ranked provincial junior player. Golf had been a central part of his life. He had been offered some golf scholarships to the states, but his parents were not in favour of athletic scholarships and insisted that he attend a Canadian university where they said he would get a better education. So while he played some university golf and led his Western Ontario team to a provincial championship, it was more recreational than competitive and for his university years, golf was a distraction not an obsession. That was where it had been for most of his life up to now. It was a mental distraction from the other parts of his life that he sometimes didn't want to be reminded of, so regular Saturday golf with a group of regular friends became his third obsession.

And Gail really hated that.

He often wondered if it would have been different for them if she had played golf as well. From his last confrontation with her he doubted it. They had been separated for over a year when he arrived home from the last trip to Korea. When he reached their house there was a big moving truck in front and Gail was standing on the front porch of their Queen Elizabeth Drive bungalow giving directions to the muscled young men carrying boxes and pieces of furniture.

Gord just stared as he walked up the driveway.

“I left you, your golf clubs, a big bucket of oatmeal, and your music stuff downstairs,” she announced. “Combined, they should probably give you a big hard on.”

The anger and bitterness in her voice was profound even after a year of separation. “But I get the rest. If you recall, the house is in my name and I have listed it and I've asked for a quick sale. I'll send you your half when I feel like it.”

Gord now remembered how they had put her name on the ownership 30 years ago for tax purposes. “I don't understand Gail?” Gord asked. “I thought that we were going to

do this in a civilized manner, if not for our sake for the kids'?"

They had been attending "separation" counseling once a month for over a year now and while Gail made it perfectly clear that she was not interested in getting back together, she had agreed to try and find an amicable way to separate.

"Fuck the kids," she yelled.

The passing moving man carrying a heavy box of books looked up.

"They are both married and gone for Christ's sake!" She started to cry a little.

"They have their own lives and they don't care a fig for either of us, and they shouldn't. We're hardly the Ozzy and Harriet of role models for a blissful married life."

Gord agreed she was right on both counts. Their two children, Robbie and Marianne, had both left the nest years ago and both were now married. Robbie was an actor. He lived in Montreal and was one of the rare successful ones. Marianne was a Petroleum Engineer making tons of money in Calgary. Other than the perfunctory duties of good children, neither paid much attention to their parents. Then again, thought Gord, other than the perfunctory requirements, Gail and he had not spent much attention on the duties of parenthood. While there was one eight- year old granddaughter in Calgary, Gail was only interested in seeing her on special occasions. Their daughter had an affair on a trip to South America and Gail never approved of the husband or the fetus that she brought home. Gord on the other hand kept in constant contact with his granddaughter, always sending her things when he was on his trips. They shared little secrets and Gord told her his favourite blues song was "Better off with the Blues" and she wasn't to tell anyone. She told him her favourite stuffed animal was the Panda he sent her from China, but he wasn't to tell her mom.

He wondered if more grandchildren might have softened Gail up a bit.

He and Gail had been university lovers, exploring each other's bodies and minds in a haze of hallucinogenic smoke in the early seventies. He was into language and music. She was a science student. They were married after they both were awarded their Ph.D.s. He went to Ottawa Valley College and she went to the NRC, the National Research Council, as a research scientist. But from that point forward they gradually drifted apart. He went into his secret world with CIDC and found solace in his golf and music. She developed an interest in politics and became obsessed with a string of left wing MPs from

across the country, volunteering to run the Ottawa side of one fledging politician or another. She was especially interested in young women politicians and their struggle for equity. She claimed that some great aunt of hers was a leader in the original Canadian suffragette movement in Canada and she had a legacy to fulfill.

Gord had an apparent total disinterest in either politics or any social movement.

And that really pissed Gail off.

She found other more sympathetic bodies and the proverbial cuckolded husband came home early from one of his trips and found a young naked, female politician from Quebec who had rented the house next to them sitting in his living room smoking grass. Gail walked out of the bedroom equally naked and only said, “What the fuck do you care – you can’t get it up anyhow.”

He wondered at the time where such anger came from.

Shortly after that, Gail moved out of their house and in with the young politician and they entered separation counseling. Now she was taking most things they had accumulated together in thirty years of marriage. As he walked through the empty rooms of the house he had to admit it was freeing in an odd sort of way. The sense of relief was somehow outweighing the sense of loss. “So here he was,” he thought as he wandered through the mostly empty rooms. No wife. No kids. Soon no house. An aging body, still very sore from the North Korean’s kick. It only remained for him to have no job.

On Monday morning after the May golf lunch where he announced to his astonished friends his intention to join the senior golf tour, he drove into the parking of Pierre Trudeau University in his ten year old Honda Civic – the first choice of good spies he used to tell himself – and pulled into the spot reserved with his name. There were perks to the VP level position. The nameplate would be gone by lunchtime he figured. So would he. He had no intention of drawing out his departure from the University and even though he had served faithfully and well for twenty-five years he really didn’t feel any deep attachment to the place or anyone there. His other international staff were wonderful young people, many from different parts of the world, and them he would miss. The President wasn’t a bad guy for a frustrated academic turned administrator. But he had found the politics and the meetings and the budget backstabbing and the mostly spoiled students something of a bore. He did his job well though and the international student

body had grown quickly since he started the office in the small university when he arrived. The university was new enough and was changing so much that no one at the time wondered why a brilliant Ph.D. in linguistics would take such a low paying and low profile job in such a university. He could have been on a fast tenure track at any major university in North America. A few even wondered at the time why a fresh out of university thirty-three-year old won the job over a number of candidates with much more experience in university international activities than he. But he knew how he got the job and had a few moments of early guilt until he started to do the job, found out he actually liked it and over the years had consequently built one of the premier international recruitment offices in the country. It was important that he liked his visible job because it was the nature of his secondary one that he was called on only once a year or maybe less often. There was once a gap of four years between assignments and if it hadn't been for his constant contact with Richard through golf he would have thought they didn't need him anymore. But since he was quitting that job, he didn't need this VP job so he headed directly to the President's office to hand in his resignation to take effect after the two months holidays Gord had accumulated. It turned out to be easier than he had anticipated; like the guy already knew what Gord was going to say. The President congratulated him on his long career and effusively told him how much he would be missed and how Gord was not to worry, his office would take care of the paperwork. Oddly he never even asked what Gord was going to do now that he was retiring.

"Don't let the door hit your ass on the way out," Gord thought.

The harder part was calling all the staff together to tell them he was retiring immediately. They were taken totally by surprise and there were real tears and hugs all around. For all his other quirks, Gord was a good boss. He cared for the wellbeing of the mostly young people who worked for him. There was not one who he hadn't helped out in some personal way. He was genuinely sorry not to be working with them anymore. It had been fun and rewarding and he wished them all the best. They all said they would have a going away party for him although he expected that after the initial emotion they would all just go on with their duties with a new boss. Only Monica remained mostly silent through the reminiscing and the questions about where he was going now.

"See ya Gordy," was all she said as she gave him a warm hug and peck on the cheek.

And then he was back at his car carrying a cardboard box with paper clips, pens with no ink, pins and bling from universities around the world and his green tea stained Bodum. All but the latter would last as far as the garbage bin outside the Safeway he passed on the way to his empty house. He was feeling freer by the moment, giddy with the weight of subterfuge and deceit dissolved in an afternoon's work. It was only early May, so 6 pm was a little late to go to the golf course today. He was anxious to get started at the practice schedule he had designed. Instead he picked up a bottle of sixteen-year-old Bushmills Malt at the LCBO – his only major consumption weakness – a take-out order of Vietnamese spring rolls and Tom Yum soup – another weakness – and decided to celebrate with a night of karaoke blues playing in the basement, the only part of his house that remained furnished. By 11 pm, when he fell asleep on the basement couch, he was warmly drunk, pleasantly full of exotic tastes and with a blues medicated glow that brought a dreamless smile to his newly freed face.

For a moment when he woke up he wasn't sure where he was and jumped off the couch wondering if he had overslept and would be late for work. Then he lay back on the couch and as he remembered he put his hands behind his neck and smiled for a moment. He stood up in his underwear and did his requisite one hundred push-ups and the one hundred sit-ups. Still in his underwear he practiced his unusual form of Tai Chi for half an hour. He figured he didn't need these skills anymore, but it was such a part of his life now he would feel a little empty if his day did not include these activities. This morning they helped with the slight hangover he realized he must have when he looked at the half empty Bushmills bottle. He went over and turned off the power to his amplifier he had left on when he fell asleep last night. He showered and dressed in golf clothes, taking great pleasure in the fact that he was going to the golf course on a Tuesday morning. He made his usual steel cut oatmeal, filled a travel mug with a mountain oolong from Taiwan and headed for the course.

As the saying goes – he felt that today was the first day of the rest of his life.



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## **Parts 2 - Chapter 12: Golf Dream**

“So, by the senior tour I gather you mean the PGA Champion Tour? Right?” Bruce asked incredulously as the two of them stood over a pile of balls at the range.

Bruce Downsview was the club pro at the Ottawa River Country Club and had known Gord most of his professional life. Like most other club pros he had once dreamed of the professional tour life and actually had some success on the Canadian tour before a wife, family, finance and reality bred some common sense and he found another avenue to follow for a golf career.

“Right. Although I suppose any senior tour, ...or event, would do. I realize that I’m probably not up to the challenge of taking on the young guys today.”

Bruce could not help but laugh at the seriousness with which Gord answered his question. He probed a little farther and asked in as serious a voice as he could muster, “So what is your goal? Your target? Your aspiration?” he paused. “Fame? Money?”

“None of those things really,” Gord replied. “I just always wanted to see how far I could go in golf, but work and other things got in the way. So now that I have retired I’d like to give it a try. I know you’re a long way from retirement Bruce, and you are still into seeking as much from your career as you can get. But I’m sure there are some things in your life that you wanted to do but never had the time? I’ve retired while I am still healthy enough to do some of those things and one of those for me is golf. I need to see how far I can go and I’m willing to dedicate the next year of my life to do it.”

Bruce didn’t even try to hide his surprise. “Do you have any idea how hard it is to qualify to even play in a senior event as an amateur much less get a Champions Tour qualifying card?”

“Sort of. I Googled the question last night and all I could figure out was that ordinary people like me have to apply to go in one of the qualifying tournaments they have across the country and when I do well on a series of those I can get my card. Entering a senior event as an amateur seems even more complicated since most events have a list of those who are exempt from qualifying; things like winning state championships, NCGA winners, U.S. Amateur winners and stuff like that. I don’t have any of those so I guess I’ll get there by skill not exemption.”

“All you have to do!” Bruce was incredulous. “Listen Gord, you have to be one of the last five standing from literally hundreds of golfers who enter these qualifiers and who think that since they have reached fifty, much less your fifty-eight, are their club champion, beat their buddies at four ball on Saturday and carry the latest technology; they can have a second career doing golf endorsements for Callaway while hobnobbing with Freddy Couples, Bernard Langer, Hale Irwin, Andy Bean, Tom Watson and the other inconsequentials who have spent their lives polishing and refining their game! He paused to take a breath. “And along with your application you have to provide your tournament record. I’m sure they will be impressed that you and Sybil won the Jack and Jill tournament last year. Your victory in the “Tombstone” event on men’s day will really knock their socks off I’m sure. They may even let you bypass the Monday qualifying!”

Bruce turned more serious for a moment. “I know that you are a bright guy Gord. But a Ph.D. means squat on the golf course. I also know that you are a good golfer.” Gord and Bruce had played together many times over the past decade. “And I know first hand that you are a fearsome competitor.” Gord won most of the time. “But you’re not talking about playing against a past his prime teaching pro or your lawyer friend. The guys who go for this are all seasoned pros who have been working at their game and have been waiting for most of their fifty years and a day for the chance to apply for the Champions Tour.”

“That’s most instructive Bruce. Did you learn positive reinforcement for your students at the last professional development session the club paid big bucks to send you to?” Gord didn’t wait for an answer. “Bruce, I only have two questions. The first is rhetorical, at least for the moment. Can I do it? The second is the important one. Your golf has slipped over the years, but you are the most inspiring teacher I have ever seen.

Will you work with me to help me get as good as I can get?"

Bruce could now see that Gord was dead serious. There was a resolute look in his eyes he had not seen before when Gord was out on the course just enjoying his golf game. He had thought that Gord represented everything that recreational golf should be. A good club golfer with a wonderful temperament who treated his times on the golf course as a distraction not an avocation. It was in fact the shift to a more serious intent in golf that ruined Bruce's own playing career. When he went to the U.S. on a golf scholarship ten years ago he had most components of a champion's game. He had won most junior events that Ontario could provide, and during his summers he entered the Canadian tour events available. He didn't win any of them but a sports writer at the time wrote him up as Canada's next great golf hope after Mike Weir and Stephen Ames. Both were doing well. Weir would win the Masters while Bruce was still at University and Canada celebrated vigorously since it had been a while since a male golfer the likes of Al Balding, George Knudson, Bob Panasik or Gary Cowan had stormed the international golf scene. Canadian golfers were always hungry for a new idol. Mike and Stephen both remarked on the talent of the young Bruce Downsview. In his senior year at Clemson, it all disappeared. His swing. His confidence. Even his degree. Some called it burnout. When he quit the team in his senior year others called it things less complimentary, but the truth was he was suffering from depression and it took a very loving and patient family in Ottawa to bring him back to health. He would never play competitive golf again. He was a natural depressive by nature and his intensity and the unfulfilled expectations he had for himself pushed him over the edge. After he surfaced from his depression that first time, he knew that playing golf had to return to pleasure and distraction from competition and pressure. His father found him an assistant teaching job at a local public course and he discovered his pleasure. Now, after taking course after course and achieving his CPGA Teaching Professional designation, he woke up energized by the prospect of helping someone else find their own Zen through the game of golf.

Early in his teaching life he had been amazed at how so many unbelievably terrible golfers derived so much pleasure from the game. At first he could not understand how someone could whiff, slice, hook, lose ten balls a round, and still come back for more. He



gradually learned that golf was simply a pleasant distraction for many of these people. The surgeon who cut into people all day was hardly bothered by the triviality of a lost ball. The judge who ruled on people's lives did not want to be judged on the golf course. These people were a pleasure to know and teach and they represented the majority of golfers at the club.

There were of course many at the club who, at least in his view, did not have the game in perspective. They were the ones that cursed, threw clubs, clearly cheated and blamed him and the grounds crew for their slices. They were the ones who felt that the rules of the game were there, first and foremost, simply to be enforced, not for the pleasure of the game.

His experience taught him there were two types of golfers who were the biggest pain in the ass. The first were those who thought they were far better than they were. These were the better golfers in the club, maybe single digit handicappers who had reached their "Peter Principle" but who were still under the illusion that they could get good, really good. The other group he had trouble with was the terrible golfers who took the game far too seriously. He never thought of himself as sexist, but most members of this group were women. There were many very talented, single digit handicap women golfers at the club, but unlike many of the similar scoring men they were modest and pleasant – apologetic about their talent. Bruce enjoyed playing with them and helping them with their game. But the others, the ones with no apparent coordination, with indescribable swings which Bruce had no idea where they learned or how they envisioned themselves, who appeared to his eye at least to have a new golf outfit and shoes for each nine they played; these were the ones he dreaded.

Fortunately, the 'pain in the ass' golfers were the minority and most of the five hundred members of the Ottawa Valley Country Club were wonderful people with the right attitude and approach to the game he loved so much.

Right now he wasn't sure where Gord fit into his classification of golfers.

The retirement bit shook him up a bit. He hated to admit it but there was a third group of real pain men golfers. These were the youngish retirees who suddenly had only golf to fill a hole that career and office had previously occupied. Many were new members with memberships he suspected were bought as gifts by wives desperate to get

retired husbands out of the house. Most women retirees only took up golf to please their already golfing fanatic husbands and they were a different group, since given the choice, he didn't see many suddenly retired career women taking up golf. One retired woman doctor lasted through six lessons and maybe a lesser number of rounds before she threw her clubs into the pond, a serious rule infraction, and very cheerfully left the course and her husband, never to be seen again by either. But the retired men could certainly be his third pain in the ass group.

Gord had never fit any of the golf molds. He was the lowest handicap senior golfer in the club but was mostly invisible, coming out only on Saturdays with the same group of friends and on club championship day when he won his preferred parking spot as the club senior champion. Bruce knew that Gord's family went way back with the club; they were maybe even original members over seventy years ago. Gord never took part in any of the golf course politics and never complained about slow play or the rules, or bad golfers, or the winter kill on the greens or anything. He was gracious, polite and with a good career at the University, seemed to have the game in proper perspective.

Now Gord was trying to change that. That caused Bruce to think very hard before he answered Gord's question. There was no question that Gord could have the game to pull something off. He was already a picture perfect golfer, the result of endless lessons as a child and teenager. If anything, his swing was too good, too mechanical, and too technically perfect. Bruce had seen too many golfers who were too preoccupied with the mechanics of their swings. Golfers who spent endless hours with swing trainers, plane fixers, videos and mirrors, all in search of the swing some commentator or reporter from the golf channel would say, "All of you young kids out there – watch 'such and such's' swing – that's what you want to look like." Sometimes Bruce wondered if that might have been his own problem. At least his obsessive study of the game and the swing had led to the job he had today. But he also knew now that golf was much more than a swing. The quest for the perfect swing was more a fabrication of the golf instruction industry including golf magazines and the fillers between tournaments on the golf channel, than it was the reality of the game. The only issues as far as Bruce was concerned were what happened when the club head met the ball. How the head reached there and what it did afterward was largely irrelevant. Of course he taught the members of his club the classic

swing rules and positions. To most of them form was more important than result so he was glad to teach them how to look good. In his own mind though, he believed something else; that golf was being taught all wrong and a generation of young golfers would pay for it. He never voiced this at the club or he would have been called a nut and probably ruined his chances of moving up to head pro when the current one retired in a few years. But he knew there was something most golf instructors were missing. Whenever he suggested to his fellow teaching pros that golfers like Arnold Palmer, Chi Chi Rodriguez, Lee Trevino and even Canadian Gary Cowan would never have made it today since some teaching pro somewhere would have tried to pound their swings out of their brains, the response was “They were exceptions, and besides, how could you ever teach those swings?”

He never raised the story of the golfer who most fascinated him. Canadian Moe Norman was one of the most successful golfers in the complete history of golf anywhere. Seventeen holes in one, fifty-two tournament wins including the Canadian Amateur six times and the Saskatchewan Open in 1964 and held numerous eighteen-hole records. Despite the fact he was inducted into the Canadian Golf Hall of Fame in 1995, it was not until after his death in 2004 that the golf world started to write about him and Bruce thought there was even a movie on the way. He had a very unusual swing and was a very odd man as well, so efforts to teach his “one plane swing” had never gone very far, despite the fact that Sam Snead once referred to him as the most accurate ball striker alive in golf today. No club golfer wanted to look like a “stiff armed troll” as one observer once called him. Bruce constantly asked himself the question as to why a swing like Norman’s won everything it touched and a swing like Gord’s only secured him a name on the trophy wall in the clubhouse. This might be his opportunity to find out.

After thinking for a moment, he answered Gord’s question with a question.

“How hard are you willing to work?”

“I will dedicate the next year to whatever I need to do to bring my game to the whatever-level needed. A year from now I want to be in the qualifiers for the Champions’ tour.”

Bruce showed no surprise. “If, after the summer, I feel you are a hopeless cause will you leave me alone?”

Bruce needed time to assess if Gord had more than a good swing.

“Yes. But it might not mean I would give up. Just give up on you.”

“Fair enough. One last question. Can you afford me?”

They both laughed and with that conversation started the process of trying to turn an obscure Canadian senior Club Champion into the next Champions Tour hero.

“I’ve got some other lessons today so practice what you want today and we will start tomorrow morning, and every day, at 7 am on the municipal range, not here at the club. I’ll have some things to tell you tomorrow, but here’s my first rule – you won’t play another game of golf until I tell you.

Gord raised his eyebrows at the municipal part and that playing order, but he didn’t say anything.

“Agreed?” Bruce offered his hand.

“Agreed.”

And they cemented their contract with a handshake.

Gord spent most of the morning on the range at the course practicing a variety of shots before heading in the afternoon to a meeting with his lawyer about the terms of the divorce that Gail’s lawyer had sent over. It was not complicated. Despite the fact she had cleared most things out of their house that was theirs, the proposal her lawyer made was for a 50-50 split. He had fleeting thoughts of trying to decide which kid each would keep. It would probably work out that he would keep the place in Anguilla and she would keep the house or at least the proceeds from the sale. She had a larger pension coming than he did so pension splitting was not likely to be an issue and, since she left him, he hoped that she would be civil. He was sympathetic with her issue though. While he had been faithful to her, he had never been the husband she had hoped for when they married thirty years ago. With the onset of menopause she suddenly wanted those years back – the years where she was alone while he was either travelling, golfing or playing music – the years that two children and her own career had sucked from her – the years that diluted the beauty that was once there as the newly-wed twenty-one-year-old. Gord thought she had aged gracefully and beautifully, but that suggestion one night led to a dish throwing episode. He could see now they had fallen out of love and he was resigned to her search for a better life and he was happy for her.

But he hadn't really thought about where that left him. They had friends, but they were mostly ones Gail had cultivated and were not likely to take his side in any of this. The kids would be sympathetic and scrupulously fair, but ultimately leave them both alone. He'd already learned that once you leave a job, you leave the people. And the only person he ever had any contact with at the Agency was Richard. He was truly alone for the first time in his life that he could remember and he wasn't sure if he liked the feeling or not. He would figure that out in the next while. But for now there was the lawyer – and his plan to become one of the top senior golfers in North America.



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## **Part 2 - Chapter 13: The Lessons**

Bruce and Gord met at the range at the appointed 7 am. Gord was full of energy and ready to get started. He was a morning person and he had already done his hundred sit-ups, hundred push-ups, and his Tai Chi and was already digesting a breakfast of steel cut oatmeal and green tea. Bruce was not a morning person, had not yet had his traditional bacon and eggs, and was clutching a Starbucks grande. He looked at Gord and could suddenly understand why Gail found him so annoying.

Gord looked at Bruce's tired face. "If you don't like the morning why are we meeting at 7 am? And why here at the public municipal range and not the club?"

"As for the time, I have other students and other duties than you that fill up my day. Besides, I know the owner here and he'll let you practice as much as you want with some anonymity. I think it might be better if we answered fewer questions about what we are doing together. People will think we are both nuts."

The fact was Bruce had not slept all night. He had sat at his desk and his computer

the whole night, going over ten years of notes he had made from the courses and teaching seminars he had attended over the years. His decision to go to the municipal course and make Gord agree to not play were just instinctive thoughts he had yesterday when he realized that Gord was serious and that no ordinary set of lessons would get the job done. Ever since he had started teaching he had the notion that most current golf instruction was off base. He had put together two things to come up with his own theory. First, he had isolated what he thought were the key elements in the swing of the greatest ball strikers in golf history. Others had done this before for individual golfers, but he just listed down one side of a page the supposedly individual golfer key swing characteristics that he could gather from the books. This was harder than it had first appeared. There were over five thousand books listed on Chapters/Indigo on golf and while he hadn't read them all, his library included books written about every great golfer that ever lived. He had even bought "Golf for Dummies" – not a bad book for beginners he thought. Unfortunately at the end of that exercise he realized why there were five thousand books. There were as many swing characteristics as books and some were even contradictory. The only common characteristic was that they all hit the ball well. Swing plane was a good example. From Moe Norman's one plane, to a Faldo classic plane to a Couples or a Furyk over the shoulder two plane swing, swing plane didn't seem to matter at all since the masters of any particular plane all managed to hit the ball pretty well. There was grip; some were strong, some weak, some overlap, some interlocking. He did not even want to start on the variations in putting style. He was particularly fond of Sam Snead's croquet style putting. It was too bad the PGA banned the style.

A swing scheme only started to take shape after he listed on the other side of the page the "tips" or even instructional strategies these many golfers provided at some point in their careers. This proved much more difficult despite the fact there were over one thousand instructional books available on line and most were of the ghost penned "Golf my way" variety. Many of these "tips" he garnered from the golf magazines or other journalists who had interviewed or spent time or observed a particular golfer. It was abundantly clear that most good golfers really didn't know what they did right and someone else had to interpret for them. It was only after reading some articles that he understood what Norman was doing with his swing. It was those two lists he had

accumulated with over a decade of reading and studying that he now had spread out on his desk. Somewhere in the intersection of swing characteristics and instructional tips were the keys to taking a guy with a perfect, Faldo like, swing to a much higher level of playing than a three handicap. So he persisted and after considerable notes and study, he figured that once you parceled out the standard instruction that was handed out in books like the 'Dummy' book there were several things that separated the good from the great. It was 4 am before he had designed his strategy for Gord.

"Ok Gord, let's get started. Take out a 7-iron. For the next three weeks you can leave the other clubs in your car."

Slightly amused but now curious, Gord complied and took his new Callaway RAZR X 7-iron out of the bag.

Bruce continued.

"The fact of the matter is you have a swing and scores that most golfer in our club would die for. I know your swing well and most teaching pros would call it picture perfect and they would just tweak a thing or two to get you playing better. Well I'm no Sean Foley and you're no Tiger Woods, but I think just tweaking won't do it. You'll have to change a few fundamental things and practice them until you erase fifty or so years of muscle memory."

He paused. "You still with me?"

"I know what muscle memory is Bruce."

"Ok. I have only three things I want you to change. You don't have to know the theory behind what I am asking you to do, just do it until it becomes second nature. I wouldn't risk teaching these things to a beginner at the club, but I think for someone like you with a great swing already they will be what you need to dramatically improve your game."

Gord was getting a little nervous with this talk of big change.

"Come on Bruce, get on with it; I'm paying you by the hour remember!"

"Right," Bruce sighed and took in a breath as if he was beginning to run a marathon. Bruce proceeded to show Gord the first of the three full swing changes that his research had come up with. He also had a strategy for Gord for the short game but that could wait. Right now he wanted to focus on the swing.

“First is your grip. You were probably taught, and I actually still teach it, that you more or less pinch the club between the thumb and forefinger of your right hand. Show me your grip.”

Gord took the club and using the overlap grip popular today, he gripped it in a perfect classic fashion, club across the palms with a relatively neutral grip with the vee formed by the thumb and pointer finger of each hand pointed at his right shoulder. Some golfers twist their right hand a little more to the right on the club, creating a ‘strong’ grip that supposedly gives more distance and certainly promotes a draw. Gord had been taught a neutral, in the middle so to speak, grip and it had served him well.

“Now, take the right hand thumb and move it towards the right hand pointer finger so that you close the vee.”

This had the effect of putting the thumb more on top of the grip rather than on the side like the pinch did.

“That’s your lesson for today,” Bruce concluded. “Hit five hundred 7-irons today using that grip and from this point forward that is the grip you will use. I’ll give you the other two changes when you have ingrained that grip into your swing thoughts.”

Gord looked at him a little incredulously.

“I just paid \$50 for that?”

Bruce ignored him and started to walk back to his car. He needed another coffee.

“See you tomorrow.”

Gord was left standing on the indoor outdoor carpet mat at the public municipal golf course range holding a 7-iron still gripped in the new way he had just been taught. “This is nuts” he said to himself. But after Bruce left, Gord stayed at the range hitting and hitting and hitting again with his new grip and his 7-iron. This didn’t bother Gord too much since he was obsessive by nature. His diet and habits were witness to that. By now he had become obsessive with the idea he could get better at his golf game and make the senior tour.

The rest of his day followed the same repetitive routine. Up at five. Hundred push-ups. Hundred sit-ups. Oatmeal and green tea. Tai Chi. Drive his Civic to the range. Hit balls all morning. Lunch at his favourite Thai restaurant. Various life maintaining functions in the afternoon such as seeing his lawyer (divorce was proceeding fine), doing



banking (pension money was starting to flow as was his Agency pay to his Anguilla account), visiting the liquor store (Bushmills sixteen-year old malt; he decided to buy a case), and seeing to laundry (he needed several changes of golf clothes). Microwave a takeout meal of some sort from the store in the strip mall down the street. A few or more Bushmills and a blues karaoke session. Asleep by 9:30 or so.

The most dreaded and easily put off of his chores was the sorting out of his possessions still at the house and preparing for the day when the house was sold and he would have to move out. It wasn't that there was much to sort out. His clothes consisted of a closet of Tip Top suits and Costco dress shirts and another closet full of casual, mostly golf, clothes. The suits and shirts he would donate to the Salvation Army clothes bin when he got around to it. He still wore most of the latter, but realized it would all need replacing when he started to compete. What would take some effort to sort out and move was his music centre in the basement; his "man cave" as Gail used to derisively call it. Thousands of dollars worth of high-end amplifiers, mixers, special effects generators and recorders – even one old reel-to-reel – covered one whole wall of a secure and sound proofed room in the basement. Several mostly bass guitars, earphones and several microphones were mysteriously umbilicalled to this morass of electronic hardware. An old leather chesterfield was positioned across from the wall in a perfectly researched position to get the full effect of a set of six-foot speakers that framed the whole concoction. It had taken Gord thirty years and a custom built house to put together the pieces of this miniature studio and he had no idea how he would either move it or find another place where he could recreate it.

However the biggest problem was not the mass of equipment, but what was behind it. When the house was being built twenty-five years ago, Gail left the design of his little man cave to him and the architect and contractor. Gord had them construct a two-foot gap between the outer windowless wall and the inner wall and to put the inner wall ...nine feet by ten feet... on a very expensive roller bearing set of hinges so that it would swing open and latch like a large door. He told them it was for a future wine storage unit and while they looked at him strangely, he was paying the bills so they did what he said. After they were finished and the basement and his music room were done, he built shelves in this two feet space so that when the whole wall was opened it displayed the

shelves and their contents. This was not an easy thing to do since the equipment was attached to a built in case on the wall and he had to move his equipment off the floor and to the back of the room so the full wall would swing. It was in this secret place that Gord kept his killing powders and concoctions; the things he had gathered and used during his career with the Agency. He had not opened the wall since he put things away after the last job, and he wondered now that he had retired how he was going to get rid of this stuff and explain this hidden space to some new owners.

And there was the golf. After a week of five hundred 7-irons each morning even Gord's level of obsessiveness was weakening, but to his surprise he had seen an improvement in both his swing and the result. A weekend golfer might not have noticed the difference, but with the sheer volume of shots he was hitting he could definitely see an increase in shot accuracy. It appeared to him that his shots were clustering much closer together out on the range than they were when he started and when he told this to Bruce, he smiled knowingly.

“Ok, ready for lesson two?”

“For sure. I can hardly wait. The last one was so revolutionary.”

Bruce ignored him.

“Line up for a shot.”

Gord complied, and took a perfect shot readiness position. With knees slightly bent like he was in a wrestling or basketball defense position. His bum stuck out a little and spine straight. Chin out. Eyes on the ball. Hands hanging directly below the shoulders; holding the club in his new grip.

“Looks good. I think I should take a photo for the club newsletter. The ladies would all make you a pin up for their mirrors.”

In actual fact, Bruce was impressed. There were few fifty-eight-year olds at the club, or anywhere else that Bruce knew for that matter, who looked as fit and were as flexible as Gord. His stance was picture perfect and his flexibility gave him the full swing of an eighteen-year old. He figured he would have to find out one day what Gord did to keep in such good shape. “Ok. Now move the club head so that you are starting your swing with the club head a foot from the ball rather than right behind the ball.”

Gord looked at him with a wrinkled eyebrow but did as he said.

“Now hit. We'll spend the rest of the week on this change added to last week's.”

They repeated the routine of the previous week for the week of the new club head position. It took Gord a day or two to get used to this change after fifty years of starting the club head from a position directly behind the ball. By the end of the week he was sure there was a noticeable difference in his consistency and accuracy. He simply put this off to more practice at first, but he had been playing and practicing for over fifty years so a little more practice in the scheme of things shouldn't make a difference. By the Sunday night he was starting to have shots land on top of other shots from over 180 yards. For fun he was trying to hit the large 175-yard marker and he did it more than he thought possible. By Monday he was anxiously waiting for lesson number three, but he was curious. He had done a little research of his own over the week and could not find anyone teaching this way.

“Bruce, tell me. Where did you pick this stuff up? Why doesn't every pro teach these things? Why do they work?”

“Whoa guy! Too many questions. You don't have to know anything other than each of the three swing techniques I am teaching you have a very sound theoretical base and are somethings that some very successful golfers have used in their career. I have chosen these for you and where you are with your swing. I don't know if they would be suitable for the high handicapper. I'll have to do some more work on that. So just have some faith for now OK?”

Gord nodded.

“Alright, it seems to be working so far. Let's get on with three!”

“Fine. Put your 7-iron away and grab your driver.”

Gord was all smiles. “Alright! I was getting tired of hitting 7-irons all day!”

Bruce looked at him with a devilish smile. “And put the rest of your clubs in your car and come with me in mine.”

“Where are we going? Can I practice at the club now? These indoor outdoor carpets leave green stains on my new clubs.”

“Buckle up,” he told Gord as they settled themselves into Bruce's ten-year old Volvo. “You'll see.”

Twenty minutes later they pulled up to the Kanata arena on the outskirts of Ottawa.

Gord was clearly confused. “What the hell is this?”

“Hurry up and follow me. I have the ice booked, or I should say you have the ice booked, for two hours each day.”

“Ice? Two hours?”

When they entered the arena Bruce pulled out an old motorcycle helmet, a warm sweater and a pair of shiny-soled leather moccasin slippers, the fur lined kind they sell at the genuine Indian handicraft store at the entrance to Algonquin Park. He told Gord to put on the helmet, sweater and slippers and go stand thirty meters in front of the net. By this time Gord was laughing hysterically as he gingerly made his way across the ice in slippers. Bruce followed him in sure-footed runners and placed a large bucket of practice balls at Gord’s feet.

And he explained. “Gord I know you were a hot shot hockey player when you were young so I know you know how to do a slapshot.”

Gord cautiously nodded.

“Right. Well I want you to take slapshots with your driver towards the net with these balls. One bucket to the middle of the net. One bucket to the top right corner. One bucket to the top left. Keep repeating that for the two hours you have booked the ice. You have the ice booked for the next week at the same time. You can keep this bucket of balls to bring with you.”

Gord stopped laughing.

“You’re serious aren’t you! I’m standing here in a motorcycle helmet, bedroom slippers, in your grandfather’s moth eaten wool sweater, in a cold, arena smelling of pubescent boys’ sweat, holding a golf club and you want me to score goals all day with golf balls?” Gord paused to sputter for effect. “Are you nuts? Because if anyone comes into this arena they will know that I am!”

“Try it,” was all that Bruce responded.

“Ok asshole – sensei – great master, whatever you say.”

Gord reached down carefully so as not to slip and placed a ball on the ice. He had to put a little snow around it so it wouldn’t roll away. He took his stance.

“New grip, new starting position.” Bruce lectured.

Gord complied. And he swung. The crack that the helmet made on the ice as Gord

lost his footing and fell hard to the ice resounded in the empty arena.

“Shit!” was all he could sputter as he struggled to get back to his feet. “Hold on. I’ll do that again.”

“Not the same thing I hope?” Bruce was laughing this time.

Gord was never one to give up and it took a while. After an hour of falling and slipping he was able to actually hit the ball and by the end of the second hour actually hit the net several times. It just became another challenge for Gord to take on. He had indeed been a very good hockey player when he was young, good enough to have some pro prospects. A blown out knee at fourteen had ruined a hardly started hockey career. But he certainly knew how to do a slapshot and by the third day he was rifling balls into the net and by the end of the week could hit the corners at will. His body was taking a toll though, and he went home that first week with a headache from hitting the ice so much. He wondered if he was getting a concussion, but when a little of the Irish each evening made the pain go away he dismissed that. The strain of keeping his lower body so balanced over two hours was evident. He thought his exercise and Tai Chi routine gave him a strong core, but he went to bed with an ache in some inside muscles and the exercises in the morning were an effort. And there was the cold. He soon left Gord’s old sweater in the car and wore his down vest instead and used his thermal ski socks in the slippers. Despite the exercise he was still shivering when he came out of the arena into the late May sun and a humid Ottawa summer. He was relieved when Bruce said it was time to go back to the range.

For all of June they worked together from seven to eight and Gord hit balls for the rest of the morning. Bruce had added the driver to the 7-iron and all he did was reinforce three things over and over again to Gord: new grip, new ball position and envision standing on ice making a slapshot. Sometimes the three things didn’t work together but when they did, Gord was amazed at the result. The combination of accuracy and distance was beyond anything he had ever achieved and he was now confident enough that when Bruce announced he could go in the club championship the first weekend in July, Gord was pumped. He could hardly wait to show off what he could now do.

“So you think that I’m ready to hit the links do you!” Gord quipped. “Do I have to wear moccasins and a helmet or can I be a normal person?”

“You never dressed like a normal person Gord,” Bruce responded. “But yes, you are ready to see what you can do on the golf course with the changes we’ve made.” He paused as he reached under the bench at the range and pulled out a wrapped parcel that was about the length of a driver. “But you have to use this from now on – my gift to you for your hard work.” And he handed Gord the club.

Gord ripped the paper and held it in his hands. “No fucking way. These things are for old guys with the yips,” he offered as he looked with disgust at the belly putter.

“Well Gordo, two things. First. You are an old guy if you haven’t noticed. Secondly, these things work so well they should be banned. The young guys on the tour know how they give you a putting advantage and I predict that by 2020 belly or maybe chest putters will either be banned or in the majority. It is only misplaced macho attitudes like the one you just expressed that stop more guys from using them.”

Gord grimaced.

“But you don’t have a choice. Our agreement is that you do what I say. So unless you want to break our contract, you are now a belly putter guy. Your afternoons from now on will be on the putting green all afternoon.”

“What do you have in mind for my chipping and pitching? A lacrosse stick?”

“Actually, other than the new grip, club head position and swing thought, which applies to all shots by the way, I am not going to do anything with your short game. The same way I’m not going to teach you how to putt. Short game is all feel and all yours.”

“So we are done with the lessons?”

“I’ve given you the techniques you need to get really good Gord. The rest is up to you. You realize that you will have to hit ten thousand balls before the changes become internalized?”

“Maybe. But I think that I am hitting it pretty well now. I’m a little skeptical of the putter thing but I’ll give it a try. After I win the club championship I’ll continue with the practicing. Will you come and watch?”

“Just let me know and I’ll meet you at the range. But it’s all up to you now Gord. I can only just tweak something that I see in your swing.”

With that they shook hands and Bruce went back to his car to go to the club and his weekly lessons with the “rules ladies” as he called them. Despite the work they had done;

despite the fact that Gord was a good golfer and had worked harder than Bruce would have thought, he was still an experiment. As he explained to Gord, he had not picked these three things at random and each change or exercise had a purpose. He felt it better not to clutter up Gord's head with the theory behind them otherwise he would spend more time considering what the change was supposed to do rather than practicing the effect. He had noticed that Gord sometimes lost the swing at the top and the grip just helped the club head get back to square. He had picked that one up from an interview with Bob Panasik in *Swing* golf magazine. He noticed that Gord had a tendency to take the club back a little inside prompting a downswing that sometimes came over the top, from the outside of the ball direction line rather than the inside. Starting from a foot away from the ball made that impossible. He'd picked that one up from a comment Moe Norman said to a writer one time. The rink thing was his own invention although the idea came from a 'golfmercial' he saw once where a guy was hitting shots in bare feet while standing on a big block of ice. His balance was incredible. Gord had a tendency to fall back on his right foot at impact; a reverse pivot they called it. He could not possibly do that while standing on ice or he would fall on his head, just like he did when he first tried it. Gord now had these changes and there was little Bruce could do except watch him once in a while to keep him on track. The club championship would tell how far the instruction had sunk in, and make or break Bruce's hard work and maybe his future as a teacher. For now it was off to the ladies to earn his keep at the Ottawa Valley Golf and Country Club.

Gord on the other hand didn't have a doubt in the world. He was feeling more fulfilled than he had been since his teen years and was thrilled with his success both on the range and on the rink. He couldn't believe how much better he was hitting the ball. After only a month, ... a month of very hard work he admitted 'he was hitting the ball straighter and further than ever before. He could hardly wait to get at the young guys and their 'Toys R' Us' drivers and show them what a fifty-eight-year-old could do. He had never won the club championship. In his golf prime he travelled too much to play the tournaments and for the last ten years he couldn't keep up to the young guys when the course distance was moved up to 7100 yards. But he was hitting the new drivers close to 300 yards now. As long as he remembered the three things he was taught, he was as

straight as he was long. Hitting the top right corner of the net resulted in a gentle draw and hitting the top left made a nice fade. “Go figure,” he thought to himself. The championship was the coming weekend, the last of July, and he could hardly wait.



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## **Part 2 - Chapter 14: The Agency**

Despite what Gord thought, Richard Fairfield actually had a real job with a real government agency that did real investigative security work. CIDC was as ‘spy’ connected as any government agency in Canada could be. In 2012 there was not much James Bondish about anything any intelligence agency did. The Internet had changed the intelligence business as much as it had changed normal commerce. Now intelligence gathering consisted mainly of sitting behind computer screens – big ones mind you and connected to big computers, sorting out the millions of gigabytes of digital data floating around the world. From newspapers to Facebook to twitters to emails to iPad apps to satellite photos to everything that moved through the Internet ether; the people at CIDC absorbed it all.

It was a different intelligence game when Richard joined the CIDC in the early seventies, fresh from a Political Science degree from the Royal Military College, Canada’s university for future military officers. He had intended on a career in the military like his mother and her father before him. His mother had a Ph.D. in mathematics, a tremendous feat for a young girl in the late thirties that spoke to her prodigious brilliance. She had actually worked on the enigma project during WWII. After the war she stayed in England working for British intelligence. She often joked that she actually had sex with Ian Fleming but Richard’s Dad just laughed and told her Ian was



too smart for that. Richard was born in England right after the war but when his parents were killed in a house fire when he was 13 he came back to live with his Mother's parents in Sault St Marie. After high school he followed his parents into a military career by going to RMC in Kingston. The early years in England gave him that typical cultured British accent that had fooled colonials for centuries into thinking that the speaker was just a touch smarter or at least a touch more informed than they were. The years in the Sault taught him how to fish, hunt and fight anyone who teased him for the accent.

The Political Science degree was just a cover for his real passion for information – any information. In high school he wrote a paper on one of the African campaigns during WWII and through an exhaustive letter writing campaign to every Canadian soldier he could find who had been there, an archival search in Ottawa during the requisite school trip to the parliament buildings, and his own study of the material in the Sault Collegiate library, he concluded there must have been a spy in the Allied ranks feeding daily information to the German high command during this particular campaign. Once the data was put together, it was obvious to Richard. Not to the Canadian and British military. Shortly after the local Sault paper published a very tiny story describing his paper that his history teacher had told them about, he and his Grandparents had a visit from some very senior military officials. They politely took all the research Richard had done. "Borrowed it" they said at the time. Richard didn't really care since the paper was done, but his taste for research and analysis was whetted. When he was quietly approached during his final year of high school by one of those same officers who came and took his research and they asked if he was interested in doing such things as a career, he was instantly curious. The officers explained that Richard would first have to go to the Royal Military College to get a degree. During the four months in the summer, his military assignment would be with a special division of the Canadian Military that fought with information, not guns. Richard excelled at the College in everything they taught including guns. Years hunting with his grandfather in the bush around the Sault had taught him to kill with one shot in the right place and he showed that skill in marksmanship at the College. He also excelled at hand to hand combat skills, since part of the summer work at the Agency was intensive training in some types of hand to hand combat skills he had never heard of before, taught by one person he thought was from North Korea and another from China. He also

excelled at studies in Political Science although he knew that was just a diversion from the real skills and knowledge he was being taught.

Richard Fairfield was being groomed to be a spy.

He graduated from RMC in 1962 and went right to work for CDIC, although officially there was no such department in the Canadian military. While the tools that they used in 1962 were different than the ones they now used in 2012, the job and the principle was still the same, gather and analyze data. In those days they relied far more on people observations and reports than upon satellite photos and computer printouts. Early in his career he had spent time on the ground in Africa, the soviet Union and India, gathering data first hand that could be sent back to Ottawa for analysis and shared with other western countries. The targets of investigation had shifted over the years, from cold war antics to African despots, to Eastern European genocides, to the Middle East, to today's preoccupation with terrorism in its various shapes. But the solutions had not changed in a hundred years of intelligence gathering; if you find a threat you eliminate it. There was not much purpose in spending billions of dollars gathering, sifting through and analyzing data if it was only to be used as fodder by politicians to advance their own brand of redemption, usually only after the intelligence has long gone stale. So Richard had a very formal job as the director of the Agency and the Agency a formal title that reported, through a very formal and as secret a parliamentary committee as government could have, the recent intelligence on international terrorists, crooks, immigrants, or anything else that might pose a threat to global or Canadian peace and prosperity. Often this information led to quite legitimate actions that interrupted the flow of drugs into British Columbia for a week or so, or the expulsion of an Iraqi diplomat for spying on Alberta's oil industry, or to uncovering a plot by a half dozen thirteen-year old Muslim extremists in Toronto to blow up the Air Canada centre with a ton of fertilizer. This reporting detail was necessary to ensure the flow of government funds that were necessary to fund the public, and not so public, activities of the Agency.

In actual fact, the public budget was totally spent on the publically accountable and legitimate actions of the Agency. During the cold war in the sixties, at the same time that the Canadian Prime Minister was winning a Nobel Peace prize for his work in establishing the United Nations, his government secretly allocated a significant sum of

money to the Agency and erased all trace of the allocation. This sum was held secretly in various accounts throughout the country and other places in the world. Through wise investment the fund had grown and now does exactly what the government originally intended. It acts as an endowment type funding agency for activities that are best left off the annual parliamentary budget debate. It was from this sum that Richard paid Gord Salmy's retainer.

There were only three people in Canada who knew of the secret side of CIDC operations. One was Richard's Executive Assistant who had been with him for the whole ten years he had been Director and had been the EA to the previous Director. While he knew the details of her kids, husband, hobbies and so on, he had no idea where she came from and how she ended up with such a confidential role, but she was indispensable in helping him keep his two roles in play. The other person who knew his role was the CIDC watcher. Her job was just what it meant – to watch. She had a regular job out in the civilian world but was a highly trained agent and was paid to simply watch over his "asset" as he called it, the only Canadian at the current time that was, in Ian Fleming's terms, licensed to kill. She watched him in Canada and watched over him while he carried out assignments anywhere in the world. She was found a job that would allow her to do this without arising suspicion in either her civilian employer or the "asset" himself.

Richard knew there were other such operations in other countries, since he met annually with the other Directors of other NATO country intelligence operations and at some point during their annual public meeting they met secretly to review the activities of each of their "assets" over the past year.

There were three ways that an "asset" could be called into action. The country that owned them could ask them to do a "job". The only person at NATO who knew of the operation could make a request of a country for their "asset" to do something. Or one country could ask another to help out with a domestic problem. Most of the "asset's" work originated from the latter two requests since it was too dangerous for an asset to do a job that was linked to his or her own country. All participating countries had the same process. A very legitimate and valuable data gathering operation provided their countries and NATO with valuable information to proact to any number of national or global threats. A very small, one person, secret operation eliminated threats that were uncovered

in this data analysis that public and legitimate governing processes were not able to do. While Richard was only called on to activate his “asset” once every year or longer, whenever he read of a “bad guy” somewhere in the world dying he figured it was the NATO “asset” gang at work. Neither he nor anyone else other than the few involved would ever know for a fact.

Gord Salmey had been NATO’s, Canada’s, CIDC’s and Richard’s asset for twenty-five years and had carried out nineteen assignments in nineteen different countries without a hitch or a suspicion. He had eliminated drug dealers, child prostitution ring leaders, corrupt despots, mass murderers, terrorists and, in the most recent case an embezzling banker who was funding nuclear programs in North Korea. During those years Gord had never questioned a job, although during the recruitment phase years ago he and Richard had many conversations and debates about the morality of such work. In the final analysis the understanding that there would never be any killing for political gain, no killing of children or collaterals of any kind, and that the decision was backed up by an immense amount of legitimate research, had placated their consciences enough that both had long ago tacitly agreed to not raise the morality issue in their work. In his case, Richard knew he was just rationalizing to not have to think about the work. He had long ago lost any patriotic zeal. It was just a job and he would retire soon enough with the pension he deserved. In Gord’s case Richard was never sure. He had grown to know Gord on a very personal way and outside of their little secret they had become good friends. Richard kept everything secret from Gord except his own role. Gord didn’t know he was the only Canadian doing this, or that he had a watcher who looked over him, or that he was part of a larger NATO team. From Gord’s side, he never told Richard how he would carry out a job. He would ask for things from Richard and they would be done. Like turning off the infrared detectors in Korea. Other than those things, the method was up to Gord, with the condition that it was seen as an accidental, or natural death. As long as they kept their little secrets to themselves their relationship worked fine. They played golf together on Saturday and when their kids were growing up and when they were both still married they had Sunday barbecues together and even the odd cottage holiday together.

Like Richard, Gord was recruited directly from a Ph.D. in linguistics. Gord had

applied for the diplomatic core and Richard had seen something in the application that tweaked his interest; a not a very athletic looking person but strangely a highly talented athlete, spoke five languages fluently, slightly obsessive compulsive, not homely looking but more innocuous in appearance than handsome. Gord was told at first that he was being recruited into the secret service as an agent and he needed special training so he accepted that without question. There was the martial arts, the lessons on how to kill, and the other traditional things that someone like him would figure you would need to be a James Bond, even though no one would ever mistake Gord for Sean Connery. When Richard finally told him what his special role would be and that he would start at the end of the month as the V.P. International for a small college in Ottawa, Gord just accepted it and, as Richard had predicted, simply became obsessed with the methods of “natural killing.”

And now, in 2012, after years of never questioning his role, Gord Salmy wanted out. This pained Richard because the Directors agreed there was one other rule of this operation. The only way an asset was replaced was if they left in a coffin. He knew for a fact that on at least a couple of occasions, unknown to either, one country’s asset had been called upon to take care of another country’s asset. He wasn’t sure if he could do this to Gord, but if it became known that Gord was out then he would have no choice. Since he may not have to call on Gord for some time now, he had time to figure it out.

He called up the watcher on his secure cell. “Hey. How are you?”

“Fine,” she replied. “That last job was a close one don’t you think? I mean a fistfight in a public washroom? Really!”

“What were you doing through this debacle?”

“Well there wasn’t much I could do except wait for him to finish and if he was late go in after him. Isn’t that my job? To clean up if necessary?”

“Sure. But you didn’t have to. No one made a connection between the banker’s heart attack and our man in the washroom. All of the security cameras in the washroom and the tunnel had been disabled.”

“Yeah. Right. No one is making a fuss because no one wants to. If the Korean security boys wanted to look further into this it wouldn’t take them long to find the trail and raise suspicions that the death was not a natural occurrence.”

“You know that’s not likely to happen.” Richard paused and announced. “He wants to retire.”

There was a pause at the other end of the line. “I’m not surprised. As you know he has retired from everything else. He quit his VP job. It will be tough to find as good a cover as that job.”

“You know that no one retires to golf and grandkids from this job.”

“Yeah Richard,” she replied with a little exasperation. “I had the Hotel California speech as well.”

“Well, I have decided what we are going to do with him.”

There was silence at the other end. Richard couldn’t even hear her breathing. “You still there?”

“Yeah,” she responded quietly.

“First. You are going to lay off him for a while and move to watching his replacement. I have had a succession plan in play for a while now. Gord is 58 after all. Despite his personal considerations, age becomes a factor here. I’ll get you her details by the usual method.”

They had a secure Internet “drop box” method they used to share written information.

“But you are no longer his watcher. Secondly. We are going to support him in every way we can with this crazy senior golf thing. I have a hunch this might actually give us a way out. Thirdly. I need you to find a way to get his personal life fixed up. Use whatever means necessary to get the divorce all done. Make arrangement for his house to be sold and the realtor to find the perfect place for Gord to live. You know what I mean by perfect.”

She was silent, thinking with some relief that this didn’t seem like an asset elimination strategy. “No problem for any of this. Will I have to get a new job?”

“Yes. How are your financial skills? You will soon be offered a job as an international investment strategist with a Canadian firm that specializes in takeovers all over the world.”

“Wow! My dream job!”

He ignored the sarcasm. “OK. We’ll not make contact again unless I have a job for

the new asset, or there is something about Gord we need to discuss. The resources you need will be made available in the usual way through the RBC account.”

Richard broke off the call and returned to the mundane world of intelligence analysis and a 275-page report on the flow of Mexican drug money to an Al-Qaeda terrorist cell.



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## **Part 2 - Chapter 15: The Club Championship**

Gord was surprised when the real estate agent called him in the morning and told him the house had been sold and even more surprised when his lawyer called in the afternoon and told him the divorce was final. Gail gets the house and he gets the Anguilla condo and everything else was split down the middle. Gail had her own career at the National Research Centre, so there were not any alimony issues or anything like that. As far as he was concerned she could keep whatever she had already taken from the house as long as he was left with his music stuff, his clothes and, of course, his hidden cupboard. Financially he really didn't care that much. He had a small pension from the University but he also had twenty-five years of Agency retainer saved and compounding in a bank in Anguilla. All along he had envisioned that he and Gail would retire to one of the most beautiful islands in the Caribbean. He was going to surprise her with the money when he retired. He had a fleeting thought that he hadn't shared it before or she would now have half of a multi- million-dollar account.

He could easily get weepy about the house. He and Gail had built and designed the house and they had raised their two children there. Despite the ignominious end to the

family dream he still had many very good memories of their life in the house. As he walked through the empty children's bedroom, and the den where they all grew up armed with the truth according to cable television, he smiled and wondered if he would ever have such personal relationships again – at least ones that would raise such emotions as he was now feeling. Even the master bedroom had enough happy history to offset the last five years of marriage misery. Now he had to make some decisions about his secret stash behind the wall of stereo equipment. He figured he would throw out some, take some to a remote location and bury it so it would never be found again and keep some for future disposal. He just hadn't yet figured out which was in what pile, or for that matter why he was keeping anything. He was retired after all. Some of the chemicals and organic materials had taken him years to accumulate and could probably never be found again, or at least not easily brought into Canada. Some of the rare plant and insect products came from some isolated parts of the world and he smuggled them into Canada and into his secret stash well before 9/11 and the rigour of modern luggage screening. He just couldn't throw them out. Besides, some were too dangerous to be easily disposed. Maybe he would leave them to some university in his will and let some grad student figure out what they had been used for. But all that was for another day. Tonight he had to get some rest since tomorrow was the first day of the club championship. He had a great reunion with the guys last Saturday for his first round of golf in over two months. Given the strange things he was doing with his swing they were surprisingly gentle with him. He had expected no end of ribbing about the one-foot rule but none of them said a thing until he took out the belly putter and then the ribbing started.

“Why don't you just use a hockey stick like Adam Sandler?”

“I guess as your dick gets shorter your putter gets longer!”

“I hope you didn't buy that thing! Probably found it outside Sunset Living Lodge.”

All comments elicited loud laughter from the three friends.

Gord gently reminded them that two of the biggest and youngest winners in the PGA the past year had used belly putters and Paul Azinger has been using one for years.

“And where is Azinger now?” Richard asked?

Gord answered by placing a curving twenty foot putt right in the middle of the cup and said a secret, “thank you Bruce!”



Gord never tried to explain the changes he had made, just put up with the ribbing and shot the lowest round he had ever had at the club. He smiled confidently and felt he was more than ready for tomorrow and the tournament. The club championship was a three round event starting with eighteen holes of medal play on each of Friday and Saturday. The top ten players in each flight made the cut for a round on Sunday for the flight and club championships. There were six flights allowing golfers of all handicaps to enjoy the competition. With an official three handicap, Gord was in the championship flight with all golfers who had a handicap less than five. There were a lot of good golfers in that flight. At least eight of them were currently twenty-somethings on scholarships at a U.S. university. One young member had actually made it to the final round of the PGA Q School before a final round put him in the top seventy-five and a year on the Nationwide Tour. After a couple of years of travel and hotels he had returned to a job with his Dad's insurance company and been reinstated as an amateur. Another senior golfer like Gord was a top ten finisher in the Canadian Senior Open; though he had put on so much weight he was having trouble walking the course as was required in the tournament. While Gord had been successful in the club senior championship, none of the top players in the club saw him as much of a threat for the club championship. He was just too old. Gord of course hoped to reshape their opinions today.

"Hi Gord!" Bruce was waiting at the bag drop area and was greeting all players as they drove up and either dropped off their clubs or made their way into the clubhouse. "Ready for this?"

"You bet!"

"Look Gord," Bruce pulled him aside. "I know you've been working hard, and I know the changes we have made are the right ones. Just don't expect instant success. Remember the ten thousand thing OK?"

"Yeah well, I think I've hit ten thousand 7-irons over the last two months, so don't worry. I'm ready." And with that Gord slapped him on the back and went off to the locker room to put on his golf shoes and head to the range for warm up.

The tournament was a shotgun start and Gord and the other three members who he was playing with that morning started on hole three, a tricky 168-yard par three. Gord smiled at this. He had only hit six or seven thousand of these 7-irons over the past month

and he felt he could hit land the ball on a dime at this distance. The tee toss put him off third and he watched the first two players, a junior player still in high school and a manager of the local Safeway, both land safely in the middle of the green. The green was hourglass shaped and was at forty-five degrees to the fairway. A sand trap filled the space left by the narrow portion of the glass closest to the fairway and for the first day of the tournament the pin was placed at the back, or top right of the hourglass, only eight feet from the back edge of the green where a steep slope ran down to the creek that meandered throughout the course. The green sloped back to front so the perfect shot, apart from in the hole, was somewhere in front of the hole, leaving a straight uphill putt for a possible birdie. Both of the first two players were in the middle of the green, but with longish makeable uphill putts.

Gord, on the other hand, went for the dime. He hardly glanced at the hole as took his stance, new grip and with perfect and rhythmic balance hit a gentle fade that started for the middle of the green and slowly curved towards the hole. It was only after he had hit that he realized he had forgotten the 'one foot from the ball' thing. As he watched the ball flight he was relieved that it didn't appear to matter. It looked like a perfect shot, and thoughts of a hole in one to start the tournament went through his mind.

"Wow. Nice shot!" the kid exclaimed. "Right at the hole!"

Gord was still holding his follow through, he had been taught to do this as a kid, as the ball landed six inches in front of the hole, took one bounce and rolled off the back of the green and into the creek.

"Ah, bad luck," the other players groaned in unison.

Gord just stood there, gaping at 'brilliance gone to shit', as his first golf teacher used to say. A good chip and a better putt with the long putter saved a bogie on the first hole, but Gord the obsessive perfectionist was not in a good frame of mind when they moved to the second hole. It had been a long time since the score he earned on any particular hole mattered that much. As a top junior prospect he had been extremely competitive and was very hard on himself for any lapse in judgment or play. He would be depressed for days after losing a tournament or sometimes just losing a hole in match play that he should have won. He did not throw clubs or react in a way anyone could see; instead he kept the reaction very much inside. It was not losing that bothered him, but rather not

performing up to the potential he knew he had. After losing a tournament in University he would hide himself in his headphones, playing his bass to the blues songs that told of lost love and things like ‘a mule kicking in my stall’, whatever that meant, and he soon recovered from his funk. Later in life he would use his obsession with perfecting the unique Tai Chi methods and even his search for the perfect invisible killing method in the same way. As long as he played golf he had to have counter points that were so much under his control to make up for his inability to control the golf course. In the end it was his inability to give in to the many uncontrollable variables on a golf course and the game that caused him to withdraw from competitive golf and, with the new obsessions of his career and music he put golf into a recreational corner of his life. Golf with the guys on Saturday, even the senior championship, just became a distraction from the intensity of his other lives, not an obsession or an avocation. But now he was obsessed with the game again. He had forgotten the feelings of rage he had often felt as a teenager when he could not be perfect at the game and he had forgotten how that internally directed rage had ruined the game for him. Now he was in turmoil again.

The second hole was a spectacular dogleg left par four that curved gently along the Ottawa River. The Ottawa Valley Club was actually not in Ottawa, but in Hull, Quebec, across a bridge from Ottawa that for most residential, government offices, and shopping purposes was considered part of Ottawa itself. The best urban golf courses were also there since the Ontario side of the river was all apartment buildings and office towers, including the national parliament buildings. The Quebec side on the other hand had been slower to commercially develop so land had been available 100 years ago along the river to build this and other courses popular with golfers from both provinces. The only quirky thing about this arrangement for golfers from Ontario was that, in accordance with Quebec law, all of the signs were in French. It made no difference to Gord since he was fluently multilingual, including French, but some of the old guys from the Ottawa side griped about it.

As the golfers teed off on number two, they looked west to the fairway and the green, and left over the river to the Canadian parliament buildings on the other side. The hole was only 313 yards long. Gord thought it odd that a country that had gone totally metric still had golf courses that used imperial measures. Some of the young, long hitters

could occasionally make this green. The wind, bounce and golf gods had to be with them since water on the left and the creek running up the right side and a green surrounded on three sides by traps, the hazards made up for the length. Gord was last to hit this time since the other golfers panned the first hole, and he felt the indignity of being last. They all hit hybrids two hundred-plus yards to the middle of the fairway, leaving short irons to the green and they all looked at each other as Gord took out his driver. He knew he had been hitting three hundred-plus yards for the last month and he had rolled one up onto this green when he was playing with the guys last Saturday. With another perfect swing he aimed for the top corner of the net and hit a perfect trajectory drive, rising up to an apex over the left side of the fairway before it landed and rolled into the Ottawa River.

There were no “ooohs” or “aaahs” from the other three players this time as they waited anxiously for Gord’s reaction. He just looked down at his hands and saw that without thinking he had used his old grip. He smiled at the others. “Looks like the golf gods aren’t with me today!”

And they all laughed, relieved that they were not going to witness a meltdown.

“Mustn’t have made your sacrifice to the driving god this morning Gord!” one of them quipped.

“Or maybe you did it in English?” another offered to further laughter. “The gods only speak French here!”

And Gord laughed right along with them and complimented each of them on their good drives and their second shots to the green that gave each of them pars again. The drop and penalty gave Gord another bogie. As they walked to the third hole all Gord wanted to do was to go home. This was not working out the way he had envisioned. He only had three things to remember and he could not seem to think of them all at the same time. He was polite and professional on the outside, but churning inside at his inability to do exactly what he wanted to do. By the fifth hole he subconsciously found himself reverting back to his old grip and stance and he ended up playing the rest of the round with his old swing. He ended up with his old score – a four over. Only some sensational putting with the long putter saved him from a much higher score. At the end of the round he shook hands with his playing partners and quickly went to his car, but he was so angry he couldn’t drive right away. When he saw Bruce coming towards him from the

clubhouse he started the car and raced out of the parking lot towards the bridge back to Ottawa and his house in the Glebe. He had left his clubs in the bag rack, but right now he didn't care. "Golf could go fuck itself!" he raged to himself as he raced out of the lot with all the acceleration a tired old Civic could muster.

As he left the parking lot he almost hit a Hyundai SUV that had been sitting at the entrance to the lot and was now just pulling out of its spot. In his mood he hadn't seen it. When he swerved around it he could see there were people in the SUV and they must have seen him, but they didn't honk at him or anything so he calmed himself and quietly apologized to them as he drove out the gate and headed east towards the Portage Bridge that led to the Ontario side and Ottawa. Before he turned onto the bridge he glanced in his rearview mirror and saw that the Hyundai was a couple of cars behind him. He thought for a moment that if the opportunity arose he would apologize to the driver. He had cooled down a little now and just wanted to get back to the house, his bass and a little Bushmills. He turned right onto the bridge into the right lane and noticed that the SUV was pulling up into the left lane of the two four-lane bridge. At the speed it was going it would be beside him and in a moment he could smile over at the driver and mouth a "sorry!"

When the SUV pulled up beside him he was so low in the Civic that he could not see the driver but he saw an Asian passenger looking down at him and it was not a pleasant look. One reason that Gord had been recruited to the Agency was that after some weird testing he apparently had some special ability. One day he had to play the palm slap game all day with another woman in a lab coat while another person used a special instrument that looked like a radar gun and jotted down notes, Gord guessed a timing measurement of some sort. After this, and some other unusual testing, the Agency had determined that Gord was one of a very small minority of people who had what they could only describe as "quick reflexes". More recent work by a Dr. Johnston at Harvard had labeled the phenomenon as "Spatial Awareness" and hypothesized that maybe one percent of the population had a special ability to quickly analyze their surroundings and instinctively take action without thinking. This instinctive, not thinking about it, action was common to all good athletes, but a small majority of that one percent were able to use their ability to excel at their sport. These athletes described it a "seeing things in slow motion."

Johnston was continuing her studies with other high motor skill performers and was finding the same instinctive, slow motion effect in musicians who were able to play a musical piece inhumanly fast. Gord was one of these people and it had explained his level of hockey playing, much of his golf success and even his extraordinary skill at the bass guitar. And now that spatial awareness instinct took over as he saw in slow motion the passenger look over to the short guard rail on the bridge, back over to the driver and say something, look back over at Gord and reach up to grasp the hand grip above the passenger door. Gord hit his own brakes just as the Hyundai took a sharp turn right that was clearly intended, not just to cut Gord off, but to send him into the roaring Ottawa river rapids two hundred feet below the bridge. Like a hockey player who misses a check the Hyundai lost control for a moment when it turned violently into a space that had just milliseconds before held Gord's car and, expecting to meet resistance, found only air. It accelerated and sped off and the last Gord saw of the vehicle it was off the bridge and racing south towards the freeway.

"Fuck!" was all Gord could say as he slowly drove to the other side of the bridge and pulled over on Sparks Street to gather his wits and let his adrenalin recede. "I was going to say I was sorry, but fuck that you asshole!" he yelled at the car that was now long gone.

"Christ! What a day," he thought to himself. "Killed on the golf course and almost killed on the highway. How can it get any better?"

His humour didn't improve any when he returned to the house. The house was in the trendy canal area of Ottawa and it was one of only a few new, less than one hundred-year-old houses that fronted the almost two century old canal that ran from Ottawa to Lake Ontario. The kids had loved skating on the canal in winter and the whole family enjoyed walking or biking on the path that bordered the canal all the way to the Parliament buildings and the Byward Market full of fresh produce and funky clothes. For the first time since he started this golf obsession he admitted he felt a little lonely. It was one thing to come home pumped from a day of practice and find some escape in his Bushmills and music, but it was another thing to come home depressed – not to mention a recent brush with death – and have no one to complain to. When he used to come home grumpy from a bad golf game Gail used to berate him and ask him why he played the

silly game in the first place if all it did was piss him off. She misunderstood. On those days he was not pissed off, he just needed to do what most amateur golfers do after a round of golf; complain and have someone nod sympathetically and say it will be better next time. It was childish he knew, but right at this moment he needed either that sympathetic ear or someone to berate him and the empty house held neither. There was not even any furniture to kick. Just as he poured himself a Bushmills and sat on the floor in the kitchen someone banged on the door. He ignored it since he had no interest in talking to a realtor or to show the house to anyone like he had done on occasion over the past month or so.

“Fuck off,” he said so no one would hear he was actually there. “The place is sold.”

The banging persisted and a voice. “Hey Gord? Are you there? I know you’re here because the car is here.”

Gord recognized Bruce’s voice and with a suddenly stiff aging body pushed himself up from the floor and went to the door and opened it.

Bruce noticed the drink in Gord’s hand. “Got one of those for me?”

Gord didn’t say anything but just stepped aside as Bruce entered the hallway and closed the door behind him.

“Help yourself to a seat,” Gord motioned to the floor as he poured a drink for Bruce.

They both sat down on the floor and Bruce took a sip of the malt. “Shit, no wonder Ireland is in deep economic trouble. Drink much of this and you’re sure to have a brain deficit to go along with the other kind.”

“Sorry, I’m all out of pink Margaritas. Shouldn’t you be at the club congratulating all the first round winners?”

Bruce ignored him and took another sip. “Hmmm ... not bad once your mouth becomes totally numb,” he offered as he took a swig. “They don’t need me Gord or care where I am. The club bar is full of half-drunk golfers replaying every shot of the day. So what happened to you today?”

“I don’t know, just stunk I guess.”

“I told you that you might not be ready Gord.”

“Look Bruce, I just divorced a wife who 'told me so' whenever I fucked up. And that was way too often in her eyes. I don’t need it from someone I thought was my friend as

well as coach.”

“Ok. That wasn’t fair. I have a different view on this than you that’s all.”

Gord paused and looked at him and smiled. “I’m sorry Bruce. Today was not your fault. So, Coach. What went wrong?”

“Well these are just guesses, but first I would bet there were some times today when you went back to your old swing?”

“A few,” Gord lied.

“And second, you went out there today to win. Enjoying yourself had nothing to do with what you did today?”

“I hadn’t thought of it in those stark terms,” he replied. “But yes, all I wanted to do today was to win. There was nothing recreational there at all.” Gord poured both of them another drink. “So, great sensei, how do I fix this?”

“Well grasshopper, “Bruce mimicked. “If I remember correctly you told me once that you quit competitive golf because you couldn’t deal with the pressure you put on yourself to be perfect. You need to be in such control in your life you could not accept the vagaries of the environment in which you played golf were sometimes beyond your control.”

Gord nodded.

“You have always had trouble just accepting that sometimes shit just happens and there is nothing you can do to change it or avoid it?”

Gord nodded again, curious as to where Bruce was going. But he was right. Gord had felt that any circumstance or event could be traced back to some human action or error. He had serious trouble accepting the role of chance in his life. He had never left anything to chance in his work with the Agency and he felt that was the biggest reason that he was still alive.

“Well it appears that I have done a great job of teaching you how to swing. But like every other golf teacher you have ever had, I have done a lousy job of teaching you how to play the game.”

Gord didn’t know what to say. Bruce continued. “No, I take that back. No one can really teach anyone to play the game. You have to figure that out for yourself. I know you are into some sort of eastern martial arts, so all I can suggest is that until you find your



karma, or your Zen, or whatever terms the ponytail crowd uses, you will never be able to play your best golf.”

“Bruce for a member of the brush cut gang you’re pretty profound; even philosophical, God forbid.”

“It’s the Irish,” Bruce suggested. “Gimme another. Not bad stuff actually.”

Gord retrieved the half empty bottle and put it on the floor between them. “You’re right Bruce. I have no idea how to let go, to not be in control, and to not become frustrated when I lose it. For 30 years I have been enjoying my golf because I didn’t give a shit. Who cares whether Richard beat me on Saturday. And the senior championship was just a lark, especially when it was only 6000 yards instead of 7000 like the club championship. From the moment I retired from my day job and decided I was going to get really good, I have approached the game differently. After today, I think I enjoyed it much less. I’m going to have to consider whether I have made the right decision to change golf from distraction to obsession.”

“I’ll leave that to your conscience. I can say that in these kinds of tournaments you need to quit trying to beat the course and just beat the person you are playing with. Two of the players with you today shot under par so you did not have to go for the course record, just one stroke better than them. I can also comment on the swing changes that we made. Quite simply Gord, you need much more practice with these changes before you test them in any more tournaments. My suggestion? You have the rest of the summer here to keep practicing the way you have been and then go south somewhere and practice over the winter. By the time you are back here in the spring you might be ready to try tournament play again.”

“Should I play tomorrow?” Gord asked. “I can still make the cutoff for play on Sunday and with two great rounds even win this thing.”

“That’s your call. But I think playing anymore right now would lower your confidence. Until you manage your expectations on the course continuing would just make you more and more depressed. When you go south, find yourself a guru or something,” and as he pointed at the Irish, “not a genie in a bottle.” Bruce rolled himself up from the floor. “I gotta go Gord. There is a banquet tonight you know.”

“Thanks for coming over. I know you have other places to be and other friends to

drink with tonight. I hope I've given you a good start!"

They both laughed as Bruce feigned drunkenness.

"But I want you to know that I appreciate what you have done for me these past few months despite my paying for that new Miata parked out front. I'm not going to give up. I haven't decided yet if I'll play tomorrow, but if I don't see you, thanks for what you have taught me. I won't give up the dream."

They gave each other a manly hug and Bruce was gone and alone with the thoughts that Gord had left him with. He couldn't think of anything else to do but go back to the Bushmills and hope that some Irish blarney might give him a flash of insight into his golf's and his life's future. He thought he'd have another drink and go get one of those precooked dinner. Bruce had helped him out of his funk, but he certainly did not feel like a banquet tonight. He had some decisions to make.

His next visitor was totally unexpected.



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## **Part 2 - Chapter 16: Secrets Leak**

"What the hell do you mean we've been hacked?" Richard yelled at Henry Thorpe, the Agency's IT Director, so loud that Thorpe actually backed up a few steps. "We're the spies goddamn it! We're the ones who hack into other peoples computers, not the other way around!!"

"We're not totally sure what happened, Richard," Henry tried to be as calm as he could. "We only noticed that there was something odd going on when we were doing a routine back up of today's activity. As you know we back all our data up and save it to an external offsite drive in the NORAD underground bunker in North Bay. We wipe off our onsite drives so that we start fresh each day. This means that anyone hacking into our

system, and this is in the very unlikely circumstance that someone could actually hack into our system, would only have access to the day's activity and not our stored data.”

“How secure is the North Bay site?” Richard knew the answer, but he had to ask it anyhow.

“The NORAD site is a kilometer underground and only accessible by a single road, a tunnel actually. Someone would first have to get into the server room and know the passwords to access the data. That's all conceivable but hardly likely.”

“Ok...Ok...” Richard was getting exasperated with the techie. “What happened? How? Is there any damage? Can we fix it?”

There was another question he wanted to ask, but he was not quite ready to panic.

“I have reported on this before Richard. It is all in my annual report you know. We have 30 seconds of weakness in our system when we make the daily data transfer to the underground servers. At that time both our systems here, and those in North Bay, are open and someone with the passwords, the equipment and the skill could do something in that thirty seconds. I proposed a patch for this in last year's budget but you cut it out. When we were doing yesterday's transfer we noticed a very small electrical fluctuation during the thirty second transfer. It would be the kind of fluctuation that would occur on your desktop when you typed in your password and the computer recognized it and connected you. It is miniscule and would only be noticed if you happened to be staring right at it. Well yesterday one of our technicians was, simply by chance, staring right at the screen while the transfer was progressing and he noticed the fluctuation. He was hesitant to tell me since it was so small but when he did we reran the digitally recorded transfer and when you knew what to look for it was obvious. Someone signed into our system during the thirty second transfer.”

“But they would have had to have access to our line – to our system – to the passwords. This isn't possible!”

“Unlikely, but possible.” Henry was now very much in control of the meeting. “And I am confident that it did happen. In fact I warned you about this in the last budget process.”

“Fuck the budget! What did this hacker do?”

“We haven't figured it all out yet, but in thirty seconds a remote site with enough

computing power and skill could have downloaded the last year's data stored on the remote servers.”

Richard winced. All of the intelligence gathered over the past year was on those drives. There were a number of very sensitive reports that would be internationally embarrassing should they become public. But as much as he hated to admit it, despite the billions of dollars that CIDC spent on national and international espionage there was not really much that would do anything than cause a few brief scandals. An MP or two might lose their jobs. It might even cost the Prime Minister his job since there were some very explicit photos of him and a Chinese reporter cum mistress who Richard knew also happened to be an agent of the Chinese government. But there was not much that most intelligence agencies throughout the world did not already have in their own servers. It would be uncomfortable and he might be forced into early retirement. With the payout that would come with it not a bad prospect he thought. But in terms of national security not a lot would be damaged. Canada was not that important a player on the world security scene. That left the question as to why someone or someplace with the kind of knowledge, equipment and skill required would bother hacking into the Agencies data? “Ok, thanks Henry. Do whatever you can to find out what happened and what they did. Maybe it will tell us the why. We'll keep this information in the building until we have more answers.”

Henry nodded and silently headed down to the basement and his team of IT specialists and analysts who were about to have a sleepless night at their computer terminals.

Richard went over to the bar hidden behind a fake bookcase full of vintage “World Book” encyclopedias and pulled out a twenty-three year old Glen Fiddich Gran Reserva. He liked most good scotches and this one was outstanding. He kept it in his office because he had a lot fun serving it to his American visitors and asking them why this particular scotch was not available in the U.S. After twenty questions and more than one drink, he showed them the label and pointed out that the U.S. won't import scotches that are aged in Cuban rum barrels. This time he just poured himself three fingers, vertically, and asked Mary to come in to the office. He poured her a drink as well.

“You know what's going on in IT?”

“Yes, I heard it all.”

“Do you think that anyone could get into the ghost drive?”

Henry didn't know it, but his system had been “hacked” long ago, only not by any outside force, but by Mary Dover, one of the most brilliant information systems experts that Canada had ever produced. Actually that the New York Institute of Technology had produced. She was a postdoctoral student at NYIT when she was caught hacking into the Federal Reserve Bank, apparently just for fun to “show it could be done.” The FBI called CIDC because she was a Canadian citizen and after reviewing her file and learning that she had hacked into a dozen public and private major high security operations in the world, CDIC offered her a choice of life imprisonment in a U.S. facility or a job with him where she would be paid to practice her hobby. That was ten years ago. Richard had never been told her history and he didn't ask since she had proven indispensable to him and the Agency ever since. Her Executive Assistant title was just a cover for her real job as one of the world's most foremost hackers. She sat in the outside office answering phone calls, arranging meetings and bringing in sandwiches to important high level security meetings. In between those duties she spent her day travelling through the computer systems of every nation, every business, every government, and every security operation in the world. She apparently could change any record on any database anywhere in the world. It was a testament to her talent that, since her first error over a decade ago, she had never been outed in her wanderings. She also had the highest security clearance that any civilian could get in Canada, and she was the only one, other than the “watcher,” who knew of the clandestine operations of Gord Salmy.

“No way,” she replied. “First of all they would have to know that the drive existed and you and I are the only two who know it is even there. They would have to understand and be able to crack our new laser generated password system.”

Richard showed some relief as he sipped his drink.

This system had only recently been developed by NRC physicists and according to them was so “random” as to not be breakable by any ordinary or known means.

“The scientists at NRC who developed the new system haven't figured out how to break it. So, no, I can't imagine anyone breaking into the ghost file.”

“That's good. So we can concentrate our efforts on dealing with the breach of the

main files. Any ideas there?”

“I don’t have anything more than Henry. Someone took advantage of that 30 second window and as far as I can tell, downloaded the last year’s data from the storage servers. While they were probably just after the main files, they extracted the buried ghost files as well. They probably don’t even know they are there. In total the ghost files are only 80 megs, so in the scope of the millions of terabytes of data they stole, it would be unlikely that they would notice they did not have access to eighty megs of data hidden somewhere in the data.”

The ghost files were small, but the thought of the wrong person or agency or government getting them caused Richard to get another drink. Those files contained four things that could never leak out. The first were the details of the CIDC link with the secret NATO operation that killed people. The second was a report he had written on each of the jobs that CIDC had been involved with; the jobs that Gord had done for him. Thirdly, the files contained all biographical and contact data on Gord and his watcher. There were also the details of the financial transactions between Gord and the Agency and the amounts and the banks where the money went. He didn’t even want to think of what would happen if this went public. It still nagged at him that someone would go to this trouble for some Canadian intelligence data.

“Mary...” he paused. “What if they were after the ghost files?”

Mary did not respond. Just took a sip of her scotch.

“There’s something you’re not telling me isn’t there?” he quietly demanded.

“I don’t want you to panic yet, but yes, there are some things that are bothering me.”

“Like what?” Richard asked, trying not to panic.

“The hackers did not take a full year of data, only the last six months. Henry will just assume they scarfed all they could in thirty seconds. What if they didn’t want all of our data, they just wanted to find the details about something in the CIDC files that occurred in the last six months?”

“OK...” Richard thought out loud. “So what has happened in the last six months that would warrant such an attack on our files?”

Mary ignored the rhetorical question.

“I have also been able to isolate the source of the hacking, at least a geographical

proximity. While they used the most sophisticated computer hijacking method I have ever seen it looks like this attack originated somewhere in Asia. Could be China, but more likely either Japan or Korea.”

Richard understood at least part of what she was saying. Hackers and scammers all around the world used the relatively simple method of hijacking the computers that sit on the desks of ordinary citizens, often without the computer owner even being aware of what was happening – maybe just a small slowdown in processing one day. Linked together these desktop processors became a network that could do everything from sending spam to industrial espionage. These hackers had probably used some sophisticated form of this “hijacking” to get into CIDC and be untraceable.

“But there is also this.” Mary handed Richard a printed copy of a page from the Ottawa Citizen. “This is from last Tuesday’s Citizen.”

Richard put on his reading glasses and started to read the article, actually an obituary, with rising concern. The fifth page story reported on the apparent suicide of a young scientist who worked at NRC. She was a recent graduate of the University of Toronto with a degree in laser Physics and had only been with NRC for a year. She had apparently left a suicide note referring to a love affair gone wrong. It was the last line of the story that gave him the chills. “Kim Yung Sool had immigrated to Canada with her parents in 1986 and is survived by a brother and grandparents in North Korea.”

Richard looked up from his reading and took off his glasses.

“This can’t be just a coincidence can it?” It was more of a statement than a question.

“I don’t think so,” Mary offered. “I don’t think we we have to worry about the CIDC files. I think we have someone out there reading the ghost files.”

They were both quiet for a moment and Richard sprang into action as he grabbed his jacket and started for the door. “Mary I want you to text Colonel Ed Smith at DND headquarters. His number is in my contacts. Text the number labeled “hunt camp” and leave the message ”Code Lemming” and give him Gord’s home address.”

She looked puzzled.

“Just do it Mary,” he said as he ran from the office. “There are some things even you don’t know.”

Richard ran to his car and started the Audi 5000 before he had even done up his seat

belt. He wondered if he was just panicking. The Lemming code was set up years ago to deal with any circumstance where a CIDC agent was in danger. Colonel Ed Smith was the current officer in charge of a specially trained and security cleared group of six soldiers who could be mobilized at short notice. To be truthful it was envisioned that someone would have to be extracted from some foreign country, not saved in the CIDC back yard. They had only been mobilized once in Richard's career at CIDC and that had been to pull a journalist out of Pakistan. He didn't know who the soldiers were but he knew they included men, women, and represented a selection of ethnic backgrounds. He knew they were surreptitious and deadly. If this turned out to be real they could act with any force necessary. If it was a false alarm no one would ever know. Richard glanced at his watch. It was 7 pm and Gord had not answered his cell phone. Richard had left a message for Gord to call him as soon as he heard the message but he was probably still at the golf course doing an after round post mortem with the other tournament golfers. The Club did not allow cell phones on the course or in the bar. He decided he would go by the house first and go to the course if Gord wasn't home.



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## **Part 2 - Chapter 17: A Surprise Visitor**

Gord dosed off for a while after Bruce had left, the effects of two quick and large Bushmills having their effect. It was late afternoon when he woke, stiff from sleeping on the bare floor with only his jacket for a pillow. "I'll get some real furniture when I find a new place," he thought to himself. Despite a late lunch of mostly whiskey and a nap on the floor, he actually felt pretty good. He did a few Tai Chi stretches to get his circulation going and decided that since he wasn't going to the banquet he should get some dinner.



The talk with Bruce had been helpful. He had resolved two things. That he would remember it was indeed just a game. And that he was not going to give up on the quest for his senior tour card, no matter how quixotic it seemed. He hadn't decided if he would play the second round tomorrow. Maybe that would become clearer after a little dinner and a little music. He grabbed his coat and headed out the door and decided to walk the canal pathway to the strip mall a half a kilometer away to pick up a prepared dinner. The late afternoon was pleasant and he was surprisingly upbeat as he walked past joggers, parents with strollers, bikers, hikers and commuters, all enjoying a warm July Friday afternoon in Ottawa. It was late in the afternoon so neither the mall nor the small store that served prepared food for time-starved commuters was busy. The parking lot was half empty. Gord should have noticed the new Hyundai sedan parked a little apart from the other cars, but he was too preoccupied with his thoughts and what he was going to do tomorrow, and the incident on the bridge was long gone from his mind. So he focused instead upon dinner as he entered the shop.

“Hi Gord!” Gloria, the owner and counter person was genuinely delighted to see him. Not only was he one of her most regular customers but also she figured he was also one of her hottest prospects for her next husband. Number four had just left her, tired of the restaurant hours, or maybe because she was showing the effects of eating too much of her own food. It didn't matter since she only felt good riddance. She had watched Gord with increasingly hungry eyes ever since Gail had left six months ago. He was tall, the right age. She herself was fifty-five. He was fit, not too bad looking and apparently had money. “What more could she ask for?” she thought.

“I have something special for you today. I made it just for you – a Steak and Kidney pie,” she proudly announced.

Gord could not remember when he mentioned to Gloria that he liked Steak and Kidney pie. He did for that matter, and even though it wasn't what he had in mind for tonight it looked like he didn't have much choice.

“You are a dear Gloria!” he enthusiastically responded. “I'm sure I'll love it.”

Gord took out his wallet while Gloria was all proud smiles as she put the dinner in the reheatable container into a plastic bag.

“Will it feed two?” a voice came from behind Gord and he turned to see Monica

standing just inside the door. He really is getting old he thought. He didn't even hear her coming into the store. He moved towards her and gave her a big hug.

Gloria scowled.

"Is your daughter joining you for dinner?" she coldly inquired.

"I love steak and kidney pie Daddy!" Monica offered with a mischievous grin. "Let's take it home and we can catch up."

Gloria became a little more civil and carefully bagged the dinner and, with a big wink to Gord, threw in a couple of hot cross buns for free.

"Thanks Gloria."

"See you soon Gord."

When they were outside Monica put her arm through Gord's.

"That woman wants your body you know?"

"Yeah, just a hazard of being tall, handsome, athletic and good looking I guess."

"More like a walking ATM is my guess," Monica retorted.

They walked in silence, arm in arm like two contented lovers on a Friday afternoon, until they reached the canal pathway. Neither noticed the dark sedan that sped off on Queen Elizabeth Drive.

"So, to what do I owe this sudden visit from my favourite protégé?"

"Would you believe I missed you and was curious as to what you were up to?"

"The curious part maybe. The missed part I'm a little skeptical of. But I have missed you Monica. I probably spent more time with you over the past eight years than with my wife. Of course that may be why I don't have a wife anymore. A lot has happened over the past couple of months. I'll fill you in over a drink at the house. I hope you don't mind sitting on the floor?"

"I've some things I have to tell you as well," Monica offered as they continued their walk along the canal in silence.

Gord was delighted at this little surprise visit by Monica. He had missed her. She was a willing and available ear for his personal challenges – wife, kids and the work frustrations. They had shared many long days at recruitment fairs and many long dinners in far away countries. Once in a while she would mention a boyfriend, more a date than a relationship. But other than that she kept her personal life much to herself. While

travelling they tried hard not to get in the way of each other's interests. She apparently liked to shop and he had his blues bars and golf courses. Theirs was a warm and comfortable friendship that went beyond the formal boss-subordinate roles they occupied. He was never quite sure just how she viewed him since they were thirty years apart in age. He could be her father, although he had to admit to himself he never saw her as daughter. Now he was quite at ease as they walked together along the canal as if it was something they did every pleasant Friday afternoon; he carrying the evening's dinner and she with a larger purse over her arm that more than likely had the right wine to go with the dinner. Far too soon they were at the driveway to his, ...or his ex's, ...house and went up the stairs to the front porch while Gord opened the unlocked door. Monica was surprised.

“We never lock our doors in this neighbourhood. Besides. Take a look. What would they steal? The furniture?”

Monica had to laugh when she looked into the hallway and beyond to the combined living room and dining room. There was nothing there except the centre island bolted to the floor.

“Go look at the rest of the empty rooms while I uncork the wine I can see you have in your purse.”

Monica laughed again and reached into her purse and pulled out a 1996 Argentinian Malbec. Gord looked at the label. “Ah, the perfect pairing for Steak and Kidney pie.” He walked over to the kitchen counter to get the corkscrew while Monica went exploring. He poured two glasses and joined Monica as she was looking into the main floor bedroom that was empty except for the king size mattress that rested on the floor and was still unmade from the previous night.

“Quite the housekeeper I see,” she offered as she took the wine and walked over to the bed. She suddenly turned around as if she had just thought of something. “But show me this music stuff that you are constantly talking about.”

Monica saw right away that the basement was a different place than anything upstairs. It was a large open area, the size of the whole 1200 square foot footprint of the two-story house. The stairs came down at one end of the room and immediately opened to a vista of electronic equipment and instruments. The windowless wall furthest from the

stairs was a solid panel of amplifiers and tape decks and mixers and other electronic items she could not identify. Some even had old-fashioned tubes. Two large pedestal speakers formed parentheses to the whole set up. A kitchen type table was set up in front of the wall with an iMac on it that was connected with various umbilicals to one amplifier, or whatever it was, in the middle of the wall. One of those large oversize chesterfields that were popular in the early eighties was situated where she assumed was the sound apex, exactly in the middle of the wall's width and fifteen feet away from the wall of electronics. On the right side of the space between the chesterfield and the wall of electronics was a tall stool framed by two instruments, one an electric type guitar, also connected to the amplifier and the other an old fashioned stand up bass, the kind you would see in a symphony orchestra. A music stand sat in front of the stool and a set of Beats headphones hung on the corner of the stool back. All of this occupied half of the room furthest away from the stairs. The other half of the room had nothing in it but a large mat, the kind that you used to pull out onto the floor in high school gym class.

“Very interesting!” she exclaimed as she surveyed the room. “You’ll have to explain some of this for me.”

What was most interesting to her was not the mystical mix of electronic devices but the impeccable order to the place. Unlike the upstairs, it was clear that each item had its place. Wires were coiled and tied. The table was neat and ordered. The chesterfield cushions placed like they would have been in the showroom when they were bought. The gym mat was clean and shiny. No male sweat smell anywhere that she could detect. The only anomalous fixture in the room was the half empty bottle of Bushmills and the totally empty glass sitting on the floor beside the stool and the electric bass.

“Most of the electronic stuff is old and pretty much redundant today. I don't know why I keep the old stuff around. Maybe it reminds me of happier days gone by. I don't know,” Gord explained. “But I can do pretty much everything I want to do today with that computer, a set of good headphones and the instruments. Even the old stand up bass is just for nostalgia since I can't keep it in tune in Ottawa's summer humidity. It's just that it was the instrument I used when I studied at the U of T.”

“Right, you had a music minor didn't you?”

“Yeah, but very minor. Other things took over my interests.”

“I should have come with you when played in some of those blues clubs. I’ll bet you’re good?”

Gord wasn’t sure if that was a question or a statement.

“It’s funny. I am pretty good I guess. At least no band ever objects to me playing with them. But I am not keen on anyone I know ever hearing me play or coming to the clubs where I play. Several years ago I used to play fairly regularly with a group at that blues bar over in Hull that closed up last year. Gail never came. For that matter she has never heard me play in thirty years other than what she heard from upstairs of course. I’m not sure it has ever even registered on my kids just how good I am. That’s fine with me. My music takes me to a different place and displaces from my head the other things that are not so pleasant.”

“I guess we all look for those places to escape to Gord. The mat? I guess that is where you do your Tai Chi? I have seen you do that on occasion. I remember time in Guangzhou where you joined a group of old ladies in the park at 6 am! I could see you from my hotel balcony.”

They wandered a little bit into the room and Gord absently fingered the stand up bass. “Yeah, I remember...you teased me. Asked me if I was looking to get some action. ‘How were my pick up lines in Mandarin?’” you asked!

They both laughed.

“Gord, I’ve quit the university as well,” Monica suddenly announced.

“Does that have something to do with the fact that after eight years of working together you decide to come and visit me at my house? It was not a coincidence we met at the strip mall was it.”

“No,” was all she offered.

“No, what? No, that isn’t why you are here? Or no, it wasn’t an accident.”

“Both.”

They stood looking at each other for a moment, each wanting to say something but neither starting the conversation again. Gord broke the spell by getting the wine bottle from the table by the computer and refilling their glasses. They clinked glasses and simultaneously took a sip. Monica wandered over to the wall of equipment and pretended to be studying the dials. With her back to him Gord felt a little freer to look more closely

at this woman who he had worked and travelled with for over eight years. He didn't suppose anyone would call her beautiful in the fashion model sense. She was too short, only 5'4", more athletic than slender, more pear than hourglass, and definitely more cute than gorgeous. But she was inexplicably attractive. She exuded something – maybe the smile, the slightly upturned nose that turned a little sideways when she laughed, and a definite self-assuredness that attracted men like flies. Everywhere they went he watched men try to hit upon her and on occasion she had used him as her pretend boyfriend or date to fend off an unwanted charge. Of course they had never linked up in any way. He assumed it had never entered her mind to enter into anything other than a professional relationship. If there was anything of a personal nature it was more father-daughter than lover-boyfriend. He had even overheard her tell a co-worker who suggested there was something between them that it would be like sleeping with her father. He was only slightly hurt at the comment, but quickly understood how right she was. He was fifty-eight and she was twenty-eight. So despite his occasional fantasy of what it would be like to sleep with her, they never even came close to such a relationship. He assumed she was here now for some fatherly advice as she embarked on some sort of career change.

“Gord, there are things you need to know,” she paused and he looked at her questioningly. “Like after today I'm sure we will never see each other again.”

Gord was puzzled. “Look I know we have both quit our jobs. But that doesn't mean we can't be friends Monica. We have a lot of history under the bridge.”

She ignored his protest and put down her wine glass and went over to the gym mat. “Hey, show me some Tai Chi!” And she stood there in the middle of the mat in an awkwardly exaggerated martial arts stance.

Gord laughed, put his own drink down on the computer table and went over to where she was standing. “Ok. Well first of all you need to get into the right starting pose.” And he showed her what to do.

“You mean like this?” she offered as she sent a left hand finger jab into his solar plexus that he hadn't even seen coming despite his extraordinary senses. It was not hard enough to hurt him or even cause him to double over, but he was surprised.

“What the fuck?” he said to himself as he watched her go into a perfect attack crouch.

“Come on old man. Show me what you’ve got!” And she threw a foot sweep that this time Gord easily blocked.

They sparred for thirty minutes and for the first time that he remembered, maybe the Korean janitor was the exception, he discovered he was evenly matched. If it wasn’t for his ability to respond faster than the normal person he was sure she would have him covered in bruises by now. She was more skillful in this unique form of martial arts than he was and only his extraordinary reflexes saved him.

Finally, at one point they both just backed off and she offered him a low bow. “Not bad Grandpa! I always wanted to know how I would fare against your special ability.” She didn’t give him a chance to respond or even be surprised that she knew he had an extraordinary ability to slow everything down. If he had thought it through he would have remembered that the only people that knew he had special abilities were in the Agency. “And there was something else I always wanted to do.” And slightly out of breath herself she reached up to a breathless and astonished Gord Salmy and kissed him. It wasn’t the kiss of a daughter, but of someone much more hungry for a passion she had ignored for far too long. The kiss started gently and broke off quickly but their lips stayed close and when she went in for a second time her approach was not hesitant – and neither was Gord’s response. He had not yet processed all that was going on, but he was certainly processing the kiss and his body’s reaction to her initiative, and the reason and rationale that had kept them apart for eight years dissolved in the instant.

After a moment or two they parted while Monica started to take off Gord’s shirt.

“What about this sleeping with your Dad shit?” Gord queried.

“Shut up. That was another thing you need to know. I’m forty-two not twenty-eight.” And she continued to pull his undershirt over his head and run her hands along a skinny but well-toned upper body. She knew what she would find and she was pleased. They kissed again and it was Gord’s turn as he fumbled with her blouse and her bra and he turned his mouth and tongue to the large nipples on very small, but very perky breasts and she moaned in response.

They were still standing in the middle of the gym mat with nothing on their torsos and they pressed their breasts together as they kissed long, slowly and passionately. Their tongues explored the inside of each other’s mouths and Gord found the hotspots in

Monica's neck and shoulders that elicited a gentle moan. He pushed her to the mat and undid her belt and with some effort slid off her jeans. With her help the panties came with the jeans and she was lying on the mat, legs apart while he knelt above her, still in his own jeans, although the hardness of his own excitement and anticipation was evident. He leaned over her naked body and began to kiss and lick every exposed part he could get to; first her ears and her neck and gradually back to the nipples where he lingered for what to her seemed like eternity. He moved to licking and kissing her firm stomach and he elicited a small giggle when he stuck his tongue in her navel and then his tongue was alternately caressing her very wet clitoris and her very firm nipples. She was not unfamiliar with good sex as a string of boyfriends would attest, but the orgasm that suddenly erupted was like nothing she had experienced for many years. Most of her orgasms had been from vaginal stimulation, unless she was doing the stimulation, but Gord wasn't even inside her yet and she was writhing under his tongue that would not quit. She shuddered as she pulled his head up to her where they kissed and she tasted her own juices. Her hands searched out his belt and jeans and together they pulled off his jeans and she grasped his hardness.

"Your turn," she whispered in his ear as she pulled him down to her and guided him to the entrance of a very wet vagina.

Where it went mostly limp.

She pulled on it with her hand until it was semi-hard and tried again and it went half limp again. The third time she expertly massaged him until he spurted over her hand and her belly as Gord shuddered on the dividing edge of pain and pleasure.

They lay beside each other on the mat, both exhausted but with the passion subsiding.

"Now you know another reason why Gail left."

"When did it start?"

"I don't know? We didn't have sex very often in the last few years and one time I just couldn't get it up. I was excited and horny and all the rest. It just wouldn't work. So I guess over the last few years I just found ways to satisfy her without actually having sex."

"So you would call what we just did not having sex? You must have gone to the Bill



Clinton school of sex for wayward men.”

“No, I know that this was sex, at least I hope you thought it was. It’s just that it is hard for a man to think that women don’t lust for their hard cocks.”

“Did you try pills?”

“Oh yeah. Gail immediately referred me to the golf channel ads. You know, the ads of attractive and fit boomer couples whose relationship was miraculously saved by the little blue pill. She figured it might save ours so she convinced our doctor to get us some. I didn’t know she even knew the golf channel existed.”

Monica reached over and took his hand and kissed it as she rubbed her cheek on his hand. “And did it work?”

Gord laughed. “It sure did. We fucked until she cried 'enough!' and I was so tired and sore that we could not go on. I honestly don’t know if she came or not. I was just concentrating on the old in and out and I was ining and outing like I had not done for twenty years. So yup, those pills do just what they say they will do. I took the one that is supposedly only good for four hours, but you can get one that works for a whole long weekend. They actually advertise that benefit. All I can say is that would be some woman to put up with that for three days.”

“So it worked,” she snuggled up against him putting her head on his chest. “Gord, if it is important to you, keep the pill available and use it. But I can tell you it isn’t a big thing for me or most women I know of.”

Gord kissed her forehead. “You’re an understanding woman Monica, but let me tell the rest of the story. The pill did exactly what the golf channel ad said for sure – including the warning section. Do you remember the warning at the end of each ad concerning erections that last longer than four hours? Well six hours into mine Gail started to think that it was quite funny. It was not to me. A stiff, blood engorged cock for such a long time hurts like hell. Not to mention that it had been vagina rubbed raw by this point. So if you had been in the emergency room of the Ottawa General Hospital at 3 am on that night you would have seen a very embarrassed grey haired man come into the emergency room bent over with a blanket around his waist. Then you would have seen the emergency room nurse break into fits of very unprofessional laughter when that same idiot removed the blanket for just a second to explain the problem. But most

embarrassing of all, you would have heard that same grey haired fifty-something year old idiot scream when the emergency room doctor, a female to boot, stuck a very big needle into his very sore member.”

By this time Monica was laughing so hard she couldn't lie down anymore since it was making her choke.

“So, no more little blue pills and enough of my whining about senior sex. I think you have some things you need to explain,” Gord demanded as he suddenly remembered the Tai Chi fight, the revelation that Monica was actually forty-two years old and the urgent sex.

“OK,” Monica agreed as she stood up and walked over to her purse she had thrown on the chesterfield. “But get me a drink first. Not the wine. Pour us each a glass of the Bushmills. We will both need something stronger than a Malbec.”

Gord followed her over to the computer table where he had put the Bushmills and retrieved the two wine glasses. They were both standing naked beside the chesterfield. “Hope you don't mind a taste of Merlot with your malt?”

Monica turned towards him and opened her mouth to answer when suddenly he saw her glance towards the stairs at the other end of the room. She shouted, “Get Down!” as she launched herself at him and they crashed to the floor behind the chesterfield. Gord felt the hair in her crotch rub against his thigh as she straddled him and moved forward to the end of the chesterfield.

It took him a second to realize that the pfft pfft pfft he was hearing were bullets racking the front of the chesterfield and, as if the shooter grew bored with the furniture, the automatic fire walked slowly and methodically over, around and up all parts of the wall of electronic equipment. It sheared the necks off his two guitars. He automatically covered his head as bits of wood and electronic parts flew all over the room.

There was only a fraction of a second of silence as he heard the soft metallic sound of changing magazines from the other end of the room. Then he saw that Monica had reached her purse and to his surprise pulled out a large handgun and in that fraction of silence she rolled to the end of the chesterfield and took a shooter's stance. Before she was upright in her stance she fired four quick shots and the groans from the other end of the room told him she had hit something. The automatic fire started again and Gord

watched, in slow motion, as red holes started to emerge on her body, starting from her crotch and moving upward. A new red belly button emerged. One emerged right in the middle of her left breast, and just before one popped out in the middle of her forehead she dropped her gun and turned her head toward Gord and smiled. With the impact of the last shot she toppled over backwards and lay motionless in the morass of glass and wire from the destroyed stereo and recording equipment. In all his years with CIDC he had never seen anyone shot ...or for that matter even die. To watch it happen to a friend and lover was more wrenching than he could ever have imagined and he had a fleeting thought of compassion for the lovers of all of the people he had killed over the years.

The shooting stopped and the silence was suddenly strange and brought a sense of finality, or perhaps reality to what Gord had just seen. There were no further sounds from the other end of the room except for what Gord thought might have been the soft sound of a magazine of fresh ammunition going into a pistol. After the shock and speed of the events he was starting to gather his wits a little and began to analyze his situation. Someone was trying to kill him, Monica was dead and he was lying naked in his grief behind a chesterfield with no weapon. He could see Monica's gun beside her body but he would never make it to the weapon before he met the same fate as her. He had taken weapons training and was actually a crack shot, but this pistol was out of reach. He reached the conclusion very quickly that he was done. All that the killer on the other side of the chesterfield had to do was to walk around the end of the chesterfield and finish him off, and someone would find two naked bullet riddled bodies in his empty house. He wondered for a second if that would discourage the new buyer?

An accented voice from the other end of the room reduced his options.

“Stand up Gord Salmly.”

Gord was frozen to the floor. His linguistics expertise told him right away that the speaker was Korean. He'd have to hear a little more. Although the English was very good, he was pretty confident the speaker was North Korean.

“We know you have no weapon and I doubt there are any more naked women with big pistols hiding behind the chesterfield with you. So just stand up,” the voice ordered in the North Korean accented English.

“Why should I make it easy for you to kill me?” he yelled from hiding. “If I stand

up you are just going to kill me anyhow. You have just murdered my friend. “ Gord choked up a little as he looked over at Monica's body, her eyes wide open and her mouth frozen in its last smile. Why give you an easy target?”

“You are an easy target now. I am just offering you a little honour in your death. To be able to look your killer in the eye. That is much more than you gave my brother.”

Gord realized that the voice was right, although he didn't know what was meant by the brother thing. There certainly wasn't anything he could do lying naked on the basement floor behind a chesterfield. He took one last sad look at Monica and then scanned his wall of electronics. The large digital clock was blinking erratically at 6:47 pm. The old tube amplifier was smoking and one of the tall old magnet type speakers had been sheared in half by the fusillade of automatic gunfire. And there was his cache hidden behind the wall. He wondered what the new owners of the house would think when they remodeled a bullet destroyed basement and found his assortment of herbs and insects hidden behind the wall. He had bigger problems now, so he slowly stood up, the early arthritis in his left hip suddenly quite stiff. He was glad for once that he was farsighted and not nearsighted so he would not need glasses to see his killer. Gail and the kids would get a big insurance settlement and, since they had half forgotten him now anyhow, he didn't suspect the mourning period would be long. It was odd, despite the killing he had done, he had never thought of his own death. He hoped it would be as fast as Monica's.

He grunted as he stiffly rose from the carpet behind the chesterfield and stood naked in front of his killer, suddenly quite calm and prepared for his inevitable death. There were three of them; at least three of them standing. Thanks to Monica two more were lying on the floor with blood dripping from their balaclava covered faces. Two tall men in black balaclavas were positioned along the back wall at the bottom of the stairs, standing in a military stance with automatic machine pistols at the ready. A third, much shorter person, also in a balaclava, was standing six feet in front of them holding a pistol much like the one that Monica had used.

“Come around and stand over here on the mat,” the shorter man ordered. He pointed at the gym mat he was standing on.

Gord couldn't see whether it mattered if he was killed where he was or eight feet

closer to the weapons. He walked around the end of the chesterfield and stood looking at the shorter man.

“Put your underwear on. Your prick is ugly.”

Gord was confused. He'd heard of the honour of dying with your boots on, but dying with your underwear on was a new one. He reached down and separated his Stanfields from his jeans where he and Monica had left them just a few moments earlier and pulled them on.

The man turned around and handed his pistol to one of the guards by the wall and turned back to Gord. “I would like your death to be a little slower and more painful than your friend over there. Such resistance was not anticipated and I regret that she had to die, and even more that my two companions are dead. They were my friends.” He took off his balaclava and a few things started to fall into place for Gord. The Korean accent. The “brother” comment. What Gord had done?

“How did you find me?”

“Does that matter?”

“Just curious I guess. I have been doing this for a long time and no one has ever traced anything back to me.” Actually Gord was stalling for time. He didn't know why. His basement was soundproofed so it was unlikely any neighbour had heard the gunfire, so he didn't expect the posse to break into the house to save him. It just seemed like a good idea to stay alive as long as possible.

“I know – twenty-five years -- nineteen killings.”

Gord was aghast.

“You could only know that if you infiltrated Agency data. That's not possible.”

“You people are so foolish,” the speaker snorted. “Where do you think your processors are made? Who provides your software? We have “nanos” hidden in computer systems all over the developed world. Once a tall Canadian was identified walking down the tunnel after the fight in the washroom it was easy to find out from CDIC files who was in Korea when my brother was murdered and put the pieces together from there. But I have to admit if it hadn't been for our chance encounter in the washroom we would never have suspected foul play. Whatever you used we couldn't find a trace of it in a thorough autopsy. If we had more time I would get you to teach me some tricks.”

Gord took small comfort in the notion that his methods were still so undetectable.

“But why all of this?” Gord waved his hand over the destroyed room and Monica’s dead body. “You are clearly a professional like me. There are much cleaner and more efficient ways to kill someone you don’t like. And killing an innocent bystander is not acceptable. She was my friend.”

It was then that Gord noticed the true look of hate in the man’s eyes.

“You killed my brother. You humiliated me in that filthy washroom and now I will kill you with my bare hands. You caught me by surprise in Seoul. There is no surprise now.” The man took the classic starting Tai Kwon Do position and sent a quick jab to Gord’s throat. If it hadn’t been for Gord’s special gifts that first jab would have broken his windpipe and he would have lain slowly choking to death on the gym mat in his basement. Gord saw it coming and to the surprise of the assailant he fended the blow off with his right hand. The blows came one after the other and Gord realized that he had never faced anyone as skillful or someone as fast in delivery as this man. He was younger, very strong; the blows were starting to hurt and he was aggressively angry. On the other hand Gord was exercising every morsel of his spatial awareness, and this combined with his own skill allowed him to fend off the blows and this was clearly frustrating the attacker.

“Your file said you were non violent,” the man offered, taking a break from the attack. “You surprise.”

“It’s just a hobby,” Gord replied, not letting down his defenses. “We’ll have to play golf together sometime.”

The attack came again, too fast for Gord to launch his own attack. Open palms, leg sweeps, elbows, pointed fingers. Gord drew from a deep reservoir of Tai Chi positions to defend himself the best he could. And then it was over. Gord actually watched it in slow motion and couldn’t do anything to avoid it. His assailant spun around on his front foot and with his back to Gord somehow sprung from this hidden position to lash out with his back heel on Gord’s knee and the knee that put him out of hockey years ago now put him out of this fight. As Gord went down he thought how he’d like to know that move and he watched the approaching palm heel just before his face exploded in a sea of red.

And he was gone.

*PART THREE: MEXICO 2012-13*



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### **Part 3: Chapter 18 Estella Starts a New Life**

Estella Munoz first met him twenty-five years ago when she was a shy twenty-three year old children's tutor and he a brash and confident seventeen-year-old working in the gardens of a large estate in Puebla. At six feet, he was taller than most Mexican boys she had known over the past five years, and with a head of curly, glossy black hair and a confident swagger, she imagined this is how a conquistador general might have looked. Even at such a young age he was the 'general' of the gardening gang, ruling the other boys with uninhibited cruelty and control, once cutting off the finger of a younger boy with a pair of garden shears who was hesitant to do his bidding. From the sanctity of the estate he ran a petty crime spree; everything from pick pocketing tourists, to extortion of the owners of small market stalls, to eventually acting as a mule for minor drug traffickers. But he had a touch for gardening. He had come to the city from a small farming community near Acapulco looking for work. His family had been farmers but when he was five years old they left the farm in search of a better income and joined the gardening crew at a large tourist complex. He knew the Mexican soil and the plants that thrived there. He had just shown up working in the gardening crew one day, and everyone else thought someone else had hired him. By the time the head gardener figured out no one had hired the energetic fifteen-year-old, he had demonstrated his knowledge and they kept him on. Two years later when the head gardener had an unfortunate accident on his bicycle, Jose took over managing the eight workers and the gardens of the six-acre estate. He was happily tending his gardens and managing his petty crime sprees when Estella joined the staff.



Estella had had finished her degree in English Literature the previous spring at the Autonomous University of Mexico in Guadalajara and was looking for her first job. There weren't many options for young women in Mexico in 1983, even ones who could speak English and had acquired good university degrees. One of the obvious choices was to teach English as Second Language somewhere, but after a few job interviews she realized the wages of schoolteachers would hardly pay her living expenses, much less leave her something to save. She had started university with some savings she had brought to Guadalajara, but even with the help of a part time job at a tourist restaurant that paid extra for her English skills, her savings were almost depleted. She also knew that, even after four years of university, her Spanish needed some additional work to become Mexican native fluent. Up until this point she had been able to put off questions about her slight, non-Mexican accented Spanish by saying she spent her youth in Spain. Then she saw the ad on the Department bulletin board:

*Wanted: Tutor for a Family of 5 children under the age of 8 in Puebla.*

*All subjects plus English. Good pay and with all room and board included.*

*Ph. 893 245 6798.*

It turned out that a wealthy Puebla manufacturer had placed the ad and when Manuel Ricardo heard the quality of her English he hired her on the spot. The job turned out to be perfect for her at that time. The family was kind and the children were well behaved and diligent students. She had her own small casita in the gardens on the property. She taught the children in the mornings and had her afternoons to herself. And she could save enough to help her eventually move to the next step in her life.

At the end of her first year on the estate, Estella and Jose Gorges, the young gardener, had sex in her garden casita.

She had a few dating adventures at university but Estella the tutor was far from experienced. She had the natural sex urges of any young woman, but past events in her life had left her with an emotional detachment from the act that diminished the experience and made her hesitant to seek out sexual experiences. And when she did give it a try, she had to be in complete control in order to never let the endorphins of sexual arousal impede her judgment, or dissolve the mistrust she had with any man. It didn't make for good sexual relationships and most men did not stick around very long. But

Jose had a certain Latin bravado that suggested a guaranteed romantic pleasure that was hard to ignore. Passing glances between them as Estella walked the garden in her free afternoons signaled a meeting that would be far from chance.

In Jose's case, he was just a randy kid looking for any chance to score. In Estella's case, it was the opportunity to break the boredom and the pattern of sleepy inspiration that comes from the constant companionship of children. One late afternoon when Jose knocked on the door of her casita and she invited him in to fill his water bottle from the kitchen tap, they both knew what would transpire. Estella could remember the details of the encounter, even over 25 years later.

Jose stood in the centre of the kitchen, suddenly not looking quite as mature as he did when leaning with a leering grin on a shovel. She walked up to him with the bottle and watched as he drank and put the bottle down. She reached over, grabbed his shirt collar and pulled him into a kiss. It was short and amateurish on both sides, but she can still taste the chili peppers he had put on the lunchtime taco. The follow up kiss was more urgent and they simultaneously realized where this was going and standing in the middle of the kitchen they started to frantically take off each other's clothes. She reached down and undid his belt, unzipped his jeans and reached in to pull out his very stiff penis. He fumbled with the zipper on the back of her dress and gave up and just reached up under her dress and thrust his hand under her underwear and felt her wetness.

And he came.

All over her hand and the front of her dress.

"I'm sorry," was all she remembered him saying as he pulled up his pants and ran out the door leaving her standing in the middle of the kitchen with her own juices running down the inside of her thigh. She sat down on the floor and finished what Jose had started and rolled on the floor in laughter. "The wonderful sex life of Estella Munoz!" she said out loud to herself, "I can't even seduce my way into good sex!"

They tried it again periodically over the next year, usually with more satisfactory results for both, although Estella was always the instigator and always in control of the event.

Then Ricardo fired Jose for stealing tools and reselling them at the local market and he left her life.

For Estella the next step in her life was still many years away.

She had not intended to stay with the estate for that long, but the days just kept drifting by. At first she felt she just could not leave the children until they were ready to go off to university. Armed with her tutoring and their father's money they all went to Ivy league universities and graduated with Honours and returned to working in the various family manufacturing businesses while raising families of their own. When the child-rearing job was over and she thought she might move on, Ricardo died in car accident and his wife asked Estella to stay and help manage the estate. Over the next decade she gradually assumed the complete management of the estate as the wife grew older and the children grew more distant. Estella spent the years immersed in the management of the estate.

At first her only discomfort was the absence of any outlet for her special athletic abilities. She often felt that she simply had to find a way to get her body moving or she was not content. Golf had always filled that void and satisfied those urges. Even running and workouts in the estate gym didn't seem to salve the discomfort. Then Marika joined the estate staff and gave Estella the energetic physical outlet she craved like an addict. Marika had lived a hard life. Left at the gate of a North Korean Buddhist monastery when she was three years old, she was both a cook and a martial arts apprentice when the Japanese military made her a comfort woman. After the Korean war, she escaped to the U.S. and then Mexico. Ricardo found her cooking in one of the restaurants he owned and brought her home to his own kitchen shortly after he hired Estella. She was much older than Estella and since she had never married, Estella became her 'child' and they became very close over the years. She had considerable skill at martial arts and while Estella taught her English, Marika taught her the lost art of Hwa Rang Do. Estella discovered, to her pleasant surprise, that Marika had the same unique ability as her for 'slowing motion,' so their sparring was at speed that most normal people could not comprehend. They never "fought" anyone else but themselves over the 25 years they worked together, but that satisfied both of them.

After the recession of the nineties, the mother moved in with her older son who lived in Monterey and in 2008 the family put the Mexico estate up for sale. No one except Estella recognized the buyer.

He was 25 years older than the last time she had seen him, had a wife and three young children and apparently seemed to have an endless supply of money. In the Mexico of 2008 it was not prudent to probe too deeply into how someone managed to accumulate the wealth needed to buy up the estate, even at a bargain price, as well as several Puebla maquiladoras that were in financial difficulty. Estella learned later that he bought things; nightclubs, sports teams, tourist resorts, golf clubs, and vacant land all over Mexico. He had a new history as well. The very old and respected Mexican family that he married into would never have let their oldest daughter marry a farm boy turned petty thief, turned gardener.

The first thing he did, as the new owner of the estate, was to fire the existing estate staff and put his own people in key jobs. He had a large retinue. Cooks, business people, a nanny for the children and a dozen or so young men that seemed to have nothing to do but walk around the estate looking over fences and through windows. Estella was a different story.

“Hello Estella,” he shook her hand. “How have you been?”

She gave a wary and perfunctory, “Quite well thank you.”

“So you wrangled a promotion from teacher to manager of the estate? Did you blow the old man? Marry that wimpy son?”

“I see you haven't accumulated manners in the same way you have wealth?” she responded. “What did you do? Come all over some rich girl's dress?”

For a moment she thought he might strike her but after a short pause he laughed, and she laughed and the tension dissolved.

“You never married, Estella?”

In actual fact there had been a number of serious suitors over the years and at least one who proposed, but she couldn't get herself to make the commitment. There was still too much emotion attached to memories that needed to either be faced or purged, and at 48 she still had not figured out which one it was to be. Besides, she liked her job at the estate and had learned much about business, gardening and some other interests over the years that had kept her preoccupied.

She just shrugged. “Your wife and family are lovely Jose. You've done well.”

“I married well you mean. Yes. She is a loyal wife and the marriage of her family

connections to my various business interests has made us very wealthy.”

“So she was a business arrangement?”

“At first. I needed a legitimate entry into Mexican society and she was willing to believe my story of coming from a business family in Tampico who all died in a house fire.” He paused. “Estella, she doesn’t know my history here and you would be the only person to recognize me.”

“What about your real parents in the country?” She asked.

“They were one of the fifty-two people killed in that drug massacre two years ago. They were killed because they were my parents and because they came from my home town.”

Estella had read and heard details of the quickly escalating drug wars in the country and while most violence occurred near the border where rival gangs fought for supremacy, there were reprisal killings every week at other locations throughout the country. Now she realized that Jose’s new wealth, the armed guards, and the new staff all made sense.

“Does your wife and her family know how you make your money?”

“No. She believes the manufacturing business is prospering. Her father suspects, but his greed keeps him from acknowledging it.”

“So what am I supposed to do now Jose?” She paused. “Do I know too much? Do I just get fired or get cement slippers or the burning tire necktie thing that druggies do, or what?”

“Will you stay?”

This surprised her. “Come on Jose. We didn’t have that much of a thing going. You must have had many women since our adventures. And I know that I’m nothing special in bed!”

“I know I can trust you Estella. Nothing more.”

She thought quickly. This was a turning point in her life. “ Alright. On three conditions.”

“I’m listening,” he responded, “But I have to tell you it is me that gives the conditions these days.”

“First. I want to be in charge of the gardens. What I don’t know I will study. I want

to become the head gardener.”

“Done.”

“Second. I want Marika as my personal assistant.”

He looked puzzled. “Marika? Who is she?”

“She is a Korean cook. She is seventy-two years old and she is friend. And my Hwa Rang Do instructor and partner.”

He looked even more confused.

“Ha wang what?”

“Do you know Tai Chi?”

“Sure. I visited China last year and saw lots of little old ladies and men doing it in the park. Tourists with grey pony tails do it on the beaches near my home in Acapulco.”

“Well,” she explained. “This is like Tai Chi, only Korean and very old. It is for killing, not meditating or stretching.”

“You have a lot of need for that in your gardens?”

“No. Of course not. It's just a hobby Jose. But one I want to continue. So Marika stays.”

“OK. You said three. What's the third?”

“No sex,” she announced, suspecting the real reason that Jose was keeping her around, although she didn't really understand it. She knew she was not that good looking. Not ugly, not beautiful, just attractive in a rugged sort of way she supposed could be appealing to some men. Jose had money and power so she doubted that women were a problem.

“You think that is why I want you to stay?” he asked with an incredulous tone? “You overestimate your charms!”

“I don't buy the 'I trust you' thing. If not sex what is it?”

He paused, stopped walking and sat on a bench in the middle of the garden. He motioned for her to join him.

“I want you to teach me English – and golf.”

She was so shocked she almost fainted. For thirty years she had been Estella Munoz and for thirty years she had left behind another life and now in the safest sanctuary she thought she could have found, this man new about her past?

“How did you know?” she asked quietly.

“Dark black dyed hair and blondish, reddish pubic hair were my first clues. You speak English too well to simply have come from a UNAM degree. And I could never quite figure out where your Spanish accent came from. Of course as a young boy I had no resources, or time, to explore my curiosity, but when I realized that I needed better English skills to succeed in my business I thought of you and hired a detective to research your background, just to be safe. It took him a while, but the forger that made your Mexican passport and driver’s license is still alive. He still has your original driver’s license if you ever want it. The golf was a surprise and an added bonus. I need to learn that as well and need to learn in private. Will you do it?”

“Will you keep my secret, my history safe?”

“I’ll keep yours if you keep mine?”

Estella laughed as she thought of a similar expression used with a young boy so very far away and so long ago.

“What’s so funny?”

“Nothing. Sure. I’ll teach you English and golf. But I think teaching you sex was probably far easier than it will be teaching either of those.”

The next two years went quickly for Estella. She fulfilled her end of the bargain and soon Jose spoke reasonably fluent English and played passably fluent golf, regularly breaking one hundred in the latter. She even enjoyed having a golf club back in her hand, although she never played a game during the times she was teaching Jose.

The only really sad event of those years was the passing of Marika. Hwa Rang Do with Marika had been her only physical outlet and she had come to realize that her special athletic ability couldn't be ignored. If she didn't have some sort of physical workout during the day she would lie in bed at night and her whole body would vibrate. Golf was once that outlet and gardening helped, but to be able to focus her skill on something as precise and athletic as this ancient form of martial arts was a good therapy. She knew now that if she ignored her talent it would bite at her until she used it. So Marika passing away made her very sad. Estella would miss her deeply.

For two years Jose kept his side of agreement.

In the fall of 2010 the Mexican cartel gang wars were in full swing. The profits to be

made from the pipeline of both amphetamine products and cocaine from Columbia to the U.S. and Canada were enormous and rival gangs fought, and killed to control various taps and products. It took a while for Estella to figure out how Jose fit into this and how he made his endless supply of money. She knew he did not belong to any of the usual cartels, but she also knew he met on occasion with the leaders of each of them.

It was only when she overheard one of Jose's bodyguards use the term "laundering" when talking to another guard that it all clicked. Jose did not belong to any of the cartels because he worked for all of them. He had set up an intricate collection of legitimate businesses, from golf courses to hotels to restaurants to manufacturing operations that all acted as legitimate fronts for the filtering of cartel drug money. She figured Jose was able to keep a proportion of all money he laundered while sending the rest back to the cartel through a legitimate banking or other legal transaction. One popular way to give the money back was to have a cartel member suddenly show up as one of the co-owners of a property or business. When the business was liquidated the owners paid the appropriate taxes and transfer fees and pocketed the rest. This process was not a secret by any means, but it was done in such a way as to ensure that everyone along the money movement process made a profit; so gathering any evidence on one illegal step was very difficult. In essence Jose was the one person in all of Mexico who could turn on or stop the flow of drugs since he controlled the profit margin for every cartel in Mexico, all without getting his hands dirty in any drug trade or cartel vendetta.

It did not mean that he was immune to the violence. Any hint of disloyalty or defection was dealt with abruptly and violently and men who worked for him just disappeared on occasion. A small cartel, including dealers, mules, sellers and their families operating out of Sinaloa, was totally wiped out in 2004. It was rumoured he had something to do with the 2010 raid on some houses in Nueva Laredo where seventeen young people were the collateral damage. Apart from his direct role in the violence, over forty thousand Mexicans had lost their lives in the cartel wars he supported. But Jose probably did not reflect on any of this too often. Estella turned a blind eye to it all as well. She immersed herself in horticulture, even attending a graduate program at the University of Mexico. As she approached fifty, she focused even more on her Hwa Rang Do, both as a way to stay in shape and to pay homage to her special abilities. She had an



affair or two to remind her that she was a woman. But cocooned in the sanctity of the estate and the solitude of the extensive gardens, she ignored the blood that was paying for her lifestyle and peace.

To her surprise, she enjoyed the instructional sessions with Jose. He was travelling more and more to the U.S. so he was having more occasions to speak English and his English was progressing well. He was having the usual beginner frustrations at golf, but that too was progressing. For their lessons he booked the whole golf course next to the estate so it was just he, Estella and three of his armed and closest friends that fanned out around them, as they walked the course. Once in a while he would bring someone along to play with, but other than demonstrating once in a while, she would not play.

Then on September 18, 2010 life changed for both of them.

It happened quickly even for Estella's special senses. They were on the tee box of the seventh hole, one of the holes furthest from both the clubhouse and the estate. She remembered that Acacia trees and Hibiscus plants surrounded the box, and that she was standing in front of Jose correcting his grip. Like most men he tended to want to use a strong, 'right hand turned to the right' grip. As a result he often had a wild duck hook as the hands came back to neutral at impact. She was correcting this for the hundredth time when they both heard pfft, pfft pfft. Jose knew right away what it was and went flat on the ground taking Estella with him. As she fell she saw the bodyguard closest to her fall as well, though it was more crumbling than falling, and he didn't lift up his head as she was doing. There were more pfft sounds and then silence. She and Jose lay on the ground twisting their necks to see what had happened.

"You can get up now," a voice she didn't recognize offered. Estella could see his feet and a pair of cowboy boots with intricate Inca designs embroidered all over the toes.

They stood and faced three men each holding silenced automatic weapons. Jose shook with fright and sweat glistened his forehead. Estella was still too busy trying to sort out what had happened to be afraid.

The one who had spoken before continued. "Get up. We want you to see that the bullet that killed you came from a Mendoza gun. When we are done with you we will cut your head off and put it in the Puebla town square for all to see."

Jose had gathered some of his wits. "It was just business Roberto."

“Business? Business to kill so many young people?” The man who Jose had called Roberto started to weep. “That was my daughter and my cousins you had killed. They did nothing wrong except be mine. All of the men here – he waved to the other two standing beside him, have lost family to your orders.”

“They were just collateral damage Roberto.” Jose appeared strangely calm. “You have done the same yourself. I couldn’t afford that kid testifying. We kill traitors. You know that. That is just business. I didn’t ask you to go into this business Roberto. As a taxi driver you would never be able to afford those handsome boots and your daughter would not have been partying in that fancy house,” Jose sneered. “So kill me if you think it will make you feel better. But every cartel in Mexico will be after you for turning off the money tap. The tap only I can open. So go ahead, kill me, but let this lady go. She is just a golf instructor and has nothing to do with this business.”

Roberto looked at her. “I am sorry Senorita, but all who know this evil man must die.” He paused and looked at Jose. “Just collateral damage.”

At this point the three men were standing about a metre feet from Jose and Estella. They each had guns, but only Roberto was holding his in a threatening manner and he now started to raise it towards Estella. Before he had it halfway to level, she swept it away with her right hand and pushed her palm into his nose with such force it was crushed against his cheek and he was immediately blinded as blood spurted from his face. As was usual for her, everything took place in slow motion. She first saw the man on Robert’s right start to raise his gun and she leveled a kick to his groin and he dropped the gun and put both hands over his crotch. The other man reacted more slowly and she was able to grip his wrist, twist it until she heard something break and send his weapon flying as well. The three slightly injured and very surprised men, none with weapons, stood in front of her, massaging their various injuries. They paused for a moment and then the man Jose had called Roberto bellowed and charged. It seemed to her he came at her in incredible slow motion and as she stepped aside she crushed his right knee with her right foot. The others were close behind him but they were easy to dodge and disable. The one with the sore groin earned a broken arm to go with it. The one with the limp wrist had his nose jammed into his skull.

And it was over. The three men lay on ground. Two of them were moaning, the

third out cold. It had probably taken only seconds, but for Estella it had been a slow motion movie and she stood over them in a Hwa Rang Do stance, breathing hard, adrenalin pumping through every part of her body. Jose had recovered one of the guns and was now pointing it at Roberto's head.

"No one betrays me," he said as he shot Robert through the forehead. He proceeded to go to each of the other two and do the same.

Estella threw up. Jose came over to her and put his arm around her. She turned and went into his arms, sobbing as she held on tightly. Suddenly he was kissing her. She tasted her own bile and to her surprise felt the moisture rise between her legs. Jose pushed her to the ground and, with an adrenalin-fed passion verging on the violence they had both just enacted, he ripped off her skirt and panties. And he entered her now wet vagina with ease on the seventh tee box surrounded by dead bodies. After a perfunctory struggle she gave up control over her body for the first time in over thirty years and let him lead the rhythm of the urgent thrusts. And then, just like that first time in her casita many years ago, it was over. He came quickly and then sat up and made a brief call on his cell phone. Estella sat up as well and gathered the ripped skirt and panties around her waist. It was only the second time in her life that she had let someone else's passion control the sex. It was only marginally more pleasant than the last and she resolved to never let it happen again.

She was shaking as she dug her fingernails into his arm.

"Is it all true Jose? What he says. Is it all true? Did you do all of this killing?"

His silence was the answer.

Maris sobbed as she stood up. "You've broken our agreement."

"Fuck the agreement." The sex appeared to have meant nothing to him. "You have taken part in some murders here for Christ sake. What am I to do with you? Is that the Ha kwang something you do every day? I think I'll have to learn that," he said, as he started to pick up the other guns. They heard the voices of his other men as they rushed to them from the estate. "You are now in danger yourself Estella. You're going to have to change your name and get out of Puebla." He thought for a moment. "I'll take care of it Estella. I know just the name, just the job and just the place for you. There's even a golf course."

And for the second time in her life Estella abandoned one life and one name to start another.



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### **Part 3 - Chapter 19: Burt Returns to Mexico**

Burt fingered the scabs on his cheek as the Captain announced the descent into Cabo airport. He looked out the window as the plane made a slow bank over the Sea of Cortez and wondered how anyone could make a golf course out of the desert scrub that ran from the ocean to the mountain range that ran down the spine of the Baja peninsula. “At least the beaches look great,” he said to himself as he strained his neck to see how far up the coast the endless stretch of apparently unoccupied beaches stretched. As the plane got lower he could make out a couple of small settlements up the coast and the occasional beachfront villa. There were a few tourist type fishing boats cruising the shoreline. “Well if the golf doesn’t work out I can pretend to be the old man in the sea!” he laughed to himself. “I can just add it to the other impersonations.” The latter thought made him lean back in his seat, rub his sore knee and close his eyes. The reality of landing in Mexico brought back the torrent of thoughts that came every time he tried to make sense of the last month. The events were easier to put together in hindsight.

It was a special hospital in Ottawa for government, military and diplomatic personnel and their families only, so the nursing and medical staff was used to dealing with strange illnesses, diseases and accidents and doing it quietly, sometimes explicitly secretly. But even for these people who had thought that they had seen it all this was as strange case. The guy was brought in by military transport and not by ambulance and had been immediately transported to the most secure wing of the hospital. Initial triage

showed he was not that badly hurt. Although his head and face were so covered in blood they could not see what he looked like, he appeared to only have a concussion. There was no visible wound. His left leg was a mess though. Something, maybe a hammer or maybe he was hit by a car, had totally destroyed and mashed his knee and his tibia was disconnected from his femur. He was unconscious but very much alive and they immediately started a morphine drip. He was sure to wake up with a very bad headache. After initial triage and first aid, he was rushed off to the secure wing where the medical staff was all military with the highest security clearance.

As far as security staff was concerned he was allowed only two non-medical visitors the whole time he was there. One was a geekish looking woman in her mid-forties and the other a pinstripe suit in his sixties. The bet between the guards was that the guy was some sort of terrorist, but someone pointed out that the security seemed more to keep people out rather than him in; so that didn't fit. They all settled on the story that he was a defector from somewhere who was hurt in the defection process and they were fixing him all up before sending him out into a secret life in some part of rural Canada. They would never know how close they were in their guess. The only others who were regulars with John Doe -- the guards now called him John Defector -- were the team of knee surgery specialists brought in to work on the guy. A physiotherapist followed the surgeons so it was not hard to guess what was being done to him. The arrival of a cosmetic surgery team verified their defector and relocation story, so those of the security corps who bet otherwise finally paid up.

Gord was not aware of any of this conjecture or he probably would have made his own bets. He liked a good bet. He was still unconscious when he arrived and after extensive examination of his brain, MRI, x-ray, and old fashioned pin light examination through lifeless eyes, it was determined that with the level of swelling and bleeding evident it was safest to keep him in a medically induced coma for a period of time to see what would happen. The brain specialists who examined him marveled at both the impact that must have caused the damage and the good luck that left him alive. Teams of surgeons came and went and Gord knew none of it. If he had been able to rationalize the final and last events before he passed out, he would likely have concluded he was dead and this fuss was simply the mortician preparing him for the worms. He would have been

surprised when two weeks after he had arrived, a team of doctors and his two special visitors met in his hospital room and agreed that it was time to try and bring him back to current events. He would have watched with interest while a doctor squeezed a syringe full of some sort of cloudy liquid into the access hole in the drip tube already feeding his arm.

“How long will this take?” the tall, older man asked a youngish woman doctor.

“Well, we can stop the induced coma immediately with adrenalin injection, but that doesn’t mean his brain is ready to wake up. Quite frankly it may never be ready. The brain is funny that way, doesn’t like getting knocked around.”

Richard Fairfield ignored her sarcasm.

“I asked how long?”

She returned his icy stare. “You’ll know within a few moments if he is going to join the living.”

And everyone in the room, Richard, the geekish lady with him, the doctor, two nurses and two military types dressed in civvies with large bulges under their armpits and new brush cuts, all turned to look at Gord Salmy lying peacefully in his hospital bed.

“Fuck my head hurts!” were his first words. “Is this hell?” he continued as his eyes focused on the crowd around him and his eyes stopped at Richard. “Yup. Must be hell. I knew we’d meet there one day Fairfield!”

The doctor took over and started to examine his eyes with a light sabre. She looked quickly at the monitor on the wall that extracted every biological measure possible from Gord’s body. “Heart rate is a little fast. Blood pressure a little low. All the vitals look good.”

“Fuck my head hurts,” was all Gord could keep saying.

“For Christ sake, give him something for the headache!” Richard ordered.

The doctor took another syringe and injected something into the drip tube. “This will help with the pain but could put him back to sleep, although this time I expect it will just be a sleep and not a coma.”

“Thank you Doctor. Now I would appreciate it if everyone left the room. You can monitor his vitals from the nursing station and be in here in a second if anything goes wrong. But for now my assistant and I would like to be alone with him.” He looked over

to the two military guards. "John and Assam, wait right outside of the room please."

Mary and Richard were left alone with Gord.

"Head a little better?" Mary asked with genuine concern.

"Yeah, much ... Thanks. What's going on Richard? Where am I? Why the band aids on my face?" His face was totally swathed in gauze. "And why can't I move my left leg?"

"All in good time Gord," Richard soothed him. "I just need to ask you some questions first. What do you remember?"

"Of yesterday?" Gord had no idea how long he had been out. Tears started to form at the corners of his eyes.

"Shit Richard. The fuckers killed Monica!"

Richard looked at Mary, then back to Gord. "Yeah. We know that much. If it is any consolation the pricks are all dead now."

"How ...?"

Richard interrupted him. "I'll fill you in when you are ready. Right now we need to know what they said or what you remember."

Gord started his story from the time Monica tackled him and described in detail what happened from that point on, finishing at the whack on the head and the red vision.

Richard just nodded and encouraged him. Mary took some notes on her iPad.

"Richard it was the maintenance man from Korea. How is that possible? What went wrong?" Gord asked, anguished at his memories from the event.

"And Richard ...," he continued suddenly remembering something else. "He said that they had a "nun" or something inside our system. It was "built in" I think he said, and they knew everything. How is that possible?"

Mary quickly left the room.

"And my stuff, my music, my equipment Richard, I had things hidden behind that wall of equipment."

"Don't worry Gord. We knew about that hidden wall and it's all safe," he assured Gord. He watched as Gord's eyelids started to droop. "But that is all for now. Go to sleep and we'll talk tomorrow."

Gord was asleep before Richard finished his sentence and Richard left soon after

that, leaving John and Assam with strict orders to let no one but the medical staff into Gord's room. He and Mary had some work to do.

The next morning when Richard and Mary returned to the hospital, Gord was awake and complaining loudly. "Listen," he was telling a very disinterested orderly. "Did you know that this tea you serve in these no name brand bags is actually the sweepings off the floor after the other good tea, the kind that you should be serving, has been packaged?"

"I don't drink tea; it all sucks," the orderly replied.

"I'll bet you don't eat oatmeal either right? So there really is little point in me telling you that this predigested mush you serve is of no value to any part of your body?"

The orderly just looked at him strangely and left the room with the empty tray.

"I can see you are feeling better?" Richard announced their entrance.

There was no warm greeting from Gord. "Headache is better. Knee aches. My face itches."

"Good morning to you too Gord," Richard replied.

"How long will I be here? I've got some things to sort out at home."

Richard and Mary exchanged looks.

"You've had some surgery Gord. On your knee and on your face. You have also had a concussion. The former two will take a few weeks to heal and the latter maybe years, but they want to watch you for a few weeks to see if anything is damaged other than your personality. So you'll be in this room for another couple of weeks anyhow. You'll start physio on your new knee right away so you'll be busy. We have some other work for you as well."

"New knee?" Gord asked.

"Yes. Sool's kick totally ruined what was left of your knee after the other hits it has taken in your life. The surgeons built you a totally new knee. You are a real bionic man now. Really, it's not such a big deal anymore. People are getting new knees, shoulders and so on. They have it pretty much down to an art. The surgeons said you would not only be unable to sense it was not real cartilage and bone, but probably be better off than before. So before you ask, yes, ...your golf career is still on track."

Richard paused and took a DVD from his pocket and put it in the DVD player attached to the TV. "But we're getting ahead of ourselves. Are you up for some of the



blanks to be filled in on what happened that night?”

“For sure. I’m more than a little curious as to why I’m not facing cremation rather than physio. Not to mention Monica? How did Sool know where I lived? What is a nun?”

“Ok, you can fill in your own story and timelines but I’ll start about 6:30 that night when Mary and I met in my office. I think I can imagine what you were doing at that time?”

Gord blushed under the bandages.

“We received word from IT that there had been some sort of hack into the CIDC data banks and while there really isn’t a whole lot in our general servers that would be worth international espionage, we weren’t certain the hackers hadn’t gained access to our ghost server. In fact, we had the panicked notion that the only real data worth getting was in that server. So to be safe, I activated our special assault unit. Like you and Monica, you have probably guessed by now, these are trained military people who have regular jobs with DND in Ottawa but can be called upon to do irregular things. They are very well trained assault troops and there are only seven of them, a Colonel and six others, active at any one time. Mary activated the squad and told them your address while I made my own way there. We met on the road beside the canal and looked around but couldn’t see anything unusual. This was 6:45. Mary had located Monica’s car in the strip mall parking lot so we went there but didn’t see anything unusual either so went back to the house. The squad was all dressed in civilian clothing so as not to catch attention and we spread out over the whole block. I have to tell Ed to buy six different suits for the crew before their next assignment. The only ones really undetectable to anyone who was paying attention might have been the two women in the squad who were dressed quite fashionably for a warm Ottawa Friday evening. At any rate, when we returned to your house I told Ed and three of the soldiers to spread out over the block while I took the two women and one other man with me to the front door. We still had no reason other than instinct to think there was something wrong or you were in danger. Then as the three of us we were walking towards the front door two Korean guys jump out of a black Hyundai sedan parked by the curb and started to pull pistols from under their armpits. The idiots were standing six feet from two of Ed’s guys and they didn’t even get the guns partially out of their jackets before they were on the ground and cuffed. Now we were on full alert.

We went into the house, the door was open and we could hear the scuffling going on downstairs. That was probably your little Kung Fu thing going on. One of the women soldiers used a snake mirror to look around the stairs and into the room. She made some hand signals to the other two and they basically jumped down the stairs and each took out one of the three Koreans. The woman who took out Sool hit him while his hand was in the air over your face. I would say that a second later that hand would have been coming out the back of your neck. So the timing was good.”

“That makes sense,” Gord offered. “The last thing I remember was a sea of red in front of my face. That must have been his brains spattering all over me. Nice.”

“Well she saved your bacon for sure. All that was left was the clean up. Fortunately Ed’s crew was trained and prepared for that as well.”

“Clean up? Like what?”

“I’m not sure where to start Gord. Let’s begin with this.” Richard used the remote to start the DVD.

It was a video of a CTV newscast and Peter Bainsbridge. *“In local news, there was a spectacular fire on the canal last night as one of the newer houses in the historic Glebe district burned to the ground in a display that lit up the whole East end of Ottawa. CTV reporter Helen Johnson is on the spot. Helen are you there?”*

*“Yes Peter. I’m at the site of this spectacular home fire on the canal. You can see behind me that the house has been totally destroyed and fire crews are still putting out some hot spots after the all night burn.”*

As the camera panned to the building the realization that this was his house slowly dawned into his whacked out brain.

*“Thanks Helen. Do they have any idea of the cause of the blaze?” Peter asked.*

*“Here is Ottawa Fire department Captain” ... Helen checked her notes... “Rod Jones.”*

The video flickered over to a smoke smeared and tired face with his name captioned below the screen. Captain Jones speculated that the fire started as the result of a short in wiring leading to a large collection of electronic equipment in the basement.

Helen took over again.

*“It appears that the owner was an amateur musician and had a soundproofed studio*

*in the basement that was sound insulated with huge sheets of a Styrofoam like material and that was the source of the huge wafts of billowing black smoke as the house burned.”*

The video had Gord’s full attention at this point and at her next comment he spilled his cold tea.

*“It is too early to be definitive but the coroner thinks that the deceased was probably asleep on the chesterfield found in the basement and was overcome with the very noxious smoke from the Styrofoam. He probably never woke up.”*

*Peter probed further. “Do we know who the victim was Helen? “*

*“Again, Peter. It is too early to be sure since the body was burnt beyond easy identification, but the house is owned by ...” Helen checked her notes again ... “ a Dr. Gord Salmy, recently retired VP International at Pierre Trudeau University. Neighbours say he was the only one living there and a friend from the Ottawa Valley Golf Club showed up this morning looking for him when he did not show up for the second round of the club championship. So it is fairly certain that Dr. Salmy died in this fire.”*

Richard flicked at the remote and turned the TV off.

“That’s enough unless you wanted to see your wife crying and interviews with people at the university saying what a wonderful guy you were. You’re funeral was a very moving event by the way. You would have loved it.”

“What the fuck! I’m alive for Christ sake! We’ve got to tell everyone!” and Gord started to get out of bed until his head and knee conspired to knock him back. No one said anything for a moment until a much calmer Gord observed. “This isn’t good news for me is it?”

“Depends upon your perspective I guess?” Richard replied.

“Gord lay back on the bed and closed his eyes. “Ok, the shock effect worked. Now fill in the blanks. What’s going on?”

‘Ok, Mary, you start,” Richard ordered.

Mary took over, pulling out her iPad and looking at some notes.

“First question. Who were those guys?” She paused and answered her own question. “They were North Korean. The cars, SUV and sedan were all registered to the South Korean embassy here in Ottawa but the Embassy had never heard of them. I managed to track their hack into our system back to Pyongyang even before the attack on your house.

The guy you fought was a high ranking military officer who, by the way, had been a world Tae Kwon Do champion in 1991. He also had an undergraduate and graduate degree in English Literature from Jiao Tong University in Shanghai.”

“That explains his martial arts skill and English language proficiency,” Gord offered. “But why go after me?”

“Ah...” Mary offered, “That gets more interesting and will lead us to why you are now dead. Richard you can fill in this part.”

“Gord, you never knew the reason why you were sent on any a particular assignment except that a death was necessary to make a better world.”

“That’s true Richard,” Gord offered. “But I could read the paper the next day and figure it out. When the operator of a child sex slave operation in Thailand tragically falls off his boat and drowns it makes the news.”

“Well the hit in Korea was complex. To truncate the story, we learned that the banker you killed was in fact a North Korean spy and had been one since he was a youth. He and his twin brother had been separated as infants during the fifties after the war. One was raised in the North. The other, the banker, was raised in the South. Unbeknownst to the South, the banker was recruited as a teenager to the cause of the North by his twin brother with horrendous stories of the torture of their parents by South Korean military. Apparently they met at school and at university abroad and conferences and so on and no one was the wiser. With some North Korean help the one brother eventually rose to the top of the South Korean banking system and for the last decade had been siphoning off billions of dollars from the system. At first it was just put off to Asian graft, but it was actually Mary who traced the funds and found out they were in fact funding the North Korean nuclear program. We informed NATO and South Korea and you were assigned the formally approved hit.”

“OK, we’re getting there,” Gord offered. “But what was his brother doing in an underground mall washroom dressed as a janitor? And how did they find out what I did?”

Mary jumped in. “That surprised us as too. I did a little hacking and found out that, quite coincidentally, they were going to do an extraction of the banker that evening. They felt things were getting a little hot and they were going to take him home. It turns out the whole mall and bank building was full of Northern agents positioned to do the extraction.

Apparently the washroom was going to be the command centre of the operation. You fucked all that up, if you'll excuse my language.”

“Shit!” was all Gord could say.

Richard continued the tag team explanation. “We gather they simply assumed the South Korean government had discovered them and so they focused on getting their people safely out of the area and the country rather than on figuring out who you were.”

Mary jumped in again. “And it was only later when Sool looked at the tunnel tapes and saw a tall Canadian in a baggy suit that he started to think in a different direction and went into our system to prove his suspicions.”

“And that is where he found me.”

“That’s where he found you,” Mary confirmed.

“But how did he do it? Are our systems that hackable?”

“That puzzled me as well,” Mary offered. “In fact I was not even sure that the ghost file was hacked. I couldn’t find any footprint to say that someone or anything passed the laser-generated password and into our system. It was not until the night you woke up and mentioned that “nun” or “nuno” thing when I figured it out. I think he was saying “nano” not “nuno”. When you mentioned where our electronics are made I was sure I had the answer and when I went back to our system and pulled it apart I was right. Without getting into the mumbo jumbo of it, this is only something I have read and never seen until now, it is possible to put a very small ‘circuit’ into the manufacturing process of any electronic device. By small I mean very small, something only electronic microscope detectable. Thus the word “nano” by the way. This invisible circuit acts as a sort of Trojan horse waiting to be activated remotely by the originator. It works so well and so insidiously because it is actually inside the system already and doesn’t need any password to go to work sending files wherever ordered. Its weakness, at least with today’s technological limitations, is that it can only be used once. That is why we detected only one minute electronic pulse and never found anything else.”

She paused. “Are you following this? Am I too technical?”

Gord looked at her impatiently. “Just get on to what this means for me.”

Richard took over.

“Well the good news for the Agency is that they blew this technology on your file.

That guy must have really wanted you, to waste such a deeply planted technology. He really didn't take anything else. Every member of NATO will now be looking for similar "nano" plants in their hardware. This job came at a very high cost for North Korea, and Sool, of course."

Mary continued. "The bad news is that he blew this technology on your file. Gord your file is still out there somewhere. All the jobs you did. Where you live. You family and work history. The location of your money. Anybody who wanted to extract any kind of revenge for what you have done could learn this. After this fiasco in Ottawa I suspect that the North Koreans will gladly sell your data to anyone who wants it."

They both paused to let Gord absorb some of this.

"Gord the only way to close the file would be to kill you," Richard announced.

He paused again.

"So, Gord Salmy was buried on July 11, 2011 in a wonderful ceremony at the Valley Presbyterian Church on York Street. You don't exist anymore."

It took a moment for this to sink into Gord's banged up brain. "How did Monica fit into to this?"

Richard sighed. "Well she was not supposed to die that's for sure. In fact she was not supposed to have anything to do with you. Her making contact with you was done on her own initiative."

"But she worked for you?"

"Each agent like you has a watcher assigned to them to act as back up on the jobs they do. Like you, the watchers have ordinary jobs when they aren't on assignment. But like you they are very highly trained and able to deal with any sort of circumstance, violent or not. As you learned, Monica was a crack shot. It was just lucky, and unlucky so it seems, that she found a job working with you. Since you resigned from the university she had already been assigned to someone else and told never to see you again."

"So I'm dead?" Gord pinched his arm. "Hmmm, seems I still hurt. There must be something I'm not getting here Richard. If Gord Salmy is dead, who is sitting in this hospital room with a fucking big headache, and a throbbing leg?" He choked back some tears. "And a big hole in his heart for a wonderful friend."

"We're working on that right now," Mary offered. "You focus on your recovery and

we'll take care of the rest.”

Richard interrupted her. “Get some sleep now. We'll get back to you when we have some more answers for you.”

Richard called the nurse and with a little extra pain medication the person who was once Gord Salmy fell into a deep sleep.

Over the next week or so Gord had nothing else to do but focus upon his rehabilitation and he worked hard with the physio to get to the point where he was mobile. The swath of bandages had been taken off and he could feel the scabs between his growing beard. By the second week he was ready to take some first steps. Either Richard or Mary came every day to visit and brought him books and magazines, mostly golf magazines. Mary brought him a set of “BEATS” headphones and a new iPad loaded with six generations of blues music. He read the newspapers they had saved for him and learned that one of the young university scholarship kids had won the club championship with a sizzling five under. After the first blush of stories there was nothing more on the fire or his death. The first couple of weeks passed fairly quickly as he focused on recovery, and not his conscience, his grief or the many questions he still had for Richard and Mary. Too much time on his own gave him too much access to all three.

One day Mary and Richard came together. They had a laptop computer bag, a large binder, a Nikon D7000 camera, a suitcase and a paper LCBO bag obviously holding a bottle. Gord looked hungrily at the latter. Due to the painkillers he had not had a drink since the house, but he was now finished with the pills and needed the bottle. No one said anything as Mary organized the computer on the table beside Gord's bed and moved it so that all three could see the screen.

Richard started. “Gord, I've got to stop calling you that. We have been working to find you a new identity. We are now ready to describe your new life.”

“What do you mean new life? I have a life now.”

“No you don't. You are dead. You don't exist anymore.”

Richard continued. “We are going to offer you some things and you can say yes or no, but we will expect something in return.”

“Why am I surprised?” Gord sarcastically observed. “Go ahead.”

“Right. Well here is what we can do for you. Firstly, we can arrange it so you are

able to enter the qualifying sectionals for the Champions Tour in 2013. We can't guarantee you will make the actual tour, which would be cheating." Fairfield chuckled at that aside. "The playing part is up to you. But we can make you eligible for a shot at the qualifiers."

Richard paused to let a shocked Gord absorb this. On his own he would have been an incredible long shot to even be able to enter the qualifiers. You have to apply and have a PGA pro-verified scoring record...at that level a handicap is meaningless... and have won at least a couple of amateur events somewhere. The Ottawa Valley Country Club Senior Championship would not have turned too many heads on the selection committee.

"Give me a break. How could you guarantee that?"

"We have ways as you know. But that isn't relevant. Would you like that?"

Gord had thought his senior tour dream was long gone.

"For sure. I'm in. What next?"

Mary piped in. "The money, about \$5 million I believe, you have in your Anguilla account is a problem. I assume your wife doesn't know it is there nor has access to it. Whoever has the stolen file does know, so if it was to suddenly start disappearing it would raise suspicions that you are alive."

Gord hadn't thought of that. He didn't envision living from his University pension for the rest of his life. "How do you know how much I have?"

Mary just looked at him over the rim of her reading glasses, ignored the question and continued. "We'll get the Canadian government to confiscate the funds as part of an investigation into organized crime – happens all the time. To the bank it is just a numbered account so no names are needed for them. We will launder the money through the Finance Department and deposit it into a secure and anonymous account of your choosing."

"All \$5 million?"

"All \$5 million," Richard assured.

"Tax free?"

"Tax free," Mary reassured him.

"Ok. I agree to that! I'll give you an account number in the Caymans," Gord quickly assured them. "What else?"



“We’ll get you a job for the next year as a teaching pro at a very exclusive Mexican Resort golf course. You will have minimal duties and 24-hour access to one of the highest ranked teaching-practice facilities south of Torrey Pines. Accommodation, meals, beach all included.”

“Damn, I don’t know, how about throwing in all the free Marguerites I can drink and all of the senioritas I can fuck? Excuse the language Mary.” Gord looked over at Richard. “Continue.”

“We’ll create a new identity for you that is bullet proof so to speak.” Richard offered.

“Ok, tell me more before I agree to this part of our little contract.”

Mary took over. “This rest of it all was harder than I had expected. The most foolproof way to create a new identity is simply to use an old one, preferably from someone who is either dead or very missing and not likely to be found again. In your case the person needed to be the same height, age, race and with a history you could easily adopt. We found one that is pretty close. This guy disappeared in 1980 and has never been found. He was into some deep shit with the drug mobs in California, so some speculate he was buried somewhere in the desert. Others figured he just ran away and started a new life somewhere. The former is more likely. At any rate he was not a very nice person. He was thrown out of his college for some infraction, likely just being the asshole he apparently was. He spent the next two years after that doing enforcing work for some shady people. I guess he found a true calling in breaking legs. He was arrested on some minor drug charges so we have all his biographical and genetic information, so there isn’t much we don’t know about him. He had no brothers or sisters and his parents drowned in a boating accident in 1990. There were friends from his university days, but as far as we can tell most of them are dead or have disappeared as well. But what makes him useful for you, other than size and other physical feature things is that he was the California State junior golf champion in 1975. This will be one of the few factual things that we will leave in his file.”

Gord listened carefully, well aware of Mary’s ability to access and manipulate any file anywhere in the world.

“So we are going to start with the police files in California. The school files are all

from the seventies and are not digital so they would be tough to alter. We think it is unlikely that if we do our work properly anyone would go look for those anyhow. We'll put in your DNA and a photo from 1980. We'll leave the minor drug charge there. What young person didn't do something minor with drugs in the eighties? We'll put in the file that you are likely in Canada hiding out from a loan shark. And we'll make it a dead file – “No further action required, no longer of interest.” Then we will create a paper trail of jobs for you in Canada, some in the golf business, some in sales. You became a Canadian citizen in 1993 and recently retired after 20 years selling life insurance in Toronto. We even have you making a good showing in several amateur tournaments over the years and you now have your Canadian PGA designation allowing you to teach anywhere in Canada. Anyone checking files in any of the places we mention will find an employment record with impeccable recommendations. Of course, if anyone actually did an in person investigation they would discover that no one can remember you.”

“I always wanted to be a golf pro. Am I still a prick?” Gord asked with a smile, amazed at what Mary said she had done.

“No, in fact your work reports describe you as quiet, innocuous and polite. A real gentleman. Someone that is essentially not very memorable.”

Richard interjected sarcastically. “That's so when you make the Champion's Tour people in your past will all say that they remember you when they don't.”

Gord ignored him. “What if I run into one of this guy's friends from the old days?”

“We thought of that,” Mary offered. “That is why you are very similar in build, race et cetera. But you do look different. Quite frankly he was better looking and if someone looked at you a couple of weeks ago they would never mistake you for him. So we can partly count on the effects of age. No one would have seen him for over twenty years, maybe more; so ageing does change people you know. And we gave nature a little help.” She gave Gord a mirror. He had been swathed in bandages most of the past couple of weeks and had not had access to a mirror since they took the gauze off yesterday. Now that he considered it, he did think it strange that the bathroom had no mirror. What he saw when he looked in the mirror was someone with two weeks of beard, extensive bruising from ear to ear, especially around the eyes and nose, and scabs all over his face. But he couldn't find himself.

He sputtered through still swollen lips. “You did fucking plastic surgery!”

“Only enough so you could fool someone into thinking you were this guy aged twenty years,” Richard offered in an apologetic tone. “We had to change the nose and lips a little for sure. Here is the sharpest photo we could get of the guy from 1978.” Richard pushed a couple of buttons on the computer and a full screen shot of a good looking, smiling young man standing on a tee box somewhere. “This is you thirty years ago. The only thing we can’t change is the colour of your eyes. He had brown eyes and you are stuck with blue.”

All they said was slowly sinking in to Gord’s bruised brain. He was someone else and no one had asked him if he wanted this. All sorts of complications of this identity change ran through his mind. His voice was still his. His golf swing was his. His education and knowledge was still his. His memories were still his. His DNA still his. His erectile dysfunction still his and he laughed to himself – maybe Mary could fix that as well?

“What if I had said I didn’t want this? Isn’t this some sort of human rights violation?”

Richard and Mary both laughed. “We actually hoped for a moment that you had amnesia from the whack on the head and we could just tell you who you were,” Richard offered. “But there are still some ‘Gord’ things that are of interest to us.”

Gord raised his eyebrows. “You, the Agency, have gone to a lot of trouble to give me a new identity. You’re not a philanthropic foundation. What do I have to do in return?”

Richard turned very serious and started in a quiet voice.

“Gord, you will not be able to contact your family ever again. The only family you will have from now on is the one we will create for you. You will never again see Gail or the children. People will look for you and any mistake could mean the death of your family. You know that. There will be some angry folks out there if the truth of some deaths and your involvement in those deaths becomes known.”

Gord didn’t say anything, just nodded. He had mixed feelings. Gail? I guess that is done. But the kids? His precious granddaughter? Deep inside him that was hurting.

“You OK with this?” Richard pushed him.

“I’ll let you know in a moment. Carry on.”

“You are going to have to change some habits. It is through habits that identity changes are undone. So, for example, someone who looks for you would simply have to look for a location that has a spike in sales of Bushmills 16-year-old malt and they would suspect you.”

“So you want me to quit drinking?”

“Hardly. From what we can gather from your new identity’s history, tee totaling would not be in character. We learned that he had a taste for rum, so here is your new best friend.” Richard handed a bemused Gord the LCBO bag and he extracted a bottle he had never seen before, a bottle of Botran Solara 1893 18-year old rum. He looked more closely at the label and could see that it was from Guatemala.

“Is it any good?”

“Doesn’t matter. It is what you now drink.”

Gord ripped off the metallic cap cover and unscrewed the cap. He took a sniff.

“Hmmm, a very good month,” he quipped as he dumped his water back into the pitcher, poured some of the amber liquid into the glass and took a sip. He was surprised how smooth it was. “It’ll do I guess. What else?”

“Your bass playing days are over.”

This pronouncement hit Gord hard. Music had been an integral part of his life since before he could remember and playing, even if it was more karaoke than live, was his escape and often his salvation. “I’m not sure I can do that Richard,” he responded quietly.

“I didn’t say give up music Gord. I know how important that has been in your life.”

Mary continued as she handed Gord a new iPad and turned to the computer. “You have a new iTunes account and there are six thousand blues pieces loaded into iTunes on this Mac – that is now yours by the way. I’m sure I missed some of your old collection, but who uses CDs anymore anyhow? You can add to your library anytime you want so just see this as a gift to start.”

“Your new identity was something of a musician as well,” Richard added. “This was just a serendipitous discovery we made when we were searching his past. Here is your new instrument.” Richard reached into his pocket and pulled out a Lee Oskar Blues Harp in A and threw it for Gord to catch.

“You’re not serious!” an incredulous Gord responded.

“Dead serious, if you’ll excuse the pun. The guy was not that great. He played in a couple of pick up bands that never went anywhere. So with your musical ability you should not have trouble catching up on a thirty-year abandoned talent. His genre was country blues, so you should not have any trouble explaining the subtle shift to any kind of blues you want.”

Gord fingered the harmonica. “What else?” he asked in an angry voice.

“No more Tai Chi. That would be a huge give away to anyone looking for you. We have put in your file that you started Yoga, Hatha Yoga actually, in the mid nineties and have become quite proficient in the art. This will allow you to keep your flexibility without the Tai Chi.”

For some reason this didn’t seem to bother Gord at all. Right now the thought of anything violent or physical reminded him of Monica and was uncomfortable. So saying good-bye to the Tai Chi stuff was, at this moment, a relief. Yoga might even help his golf game.

“No problem, anything else?”

Mary continued. “Gord these are all things you need to do to save your life and cement the new identity and you need to take them seriously. One mistake and you and your family will be in danger.”

“This suitcase has everything in it that you will need. New clothes to start you off. Driver’s license. Credit cards. COSTCO card; there is one in Mexico where you are going to live. I’ll take a photo today and you’ll get a new passport tomorrow. In general, these are the cards and ID you would have if you were a Canadian golf pro going to live and work in Mexico for a while. There is a new iPhone in there with an international account in your new name and the phone is preloaded with a collection of contacts that you would have after 25 years in Canada. There is a \$1000 CDN in cash and \$20,000 in a bank account accessible by the debit card. This will get you started until you get your first paycheck from the golf course. There is also a first class Air Canada ticket leaving tomorrow afternoon from Pearson non-stop to Cabo airport in Mexico.”

“Wow!” Gord was impressed, looking forward already to a recovery period on a beach in Mexico.

Mary and Richard exchanged satisfied glances.

“There is one more thing though Gord.”

Richard paused and handed Gord the suitcase and when he had it, looked at Gord and said, “We have another job for you.”

Suddenly the warm feelings were gone and Gord threw the suitcase back at Richard. Richard just knocked the bag to the floor with his hand.

“So none of this, the new identity, the money, all the fucking help had nothing to do with helping me at all. It was all for the Agency. The Hotel California right?”

Neither Mary nor Richard said anything.

“So what happens if I say no to it all?” Gord knew that was a rhetorical question. He had agreed to the contract when he became Gord Salmy, the NATO-CDIC agent of mercy, and he knew there was only one way out of that contract. Now he knew he would likely have that way out if he rejected what Mary and Richard had set up. It seemed good alternative for a moment until he realized that it was not only him who would pay the price, but his family.

Mary and Richard continued to stand at the end of the hospital bed, saying nothing.

“What’s the job?”

They were both visibly relieved. “We’ll let you know later. It will be six months or so before you need to do anything. You’ll need that time to get healthy again and to internalize your new identity. As usual, we’ll get you the target details and leave the method to you.”

“I lost all of my materials in the fire.”

“There is a new set of golf clubs being shipped to your suite at the golf course right now. We were able to save most things and you’ll find them hidden in various ways in the clubs and bag.”

Gord looked doubtful but had learned to trust Mary over the years. “Anything else?”

Richard put on his coat to leave. “Gord, from this point on we will never meet unless in secret, but if you ever need us there is a contact in your iPhone, ‘Muddy Waters’. If you auto dial the number you will get either me or Mary.” He paused as he turned around to look at Gord. “I’ll miss you buddy.” And he came over and gave Gord a hug. Mary actually had tears in her eyes as she did the same. “Take care Gord.” And they were both

walking out the door and out of Gord Salmey's life.

"Wait a moment!" Gord yelled and they paused at the door. "What is my new name?"

The bump of the wheels on the runway dragged Burt away from his thoughts and he sighed as he turned his mind away from the events that put him here to the thoughts of a new life for Burt Van Royan in Mexico.



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### **Part 3 - Chapter 20: The New Gardener**

The morning of the staff meeting offered Maria a typical scorched sky sunrise over the Sea of Cortez. Her home was really just a fisherman's cabin that clung to a hunk of grassy desert on the edge of a small arroyo. While she had been told by some of the fishermen that in a heavy rain a flash flood could come down the arroyo and wash the cabin into the sea, there had never been such a rain since she arrived. In fact it rained less than five days a year in the area so she figured she was safe for a while. She imagined that if this did ever happen there would be quite a waterfall, since the arroyo ran down a cliff from the desert above and fell into the centre of a small cove surrounded on all sides by cliffs of sand and rock. The beach was only fifty metres from the end of the arroyo and her cabin so she could also imagine everything in the path of the unlikely flood being quickly washed away into the sea of Cortez.

On this particular morning the sun crept up the sides of the cliffs and entered her cabin while she slept, gently nudging her awake and welcoming her to another perfect day in the Baja. The cabin was only fifteen kilometers north of San Jose del Cabo, the nearest town, and only forty or so kilometers from the busy tourist centre of Cabo San

Lucas, but for Maria it was another world. The first four kilometers of the road from San Jose Del Cabo were well paved since it led to the new Puertos Los Barillas Golf Resort. From there to her casita it was a very bumpy gravel road that at places hung precipitously from the edge of cliffs that hid coves, beaches and a few fishermen's casitas such as the one Maria lived in. The road was tough on the occasional rental car that attempted the drive up what was known as the East Coast Road, but perfect for Maria's Honda XL250 trail bike that she used to get back and forth from work at the golf course. The coastline property was mostly owned by wealthy developers from Mexico City and foreigners could not own ocean front property in Mexico except through a trust arrangement. While there was the occasional mansion perched on a cliff over the sea, most owners were waiting for more prosperous times to develop the area. A large hotel, golf course and condo development was approved and planned for the town just north of where Maria lived, but it was temporarily on hold while sub-prime mortgages and national debt problems were brought into submission. In the meantime Maria's cabin was quiet, private and perfect for someone who just wanted to be left alone.

Maria rolled out of bed and spent a half hour doing a series of unusual exercises that no one would recognize, and if they did they would wonder why a Mexican gardener at a golf course in San Jose was practicing an ancient and extinct form of Korean martial arts. Her explanation was simple, although Maria preferred not to ever have to provide it. So she sought private places for her morning ritual and she never had a better place than this casita and cove. She didn't even have to get dressed since the beach and the cove were hidden from the road above. After a half hour of stretching and twirling, poking at imaginary enemies with imaginary weapons, she went for her morning swim. The cove had a small beach, maybe forty yards wide, and a rock reef a hundred yards off shore helped create a calm lagoon, perfect for both swimming and, later in the day, a snorkeling adventure. The water was cool this early in the morning and she ran dripping up the beach to a towel hanging from the clothesline rigged up on the cabin porch. At fifty-two years old it was getting harder and harder to stay in great shape; she didn't need a mirror to know that so far she had been very successful. Good genes to start with didn't hurt. Unlike most of her Mexican female counterparts, she had genes that promoted a slender figure rather than a full one. At just under six feet, she was also taller than most Mexican



women and it was joked at the house in Puebla that her ancestors were more the product of a randy conquistador than a righteous Mayan. She did not have the classic beauty of a Spanish noblewoman, but she knew that with her combination of blue eyes, long black hair, handsome, not beautiful, face, and lithe, athletic figure she could appeal to any man she wanted.

Like her figure, she worked at maintaining her hair. This morning it hung in long wet ringlets down her bare back, but later she would curl it up in a bun for work. The intense, rich black was becoming easier to maintain now that she was actually turning grey. Touching up grey roots was easier to explain than touching up auburn roots. After one last glance at the ocean and wrapping herself in a sarong, she went into the cabin to prepare some breakfast. The cabin had only generator-provided electricity so she preferred to cook on either the small propane stove inside or the small barbecue on the deck. More often than not, she preferred to light a driftwood fire on the beach to grill a fish but in the morning it was easier to just light the indoor stove and soon a plate of huervos rancheros was ready to be washed down with a mug of strong black coffee. The 600 sq. ft. cabin consisted of a small bedroom and a combination kitchen, dining and living room, the latter facing a small adobe fireplace on one wall for cool evenings. A large porch stretched across the complete front of the building and contained two hammocks and a small plastic table with two matching chairs. That is where Maria had her breakfast, watching the pelicans swoop down into the lagoon for their own breakfast.

The original cabin had been built by a fisherman to take advantage of both the exceptional fishing at this spot in the Sea of Cortez and the natural harbour provided by the lagoon. He never owned the land, and when Jose had purchased a large tract of land for future development, he acquired the cabin and the fisherman as well. Since development was slow, he let the fisherman stay on the land and in the cabin. When the fisherman died a couple of years ago, Jose turned the cabin into his own private retreat, renovating the building and acquiring the furniture to be a modern hideaway. He did not bother with hydro since a generator and propane took care of most lighting and heating needs and his goal was to get more away from these things rather than to take them with him. When Maria had to get out of Puebla, he got her a new name, the job at the golf course and gave her the cabin to live in. Even the X1 came with the cabin. Now she

wondered how long he would let her stay there. Or for that matter what he would do with her, period.

Their last meeting had not gone well.

“People do not say no to me,” he had quietly, but firmly, informed her as she served him a piece of freshly grilled sea bass and refilled his wine. They were sitting at the same table where Maria was now sitting with her breakfast. It was the first time he had visited her at the cabin since she had started the job at the golf course and moved into the cabin. He had arrived unannounced in three Hummers each holding a squad of heavily armed “consultants,” as he called them. His consultants took up watchful positions along the dirt road, the path leading down to the cabin, and one was patrolling back and forth along the beach.

He had come expecting sex with Maria.

“I thought we agreed that part of our relationship was over, if it was ever there. That is why I am here in the Baja, and you are still in Puebla,” and she added, “and still married.”

He used his fork to play with the fish, put it down and took a sip of wine.

“Maria, we have known each other for over thirty years. We have been friends, we have worked together, we have been enemies and we have been lovers. You know my history, my ambitions and my flaws better than anyone alive. ”

Maria put her own glass down and looked at him. She spoke quietly but firmly. “We were never ‘lovers’. We just had some spontaneous sex on occasions thirty years apart. I know you better than most because you just kill anyone who starts to know too much about you. You have killed all the people from the old days who know you are just a kid from the barrio, not a high Mexican family. All of those who know that Jose Gorges is not your real name. All of those who know you do not have a university degree from CETYS University. All of those who know you lose money as a maquiladora and make more in the drug trade. And you only married to get a name and respectability, not love. Those who are left know that you are incapable of love, only cruelty.” She paused and looked into his eyes. "And you still kill – even young children."

“If that is so, why are you still alive?” His tone was cruel and his face showed no sign that her comments had any effect on his emotion.

“I don’t know,” she offered. “Maybe it is some weird Oedipus complex. Your mother is dead. I’m six years older than you. I saved your life. I was your first fuck, maybe your last? Maybe there are even boundaries to your sadism? Maybe if you kill me you totally erase a past that you actually don’t want to totally forget? Maybe you just need to have power over someone you can’t have power over? Maybe if you kill the last person on earth who says no to you and you can’t control with fear you will be bored?” She paused and took a sip of your own wine. “Jose. I am indeed grateful you did not have me dumped in the middle of the road without my head like the last twenty-seven unfortunates who showed up on a Guadalajara turnpike, or had my house sprayed with bullets like those poor students, and I truly thank you for the job and the cabin. In a weird way I still feel sorry for that confident immature seventeen-year-old who prematurely ejaculated all over my new dress. Neither of us are who we once were Jose. It was a mistake to have sex that last time and it will never happen again. If you do actually care for me you will make sure no one ever knows of our connection. As far as your wife and family are concerned I have left the country for good. I know you found me this job, and you let me stay here, because you think I will be your little secret, tucked away on the Baja for your pleasure whenever you feel the need for a golf game. But if so, get me fired, throw me out of the cabin or get one of your goons to cut off my head and leave me in a ditch because that is a fantasy that will never transpire. You should know me better than that.”

“You weren’t my first fuck. It was with a Theresa Gonzales when I was 14 and she was better than you.” He reached into his jacket pocket and pulled out a paper and slid it across the table to her. She cautiously picked it up and read it.

“I know all of what you say,” he agreed. “Except for the octopus, or whatever it was, thing. I’m sorry for tonight. I only meant to see you one last time to give you this. We will go in different directions now and maybe, or maybe not, our paths will cross again. I do not want your memories of me to be all bad.”

Maria was astonished. The paper was the deed to the cabin and the land surrounding the cabin, 700 acres and over a mile of beachfront.

“The taxes have been taken care of for ten years. After that the recession should be over and you could raise some capital to do whatever you want. This area will prosper

I'm sure. It can be your future."

"And you Jose?"

"My future was established with the first profit I made from Columbian gold. I have much more mining to do." He stood up to leave. "I will still be coming to the golf course occasionally but we never have to indicate that we know each other." He paused at the door. "And, of course, you could tell anyone all you know about me. But who would believe a black haired Mexican woman with no passport or birth certificate who has red cunt hair."

And then he was gone, surrounded by his phalanx of loyal foot soldiers.

That was six months ago, and she had thought often about her old life and the transition to her new. She had left a past behind once before and she was confident she could do it again. She did not know how he arranged it, but she left that day two years ago for San Jose del Cabo, the job at the golf course and the casita on the beach. She had not seen Jose since until he showed up at her casita six months ago and now she suspected, hoped in a certain way, she would never see him again. It was time for her to start a new life again. She finished her breakfast, cleaned up the dishes and showered under the gravity shower fed by the water tank up by the road that was filled once a week by a water tanker. She dressed in her gardening clothes and walked up the steep path to the road where her Honda was parked. She loved the bike, the road and the speed with which she could negotiate the twists and turns of the rough road into town. It was one of the occasions where she could put herself in the "slow motion" zone and exercise her special attributes to the limit. Some of the local boys sometimes tried to keep up to her on their own machines but gave up somewhere around the worst of the hairpin, cliff edge turns. They teased each other unmercifully that such a mommita could go faster than any of them. This morning though, she just cruised, enjoying the morning breezes off the Sea of Cortez and the spectacular view into the coves and beaches of the coast road. Depending upon how fast she wanted to go, the eight kilometer trip to the golf course took only fifteen minutes or so and she parked and joined the other staff in the dining room for a special morning staff meeting.

She liked the head professional Doug Hernandez, although she thought he was young for such a good job. She guessed thirty-something. The staff liked him, even the

ordinary labourers she supervised. He also respected her gardening skills and left her pretty much alone to do her work. He hadn't asked too many questions about her past when she arrived relatively unannounced one day, so she figured that he too had some connection to Jose. All he asked was that she be good at her job and in the two years the grounds around the golf course were more beautiful than even the elaborate grounds around most of the high-end hotels further south. She had a tremendous ability to use local plants to exceptional visual effect. And her cactus garden with twenty-six different types of Mexican cacti was becoming as large a tourist attraction as the golfing.

This particular morning Doug was reviewing the development plans for the area over the coming year. They were going to stick with only eighteen holes for now. Although the Nicklaus and Norman designs for two unique eighteen-hole courses were still on track they would have to wait until the economy recovered a little more. Maria herself had not played the course yet, although she had rekindled some interest in golf by going to the driving range during some off hours when no one would see her. She had asked Doug when she first came if she could use the facility and he looked puzzled but said all management staff had free use of the golf facility.

“Do you play?” he had asked.

“Once when I was younger,” she replied. They both left it at that.

Doug had finished the presentation on the future developments and was starting to wrap up the meeting. Maria thought she would get a cup of coffee while he was introducing the newer staff members. She had just filled her cup when she heard him introduce the new Teaching Professional and the shock caused her to drop her cup on the floor where it shattered and sent coffee over the empty chair beside her. She ignored the taunts of her fellow workers and scuttled off to get a broom and cloths, but instead went into the women's washroom and sat in a stall and shook.

“It couldn't be,” she thought to herself. “That's a common name.”

She did not leave the washroom until everyone had left the dining room.



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### **Part 3 - Chapter 21: A New Golf Pro**

Gord was met at the airport by Doug Hernandez, the Head Professional at the Puertos Los Barillos Golf Course. Doug was a rare Mexican who had been inspired by Lee Trevino rather than Manuel Rosas and chose golf as his passion over soccer. He was even more rare in that he did not come to golf through a wealthy family. He was brought up in Mexico City where his father spent the nights cleaning the offices of those getting rich from Mexico's burgeoning manufacturing industry and his mother spent the days cleaning their homes. One of those homes was on a golf course on the edge of the city and before he was school age, Doug would often go with his mother while she worked. He would want to help, but at that age was more hindrance than help and his mother would send him away to play on the spacious grounds of the golf course mansion.

In 1987, the golf courses in Mexico City were private and the security around this course was formidable. Like most kids in his neighbourhood, he knew there was a golf course, and the news reports of Trevino winning tournaments reached even his neighbourhood. They were proud of any Mexican who did well on the national stage, no matter what the sport. Lorena Ochoa would soon be a national hero. But he and his friends were usually more interested in old soccer balls, sometimes just tightly rolled up plastic garbage bags, and dreaming of the day they would be picked for the Mexican squad in the World Cup. His mother's job gave Doug a glimpse of another world and a kind employer gave him a glimpse of another sport. On one of the first days, full of five-year-old boy curiosity, he wandered around the grounds of the house and he came to a spot where a bench was situated so that it overlooked a tee box. He sat down and watched as a group of four players started to hit their balls and he wondered why the object of the game appeared to be to hit the little balls into the woods? After they hit they said things that he only heard from the neighbourhood boys his mother said he wasn't to play with. They looked so funny swinging at the ball that he laughed out loud just as one player was

in his backswing. That player also hit an apparently good shot into the trees and said the same things as the others and turned around, looked at Doug and threw his club at him. The club missed; the other players laughed and Doug ran as fast as he could back to his mother. The next day he went back to the same spot and watched again. He found to his surprise that they had left the thrown club in the bushes. As soon as he picked up the old 5-iron, Doug Hernandez was hooked.

Soon he was finding those lost balls for golfers and cleaning their clubs as they went past the third hole bench. With the help of the owner of the house where his mother cleaned he talked his way into a job as a caddie. The rest is well known golf history in Mexico. Although he never went to a college or university, Doug Hernandez went on to become one of the few Mexicans to have a shot at the PGA tour and he won once on the fledging Nationwide Tour. However by thirty years of age, Doug and his Mexican backers, many from the old club that had given him his start in golf, realized he was not good enough to go the distance. Despite an abundance of natural talent, he never received the good instruction needed early in life to really excel at this game. So, again with the help of his backers, he obtained his PGA instructor certification and decided he would dedicate the rest of his life to helping young Mexican golfers learn and excel at the game that had pulled him out of the cycle of drugs and gangs that most of his childhood friends had found.

He wasn't particularly happy that he was now spending his time coddling to wealthy Cabo condo owners, mostly from the U.S. and Canada.

He especially wasn't happy that his new teaching pro was a nobody from Canada.

"From where?" astounded, he had asked the course owner over a beer at the clubhouse bar, surrounded on all sides by heavily armed guards. "Canada? What the fuck? Will he bring his own hockey stick?"

"Look," Jose Gorges, the course owner had replied as he slid Doug the file with Burt's resume. "We get a lot of Canadians down here and he might make them feel at home."

"We'd have to have two feet of snow every morning to do that," Doug replied as he opened up the folder and glanced at it. "There are a lot of young Mexican pros who would have loved this job, so this guy had better be special." And then he noticed Burt's

age. “Christ Jose. He’s fifty-two years old? Maybe he’ll bring his crutches and Viagra along with the hockey stick.”

Jose laughed briefly. He enjoyed his time with Doug. He had known Doug ever since the days when Doug’s mother and Jose had been neighbours in the barrio. “Be careful there Doug,” Jose lectured with a somber grin. “I’ll be fifty soon. Is this how you will talk about me?”

He turned serious. “Doug, this is not an appointment that either you or I have much choice in making. There are things that our government doesn’t even tell me when they ask for something, but I’m telling you now, asking you if you like, help this guy do his job. It is important.”

That was a month ago and now Doug was picking this ‘guy’ up at the San Jose airport. He had gone over the details of his assignment and he would take good care of this man. Jose had gotten him this job, a plum for a thirty-year-old washed up pro. Not only was Gorges a very rich manufacturer, but he was very connected to the political life of Mexico. Some suggested he was the only man in Mexico who had contacts with every active drug gang in Mexico. He brushed off his thoughts and his conversation with Jose as he held the photo of Burt Van Royan in his hand and stood with the taxi drivers and condo sellers waiting for the plane from Pearson to disembark its warmth seeking passengers.

“Van Royan?” Doug went to a tall man as he left the immigration counter and headed into the morass of greeters. The man turned and with a broad smile Doug put out his hand. “Hi! Burt Van Royan?” he offered in English. “Welcome to Mexico Burt. Are these all your bags?”

Van Royan had a large Booq backpack sling over one shoulder and a carry on suitcase that he pulled behind him. “Yeah. I shipped most else I need down earlier.”

“We got it all,” Doug replied. “Your clubs included. They are in your house. Good flight?” And they started to walk out of the airport to the parking lot.

Burt walked with a visible limp.

“The flight is only four hours from Toronto so no big deal. But with this,” he slapped his knee, “sitting still too long is a little bit of a challenge.”

“How did you do that?” Doug pointed to the knee.



“Ski accident. Just had the damn thing rebuilt. It’s a little stiff but I’m now bionic. After a little more physio I’ll be better than ever.”

They arrived at Doug’s car, a perfectly restored sky blue 1962 Volkswagen bug. Burt threw his gear in the back seat. “Wow! I’m impressed! I used to have one of these when they were not called an antique. Is it stock?” He slid into the passenger seat as Doug started it up.

“Yup. All original. It was my Dad’s car and he and I have been fixing it since I was old enough to walk. When he passed on I took the car and it became my stress reliever to fully restore it.” He slipped the car into gear and they headed out onto the traffic heading south from the airport. Doug explained that most traffic was probably going all the way to Cabo San Lucas, forty-five minutes away, but they were only going ten minutes to the smaller village of San Jose del Cabo where the golf course was located and where Burt would live. “Have you been to Mexico before?”

“Not really. When we were kids in California we used to head over to Tijuana to party. That was before the drug wars gave the phrase 'party till you drop' a whole new meaning.”

“I can see there would be no shortage of VW parts,” Burt suggested, observing that half the cars they passed on the highway were VWs of different sizes, models, shapes and condition.

Doug nodded. “Yeah. Nor of mechanics. Every boy in Mexico knows how to strip down a VW engine and fix any model with a piece of wire and duct tape. You hungry?”

“Famished. I passed on the airplane food. Know what a Spalumbo is?” Doug’s look was the answer. “Well it is a big spicy Calgary wiener that tastes great on the golf course, but isn't that appealing at forty thousand feet. Would you happen to know where we could get any good Mexican food?”

“I think I can find a place. It’s six now, I’ll drop you at your new digs, it’s right beside the golf course, give you a few moments to unpack and I’ll come by at seven and we’ll walk into town to a great little place that likes golfers. That OK?”

“Perfect. Would they have Pacifica as well?”

I think I’m gong to like this guy, Doug thought to himself. Good sense of humour. Seems easy going enough. The teaching here isn’t too tough. It's mostly tourists who are

here to absorb more sunshine and Tequila than lessons so he doesn't have to be great at that. But there was something in the man's swaggering demeanour that gave Doug a strange feeling in his stomach. He knew Burt was not here because he was the most qualified applicant. There had been other employees that Doug had been just told to hire, but they all been lower level; a cook's helper, a waitress and most recently Jose had delivered him a lady who was to look after the grounds. "She is wonderful with flowers!" Jose had assured him. It turned out to be true, she was an exceptional gardener, but he assumed that was only by chance, not design. None of this should bother him. He was Mexican after all so the notion that there would be some friend or preferential hiring of relatives and friends was not foreign to him and he had to admit it was probably only his own relationship with Jose that resulted in his own position as head pro. It didn't appear this guy had any relatives or cronies in Mexico who he could hit up for this job. A washed up, golfer Gringo who had never been to Mexico wasn't the ideal match for the teaching pro job so Doug knew that something was going on. And the look of the guy didn't lower his antenna much. In addition to a bum knee – ski accident? -- he had blotches on his face that suggested a collection of scabs had fallen off not too long ago and the new skin had not yet reached the roughness of the old. He would receive a clue by email later that week as to Burt's real purpose in Mexico, but for now he was just a skeptical, friendly greeter.

"Here we are!" Doug announced twenty minutes later as they pulled through the elaborate arc over the entrance to the golf course parking lot. "You will stay in that house over there."

Burt looked. First at the golf course that he could see beyond the clubhouse and then at the building Doug was pointing to. The former was breathtaking. The latter even more so.

"How many people will be staying there as well?" Burt asked as he took his bags from the back seat of the car and nodded towards the very large and ornate Mexican hacienda style house perched on the side of the hill overlooking what Burt assumed was the first hole of the course.

Doug laughed. "Just you. Unless of course you find yourself a roommate. People who rarely come here own these houses. They use the homes as landing places when they

tire of living on their yachts parked in the marina over there.” He pointed towards the sea to a place Burt couldn’t see. “They ask us to rent them when they aren’t here just to have them lived in. A financial guy in New York who is now in jail owned this one. The developers of the course and housing development around the course had to take the place back so we have access to this one and several others of the same type until they are sold again. Since no one is buying anything down here right now I suspect you will have the place for as long as you want it. Come on, I’ll show it to you.”

They walked together to the entry courtyard of the house and Doug used his key to let them into the home. When they walked in, Burt just stood staring for a moment. He had seen nice places in his life but this was as spectacular as anything he had seen anywhere in the world. Standing in the entryway he was looking through a living room furnished exquisitely in Mexican style, to a wall of complete glass. The windowed wall faced southeast and provided a view that crept over the golf course and led to the Ocean, lit up red and magenta by a western sun starting its western descent.

Doug was enjoying Burt’s surprise. “The sunrise is even better.” He handed a speechless Burt the key. “See you at seven in the parking lot. The bar is already stocked if you want a drink.” And he left Burt standing in the entrance as he closed the door and made his way over to his own house, the one next to Burt’s. He enjoyed the surprise when he showed Burt the “apartment”, but he had not been entirely honest with him. The bust of 2008 had resulted in a number of “repossessed” houses in the subdivision and by 2012, the combined residual effect of the bust and the drug wars had killed the real estate business so nothing was selling. There were several property development projects for the area that were on hold, and even at Puertos, the planned double eighteen-hole course project had been reduced to a single eighteen-hole project so the view from the parking lot of unfinished homes and the unfinished golf course was not the most impressive. Burt was waiting in the parking lot when Doug came down the path from his own house.

“You get settled alright?”

“Fine. Was this the most comfortable place you could find for me? I was hoping for something with a better view.”

Doug smiled. “I’ll remember that. For now let’s get a drink and some food. It’s a ten-minute walk to the restaurants down by the marina. They are all pretty local, but

pretty good and the one I like has all the Pacifica you can drink.”

They made small talk as they walked down the road to the mouth of the marina and Doug explained that the harbour golf course and housing development were only half a dozen years old. All had been developed with the intention of bringing in wealthy golfers, yachters, fishermen and beach people from the U.S. Up until 2007 it was going well. Even today they could see that the man-made harbour was full of ocean going yachts. Doug pointed out that the area north of them, up the rugged Baja East Coast Road, the shoreline was wild and undeveloped. That shore was full of hidden coves and beaches and there were some spectacular homes developed on acreages. One even had its own airstrip. Where they were standing was the dividing line between the “developed” Baja tip, and the “undeveloped” north. The area between here and La Ribera, sixty kilometers north, was spectacular but still mostly undeveloped. While he did not explain this to Burt, he knew the area pretty well since Jose owned a lot of property up the coast and he and Jose once went to what he called his fishing cabin, up the gravel East Coast Road. For some reason, Jose had put the new landscape gardener into that cabin when she arrived.

Soon they were at the mouth of the marina and a small collection of rustic buildings. One of these was the Mega grocery store, advertising the cheapest Pacifica in town. Another small palapa covered restaurant was part of the Playita Hotel and a sign on the outside wall proclaimed the “Best Tortilla Soup in Mexico”. When they entered the sole waitress greeted them at the door. Burt guessed she was in her twenties. Slim, with very dark long hair and her warm greeting smile made her more than attractive.

“Hola Senior Doug!” and they gave each other a hug and a cheek peck. They chatted away in Spanish while she led them to a table on the patio that overlooked both the marina and the sandy beach leading to the water’s edge. Burt listened as he told her in Spanish that this guy was a Canadian gringo and that she was to leave him alone ... he was too old for her. She responded that she liked experienced men and they both laughed. He suggested she tone down the chili level for the gringo, that Canadians liked everything cold not hot. She laughed again. Doug turned to Burt as they sat down at the table. “I told her to bring us her best food tonight. You are a special guest.”

Burt turned to the young waitress and spoke in perfect Spanish. “Senorita, it pleases me much to learn that you prefer seasoned company to that of the young and

inexperienced such as my companion here. Like a well-aged wine you would find me full bodied with a taste of fruit and the strength of oak. And I like everything very hot and spicy. Could you bring me a Pacifica, some sauce picante and my companion a glass of milk, por favor?"

It was a toss-up between who was more surprised, the waitress or Doug. The waitress was embarrassed enough to scurry quickly away to get Burt a beer. Doug just stared at Burt and broke out laughing. He had greeted Burt at the airport in English and they had been speaking English for the past hour. He switched to Spanish. "I thought you said you hadn't been to Mexico before. How does a Canadian learn to speak Spanish like that?"

"I told you. I was brought up in Southern California. You had a far better chance of getting laid if you spoke a little Spanish. My first wife was actually from Madrid, so I had to improve my Spanish to understand what she was saying when she was yelling at me."

Doug was not sure he totally accepted that explanation but it was a pleasant surprise. After he got the message from New York it would make even more sense. But for now, he shrugged and suggested they speak Spanish when they were together from now on if Burt didn't mind. English was a second language for Doug and he felt more secure sharing a conversation in Spanish.

"I don't mind at all. It would be good to polish my Spanish."

"Doesn't sound to me like you need much polish, but thanks anyhow."

Their drinks came, beer for both, a straw basket full of taco chips with a guacamole dip and they both ordered the whole grilled snapper.

"My turn for a couple of questions," Burt suggested.

Doug looked wary but waited.

"First. Where did you learn your English? And second how does a good Mexican boy like you have a name like Doug.

Doug smiled, relieved at the nature of the questions. "Easy. The English I studied at school and when I went on tour, the language of golf was English so I just worked at it. It seems you can't be a pro at a Mexican resort golf course unless you can speak to the old ladies from Calgary."

He left out the year he spent training in the Adirondacks.

“The second is more complicated. My full name is Francisco del Monte Real Jimenez Douglas Hernandez. The first four names are all my mother’s relatives. My dad was so pissed off at there being none of his relatives’ names he slipped Douglas into the birth certificate at the registry when my mother wasn’t looking. It was the only real English name he knew. He took it from the name of a record that someone had thrown out. He salvaged it from the garbage and brought it home and he thought the band was funky. I can’t remember the name of the band now, Doug and the Bugs or something like that. At any rate I was anointed with the name Douglas because my Dad wanted to piss off his mother-in-law. I started using the name Doug when I was on the tour. It was easier to say and made me more North American.”

Burt thought for a moment. “Was that Doug and the Slugs?”

“That’s it!” Doug exclaimed. “Have you heard of them?”

They both had a good laugh over the fact Doug was named after a defunct Canadian band. How one of their albums ever found its way into a Mexico City garbage pail would remain a mystery forever. But it was a good story.

The food arrived and they both dug into their grilled snapper and Burt had to admit to himself that this was the most succulent piece of fish he remembered having anywhere.

“So let’s talk golf for a moment,” Doug suggested between mouthfuls of fish and rice. “I don’t want to be rude, but this gig isn’t usual for a guy with your experience. You could go for the head pro at any number of courses anywhere. With your Spanish you could have my job. So what’s with the attraction to teaching little old ladies and fat tourists?”

“I could ask a similar question of you. How did a young guy like you land the head pro job at a place like this? But to answer your question, I do have another motive for being here.”

Doug smiled. He knew there was something else.

“I’m preparing to enter the qualifiers for the PGA Champions Tour in the fall. I needed a place to recover from my accident and work on my game. A friend knew that this job was open and he made a few calls and here I am.”

Doug was surprised. “You can’t be serious? I’ve seen your file. Other than one time back when you were sixteen and won the California Junior, you’ve haven’t won a thing

of any consequence. You've bounced all over Canada with pro jobs at the most obscure places. Moose Jaw? Where the fuck is that? And you have spent most of the last decade selling insurance for God's sake. And now you think you can beat the fifty thousand or so guys who are as delusional as you in their assessment of their game? Do you know that only five guys out of thousands make it through to the tour?"

"Thanks for your encouragement. Maybe you're here because you've given up on your dreams. I'm here because I'm chasing them."

That clearly stung and Burt immediately regretted his comment. Doug had given up on his dreams of a pro life and he did have some remorse that he was entertaining gringos instead of chasing his dream on any tour. He snapped back at Burt.

"Enjoy your fish. I don't care how foolish you are as long as you do your job here."

They ate the rest of the meal in silence or meaningless small talk. They walked back to the course in the gathering darkness and as they parted in the parking lot, Doug told him to be ready to start tomorrow.

"There's an all staff meeting at nine in the clubhouse."

As they walked into the staff meeting the next morning, Doug told Burt his talk would be in Spanish since most of the staff had only minor facility in English. The sales staff, the others who interacted with the tourist public could all get by in English, but the maintenance and grounds people had a marginal facility with English, so all meetings were in Spanish. If there was something that Burt missed, Doug said he would explain later.

The meeting was the first 'all staff' meeting of the fall tourist season, so the first order of business was to introduce the new employees who had recently joined the Puertos staff. There was a new receptionist from Cabo, and a new saleslady from Mexico City. There were several men new to the grounds keeping crew and two new women for the gardening team led by Maria Jimenez, the lady who Jose had told Doug to hire. Burt was the last to be introduced and everyone was very welcoming. They all laughed when an embarrassed Jimenez dropped her coffee cup on the floor while Burt was being introduced and someone joked that she had better stick to flowers. She scuttled off to get a broom to clean up the mess. Doug closed the meeting with some updated news about the development and the state of the economy in San Jose, how they would have to work

extra hard to attract the tourists away from the town core and the other golf courses along the corridor. After it was over Burt left the clubhouse to take his first look at the golf course that would be his home for the next six months.



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### **Part 3 - Chapter 22: Golf Lessons**

Burt's first client was already waiting for him at the practice range at ten the next morning. The course had a practice facility more suitable for the twin eighteen-hole champion course that had been envisioned. In fact Burt had never seen a better layout for teaching and practicing. The range itself was the centrepiece of the facility with twenty-five stations. Each was covered to protect the stations from the sun and the one rainstorm a year, and a plant covered lattice along the sides kept each platform private from the one next to it. Behind each mat there was a round table and two chairs and behind those a piece of furniture that looked like an entertainment unit. When opened, it exposed a 42-inch flat screen TV connected to a DVD unit, a small digital movie camera and a computer. Burt recognized these as the indispensable tools of the modern golf instructor. He correctly assumed that the computer would be loaded with the latest golf instructional software as well as hooked up to the satellite system.

But his real surprise was the driving range mat. Instead of the rubber or the outdoor indoor carpet he was used to, it was a six ft. by six ft. mat of real grass. One of the assistants would later take him to the back of the clubhouse where they grew the grass in chunks of sod to replace the driving range mats every couple of practice sessions or so, depending upon how badly the student beat up the turf.

Beside the driving range was a short game practice facility. It was fifty yards long



and maybe a hundred yards wide and had the same grass as the range. There were two large greens surrounded by a half-dozen traps set at different distances from the greens. The practice putting green was probably twice the size of the largest green Burt had ever seen, with a dozen holes, all located on the side of hills, in valleys and over mounds. Burt figured that if he could not get good enough to qualify for the open here he could never make it happen.

The whole thing was topped off when he noticed the lights on the ceilings over the tee boxes and realized that the driving range was lit for night use. This was going to be fun he thought to himself as he approached his first student.

“Good morning!” he greeted the man warmly in Spanish, “I’m Burt Van Royan, your instructor for this morning.”

The man looked at him a little confused.

“Hables Ingeles Usted?” he offered in mangled Spanish.

Burt laughed. He had forgotten for a moment that most of his students would not be Mexican, but rather North American tourists.

“I’m sorry! Of course we can work in English. Where are you from?”

The other man accepted Burt’s outstretched hand and introduced himself. “John Philips. Massachusetts.”

“Glad to meet you John.”

Burt figured John was in his mid to late fifties. He carried at least 30 lbs. more than his six-foot frame was designed for and Burt could see the package of Cuban cigars sticking out of his back pocket. He had read from the form John had filled out that he had a thirteen handicap, so Burt guessed this was not his first lesson.

“So let's get to golf and we can chat later?”

“Right, let’s do it,” John enthusiastically replied.

Burt handed John a 7-iron and dumped a bucket of balls on the grass beside the tee box. “Let’s see what you can do. Hit ten shots like you would normally do.”

Burt could see right away that he had the basics of the setup pretty much nailed. His stance was classic and he made exaggerated moves to ensure that his ass and chin jutted appropriately out as he looked down at the ball. His grip was neutral and he took the club back on a good plane. But from there he just seemed to lose it. His backswing was faster

than his forward swing and he hit the ball fairly square but with all arms, his hips following the swing rather than leading them. The ball went fairly straight, just not very far.

“So John, what is it you want to get from some lessons?”

“I need to hit it further,” he paused. “Like maybe twice as far.”

Burt agreed and was glad that John realized his weakness.

“Put the club down and let’s go look at some movies.”

When he was told he would be a teaching pro, Burt had put considerable thought into how he would approach his teaching and he had put together teaching aids that built on the lessons Bruce had given him. This was his first chance to try them on someone who was not a beginner. When they were seated at the table Burt inserted a DVD and started the movie with the remote.

“John I want you to watch this first player.”

What John saw was a hockey player making slapshots that rifled shots into the corner of the net.

“You ever watch hockey?” he asked a puzzled John.

“Sure! I’m a real Boston fan. Even had season tickets a couple of years ago.”

“OK, now watch this guy.” He advanced the video to another player who took the same slapshot but with absolutely no hip into the shot. The resulting shot hit the net but with no speed.

“So would this kid make the team?”

“No,” John laughed. “Even a Boston goalie could stop that shot!”

“Right, let’s look at another sport.” And Burt showed John the same thing in baseball and tennis. The former showing what happened when a baseball player swung with all arms and a tennis player did the same. He took each of the hockey, baseball and tennis swings and showed with mouse-made lines how the spines of the swingers stayed relatively stable throughout the swing. To finish he showed some golf swings that showed the same action of the lower body through the shot.

“You, John, are the wimp in these shots. Let’s fix that.”

They went back to the mat and as John reached for a club Burt stopped him.

“Nope, not those. This.” And Burt reached behind the entertainment unit and handed

John a hockey stick. “When you can hit a teed up ball one hundred yards with this we will move to real clubs.”

John was incredulous. “Who do you think I am? Happy Gilmore?”

“He won didn’t he? You have had lots of lessons John and you’re still hitting like a wimp. What’s the harm in trying something new?”

“Shit. What if someone sees me?”

“Just tell them you’re trying out for the Ottawa Senators. Practice away and I’ll be back in half an hour,” he said, pointing his head a couple of boxes away. “I have another lesson over there I need to start.”

Burt left a puzzled John standing on the tee box holding a hockey stick and he went over to another tee box where his second student waited.

His second lesson would be more of a challenge; a fifty something, recently retired woman from Minnesota who wants to be able to golf with her golf fanatic husband, but who has never golfed before. Burt figured his first piece of advice should be to not do it. Most husbands who spend their free time at the golf course are likely trying to get away from a wife, not welcome her with their Saturday morning golf group. Learning the game later in life is a challenge. He remembered what P.G. Wodehouse once wrote, “... Golf, like measles should be caught young, for if postponed to riper years could be serious...” But if she can get over the notion of golf as a way to save her marriage, she can enjoy the game so he’ll do what he can. As he reached the tee box he was surprised to find a very athletic, impeccably dressed and quite attractive woman, with her long blond hair done up in a pony tail that stuck out the gap in the back of her baseball cap. She greeted him in English with a huge smile.

“Hi. I’m Joanna Lundstrom.”

He gripped her hand. “My pleasure. I’m Burt Van Royan. I’m the guy who is going to ruin your life by introducing you to the game of golf.”

She laughed with a warm smile. “Golf has already ruined my life so don’t worry.”

Burt wondered what man would leave this woman for the golf course. “Well, then we have nothing to lose do we?” He picked the 7-iron from the set of new Pings at the back of the tee box. “Nice clubs.”

“A Christmas gift to myself.”

“You have good taste. Have you ever swung a golf club before?” he asked looking at the unscathed iron.

“Only at my husband.”

Burt looked up in surprise.

“Just kidding. No, golf was never my sport and I never had the time or inclination to try it.”

Burt sensed she wanted to talk a little. “What is your sport?”

“I’m from Minnesota. What do you think? I am a skier – downhill and cross country.”

That explained the great shape she was in.

“When I was younger I raced and I’ve been a ski instructor and patroller for the last twenty years. Do you know what that is?”

It was Burt’s turn to laugh. “I’m Canadian. We have the odd ski hill around!”

She returned his laugh. “Sorry. I’ve skied many times in your mountains. Whistler. Louise. Blackcomb. I’ve done them all. That is, when I was not working. I just retired as V.P. of a marketing firm in Minneapolis and my husband and I bought a place on the sixth fairway. So I guess if I’m going to live on the course, I’d better learn something about the game. My friends told me to never, never learn golf from your husband.”

“Is he down here as well?”

“No, he hasn’t retired He’s a banking executive so he doesn’t figure he has to retire to get in all the golf he wants. He’ll be down for a couple of weeks in March, but other than that it will be just me and the girls.”

“Girls? You have some friends or children with you?”

“My three cats. With our careers we never had the time for children.”

Burt figured the conversation was getting personal enough so he brought it back to golf. “Ok Joanna, if you have taught skiing you know how difficult it is to learn sports later in life. How would you approach teaching someone your age skiing for the first time?”

“Well, the first thing I would do is ensure they have the right expectations. I can teach them not to fall down and give them the skill to enjoy the out of doors, but they will not likely ever be doing double black diamonds.”

“Right. It is the same with golf. You obviously have some athletic ability so I will make sure you can enjoy the game but you have to have realistic expectations of the game you will have. Only five percent of all golfers break a hundred, and you’re not likely to make that group, at least following the regular rules of golf. But I’m getting ahead of myself here. Let’s start learning the swing.”

He went over to her golf bag, put the 7-iron back and pulled a pail with a long stringy mop in it from behind the entertainment unit. He stuck a tee in the ground where it would be placed to practice drives, pulled the mop from the pail and wrung it out a bit. “I want you to take one hundred swings at the tee with this mop. Full swings. Take the mop all the way back and all the way forward. Like this.” He took the mop and made a few full swings with it and handed it to her.

“I can see that I could have saved a lot of money by getting my clubs at Home Hardware instead of Nevada Bob’s,” she suggested as she hefted the mop in her hands. “Nice balance. This must be a custom grip?” She took a swing. “I assume there is a purpose to this? Is there a grip or a stance I am supposed to use?”

“Nope, just swing it and try to sweep the tee off the tee box. Have fun. I’ll be back in 15 minutes to see how you are doing.” And he left a very astonished and amused Joanna and returned to an equally amused John.

He could immediately see that John was now swinging the hockey club with every muscle in his body, trying to get the ball to go the required one hundred yards. He was getting close, maybe seventy to eighty yards now, and was so focused upon the effort that he didn’t even see Burt come up behind the tee box.

“Not bad,” Burt offered. “I just got a call from the Oilers. They have picked you up on waivers.”

John took a towel and wiped some sweat from his forehead. “It’s too hot down here for hockey! And no one, not even Happy Gilmore, could hit a golf ball a hundred yards with a hockey stick! You show me,” John challenged and gave the stick to Burt.

Burt took the stick, put a ball on the tee and hit a slapshot that soared directly over the 100-yard marker and landed at the 120-yard mark.

“I guess you have to be Canadian to do that right?” a surprised John laughed.

“No, you just have to be able to get all parts of your body working together at the

moment you hit the ball that's all. You were only using your arms and not the strongest part of your body and you saw what happens when you only used your arms for a slapshot. So let's try a slapshot with a golf club now."

Burt pulled the bigheaded driver from John's bag.

"Nice club. Where did you get this one? Toys R'Us?" Burt had always been amused at the efforts of club makers to make driver heads bigger and bigger.

"Hey," John laughed. "That just cost me \$600 at the pro shop back home. It has the latest and thinnest titanium face, the lightest shaft on the market and the MOI adjusted to compensate for off centre hits."

"Wow... maybe we should just let it hit itself. Let's see what it can do. Remember – just a slapshot, not a swing like you have been taught all your life."

John stood up to the ball, stuck his ass and chin out, examined his grip, and gave his ass a waggle.

"Stop, John. I didn't say take a golf swing. I said take a slapshot. Hit this driver just the way you were hitting the hockey stick."

"But my hands were not together and I did not take a full back swing?" John whined.

"Now you got it. Put your hands wherever you want and swing however you need to do to put that 'puck' through the back of the net.

This time John grabbed the club like a hockey stick and took a slapshot at the ball. He hit the ball cleanly and the ball rifled two hundred yards straight down the fairway.

"Holy shit!" John exclaimed. "How did I do that?"

"Magic. Hit two hundred more like that and I'll be back for the next step in your metamorphosis to a golf Houdini."

"Thanks. Didn't you guys in Canada kill him?"

"Nah, it was your U.S. healthcare that toasted him," Burt retorted as he left John to his slapshots and walked back to Joanna.

He could hardly keep from laughing at the sight of a perfectly dressed and coiffured dignified senior woman swinging a wet mop at a golf tee. He noticed a group of gardeners was watching as well, including the woman who dropped her coffee cup this morning at the staff meeting. He caught her eye as he walked by the group and he wasn't sure whether it was look of confusion or anger; but there was something he didn't like.

Joanna noticed none of this, not the gardeners or Burt approaching. She was swinging with great fury and a strand of blond hair was hanging over her eyes.

“Someone you are angry at?” Burt interrupted her in mid-swing.

“Yeah. I haven’t touched a mop in thirty years and now I’m paying you \$50 an hour for the privilege.”

“Hasn’t anyone told you yet that golf is a humbling game?”

“I’ve heard that but I’m not sure this is what they meant,” Joanna offered, giving him back his mop.

“Tell me Joanna. What is the hardest thing to teach a beginning skier?”

“How to fall without killing yourself.”

“Ok, that one does not apply to the golf course unless there are free drinks from the drink cart. What’s next?”

She thought for a moment. “Well I would guess the up and down rhythm that allows you to carve a turn?”

“Right. It is the same in golf. Once you have the rhythm the rest is simple. Let’s try the mop again.”

He stuck the head in the bucket to get it wet and handed it back to her and she reluctantly grabbed it.

“You like Freddy Couples?”

“Yeah, a sexy guy!”

“Ok, now swing the mop and say ‘Freeeddy’ as you take the mop back so the cotton rope on the head slings behind you, and ‘Coouuples’ as you swing down and the momentum of cotton rope changes direction and ends up pointing in front of you. Try it.”

It took her a few tries, but soon she was swinging the mop freely back and forth as the momentum of the cotton rope on the head of the mop changed the direction of the rope from pointing behind her to pointing in front of her.

“Good job. You have now mastered the fundamentals golf. That’s all for today. See you tomorrow? Ten AM OK?”

“Sure. Do I need to bring my vacuum cleaner? Or maybe my dusting swifter?”

“No, just your sense of humour. See you tomorrow Joanna.” And he went back to John.

By now John was having some fun slashing away at the ball with his driver with no thought to the appropriate golfing form he had been taught through endless lessons.

“How’s it going John?” Burt asked as he approached the tee box. He noticed that John’s hands had crept up closer together than a hockey stick slapshot would be, finding the natural balance point of the long driver.

“Well it is strange, but I am hitting this driver pretty good. As far as I ever have, and sometimes farther. Once I found the rhythm of it I’m pretty consistent.”

“So why don’t you hit it like this all the time when you play?”

“Are you kidding? I’d be laughed off the course! My grip is wrong. My stance is not right. I look like a dork!”

Burt handed John a DVD in a plastic case. “We’re done today John, but I want you to watch these videos tonight. We can talk tomorrow. Can you come at 10 am? We’ll work on the tee box some more and you and I and the other student I am teaching will go out and try what you have learned on the course. You OK with that?”

John nodded and took the video. “See you tomorrow.” He picked up his clubs and walked towards the clubhouse.

Doug met Burt as he walked into the clubhouse to get a bite to eat. The deal was that he only had to teach half a day, so the afternoon was all his own and he thought he might try swinging a bit himself. That slapshot he did with John told him his knee was not yet recovered from the surgery, but he thought a few gentle shots wouldn’t hurt the healing.

“Hockey sticks? Mops?” Doug cornered him as he walked in the door. “Where the fuck did you learn to teach golf? Walmart?”

“Did they complain?”

“No, but John is in the dining room telling all his buddies that you are nuts – crazy Canuck he is calling you.”

“And the woman, Joanna?”

“She just got in her car and left. She was shaking her head and but had big grin on her face so it can’t be too bad. But Burt, these are the people we need to take care of. They own all these houses around the golf course and if they don’t visit here and spend their money we are all fucked. You don’t see a lot of Mexican schoolteachers eating or golfing here.”



They walked into the dining room together and Burt waived at John as he said something to his friends and pointed at Burt.

“Look. I know this appears a little unorthodox but wait until they have had a few lessons before you write me off eh?”

Doug looked dubious.

“I’ll make you a deal. If John and Joanna are not satisfied, more than satisfied, I’ll teach any way you want me to. Let me try my way first. At the very least John and Joanna will have some entertaining stories to tell over their margaritas.”

“No kidding. OK, go for it. If you can do something with those two I might even take lessons from you myself.”

They sat down at a table in the clubhouse dining room overlooking the first hole. They both ordered coffee, Doug a clubhouse sandwich and Burt an enchilada. Doug started the conversation while they waited for their food.

“Tell me more about this senior tour thing? Do you really think you can get through the qualifiers? For that matter how are you going to get into a qualifier? Have you ever won anything?”

“Those are a lot of questions. On the getting in part, that’s easy. They have a clause in the qualifying requirements that lets any state champion have one try at qualifying. I won the California junior championship when I was sixteen so that makes me automatically eligible to enter the qualifying tournament in California. Making the tour is another matter all together. To answer that question, I don’t know if I am good enough. That’s one reason I’m here – to find out.”

“So that’s why the deal is you only teach in the mornings right?”

“Right. Half the day is helping others be better and half the day is getting better myself.”

Their food came and the conversation turned to Mexico.

Burt started. “I read in the paper there was another mass murder down in Nuevo Laredo. Any chance that stuff would reach here?”

“Not really,” Doug replied. “Most of the places where there is trouble are either the home areas of one of the cartels, or a border town where the cartels fight over pipeline control. And most of the killings are between gangs. That school kids’ thing last year was

unusual. Ordinary folks are occasional collateral damage, but the violence is not aimed at them. We get the odd robbery around here, but nothing violent that I recall. Anything like that is usually between the tourists themselves down in Cabo.”

“So no effect of the forty thousand plus killings here?”

“Oh lots of effect! For every killing reported in some border town, ten North American tourists decide not to come to Mexico to buy or a take a holiday. Look around this place. Less than half the golf course lots are developed and the second eighteen of the golf course is on hold. The financial world meltdown hasn’t helped; although most of the buyers down here aren’t worried they might lose their jobs. Besides, most Mexicans know someone who has been affected by the drug trade, through either the violence or his or her livelihood. I’ve lost a couple of cousins and some good friends from my old neighbourhood.”

Their food came and Burt started into his enchilada. “What neighbourhood is that?”

“I was raised in a Puebla slum, we call it a barrio here, and many of my friends from those days were sucked into some aspect of the drug trade. It was the way to make more money in a month than an ordinary job could give you in a lifetime. That’s the Mexico problem right now. The trade is so lucrative it ensnares politicians, police, military and everyone else who tries to live on a Mexican public sector wage. Even good honest people turn their backs to the trade when some of the money gets to their own communities. There are cartel families who sponsor schools, hospitals, and sports facilities in their province, things the government never did. Even here in San Jose I would suspect that drug money in some shape or another has built most of the private tourist infrastructure. It’s rumoured that an international arms dealer and a couple of cartel leaders have palaces in the hills above San Jose. I don’t know for sure but the guy who built this,” Doug waved his hand over the course and buildings “probably used drug money of some sort.”

“That makes sense,” Gord offered between bites of his food. “The facilities go way beyond what any normal bottom line independent developers would fund. That teaching practice facility is way over the top.”

“Don’t complain or it might go poof and disappear!”

“So who is the owner anyhow? Does he ever come here?”

“His name is Jose Gorges and he is a manufacturing kingpin based in Puebla.”

“Is he into the cartels?”

“There are only rumours that he has something to do with some of the cartels. Since the two years I have been here he has hosted at least four meetings of individuals that are known to be cartel leaders, but I’m pretty sure he isn’t involved in any drug running or anything like that. But there is something there for sure. Maybe he is just a peacemaker?”

“Does he play golf?”

“No, he built a golf course because he hates the game!” Doug answered sarcastically. “He’s as addicted as anyone else to the game. When he comes we close the complete facility so that he and his entourage, mostly bodyguards, can have the place and the course securely to themselves.”

“Maybe he’d like a lesson? I have a spare mop he can use!”

They both laughed and quietly finished their lunches while enjoying the view over the golf course and the grounds from the dining room window. Burt noticed the group of gardeners working on the cactus garden below their window. “Who is the tall woman with the black hair?” he asked Doug.

Doug craned his neck to look down into the garden. “Oh, that’s Maria Jimenez, the head gardener. Great gardener, but a little strange.”

“What do you mean? Is she not local?”

“No, that’s part of the strange thing. She came here a couple of years ago from a job managing the gardens for a big estate near Mexico City. She has a university degree in business and literature and a Masters in Horticulture so what she is doing here in San Jose del Cabo is beyond me.”

“People could describe us the same way Doug. This is a pretty nice place to live and I’d say she has a great job if you like flowers and cactus. So I don’t think it makes her too strange to want to be here.”

“Oh that’s the normal part, mostly normal anyhow. So how about this.” He started ticking things off with his fingers. “Despite the efforts of half the more mature male population of San Jose del Cabo she has never accepted any invitation for dinner or anything else.”

“That may just be good taste,” Burt interjected.

“There’s more,” Doug suggested moving to his second digit. “She lives by herself in a casita by the beach eight kilometers up the East Coast Road, right where the road leaves the sea. That is OK I guess, but she drives back and forth on an old Honda XL250 and goes so fast she apparently scares the shit out of all the roadside chickens between here and Cabo Pulmo. Fifty-two year old women are supposed to be grandmas that their grandchildren drive around!”

“Ah, your Latino macho is showing Doug! I think you’re just upset that she’s slender. An obvious rebellion against Mexican female tradition.”

“True. We do like a little meat on our bones, but there’s more,” he continued moving to the third digit. “One of the bus boys who lives up there was on the beach fishing one morning and he watched her doing some sort of weird martial arts thing. Apparently she does it each morning before she comes to work.”

“Well that is weird,” Burt agreed, suddenly very interested in this lady.

“In the nude!” Doug choked the words out through a fit of laughter. As the other dining room patrons looked over at him, he leaned over to Burt and in a conspiratorial tone he whispered. “But here is the worst!” He paused for effect. “She plays golf!” And they laughed so hard the tears were running down their cheeks.

Over the balance of their coffee, Burt was able to extract the information that Maria had asked for permission to use the range during off hours. She apparently comes in the middle of the night and hits balls from the lit tee boxes into the dark range. One of the security boys secretly watched her one night and reported back to Doug that her swing was the ugliest thing he had ever seen on a golf course.

“Strange lady that,” were Doug’s last words as they stood up and left the dining room.



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### **Part 3 - Chapter 23: Settling into Paradise**

Doug went to his office and Burt went back to his apartment. He had not had time to unpack much of his personal things yet since he had been focusing on his first morning of teaching. He thought the morning's lessons went well. From his own study and the lessons he had from Bruce, and many others earlier in his life, he had developed both a teaching philosophy and some teaching strategies.

The philosophy came in many ways from his eastern martial arts training and was simple. The first part of his teaching philosophy was that the object is for the club head to meet the ball with the desired effect, distance, accuracy or whatever; not to follow a large set of swing rules that golf instructors make up to keep their profession going. Everybody is different so you should do what feels right for you. That is why he gave John videos of Lee Trevino, Chi Chi Rodriguez, Arnold Palmer, Moe Norman, Jim Furyk and Freddy Couples. These are great golfers that most modern instructors would tear apart. John's problem was he was trying to be too perfect rather just letting his swing take him to the right place. The second part was that the game was supposed to be fun and the rules of golf were ruining the game for far too many people. He would teach Joanna a new game. One where you teed it up for every shot, picked the ball up when you had had enough, and throw the ball from deep sand traps.

In terms of technique, once someone had a good stance and grip, he would really only teach two maxims, find your rhythm and see the club head strike the ball. The rest would take care of itself without too much thinking. He agreed with Ben Crenshaw when he said he was "five inches from being an outstanding golfer – the the distance between my two ears."

"This teaching gig is going to be fun," he thought to himself as he sat down on the chesterfield and looked out over the Sea of Cortez and the golf course. "I'll have time to heal. The weather is wonderful. The accommodation is superb. It is only November so the heaviest tourist and teaching season had not started yet, and I have my afternoons free to work on my own game. I can practice down here until May and head up to California

to practice on the course where the qualifying tournament would be held. No problem.”

Most of his things had been shipped down from Canada earlier and it all had been piled in the corner of the living room. He decided he would spend the afternoon getting his apartment in order. He wanted to practice some Wing Chung, but that was part of the old Gord, not the new Burt. So he had yet to figure out how he would let yoga replace the energetic and stress relieving martial arts workout. He was already missing his bass guitar and karaoke stereo set up. But those were also part of a previous life. He had gone to some “Beginner’s Blues” workshops back in Ottawa to see if he could learn the blues harp. How hard could it be? Three inches long and only ten holes to choose from. He had found that while playing “Oh Susanna” on a diatonic harp was a good way to start, real blues playing was far more complicated than he had figured. He was fascinated by the instrument and had brought some harps and some instructional books with him. He had selected a few songs to try and learn from the blues pieces that were loaded on his iPad, so this at least let him do some music. There was a good stereo in the apartment and he went over and hooked up the iPad to the amplifier and picked out his “harp songs” playlist and started the music. He began to unpack his belongings to the wailing of Little Walter’s ‘Juke’.

He started with the easy part, the clothes. Mary had bought the clothes she thought he would need and they were all packed and sorted neatly, so it was easy for him to put them in the drawers and bedroom closet. Most of it was golfing attire; shirts, pants and socks. There was a week’s worth of underwear and three sets of light cotton pajamas. She knew he liked to work out so there were two sets of workout clothes; shorts and top and a tracksuit. She had put in a couple of nice cashmere sweaters and even a hoodie. For footwear there were two pairs of golf shoes, one traditional two tone Foot Joys and the other an Ecco “Freddy Couples” style. She had packed a nice pair of Nike track shoes for the gym, a pair of sandals, and a pair of dress shoes. He opened a suit bag and found a tropical suit that matched the shoes, with white shirt and tie to match the suit. He wondered where she thought he would be using that in San Joe del Cabo but he hung it in the closet anyhow.

He moved to the other personal items that were shipped down. He already had the iPad with the preloaded music. The stereo had now moved on to Downchild Blues, “A

Feelin' so Good.” He discovered that Mary had shipped down a whole collection of harps, twenty three of them, sometimes two in each key. There was also one chromatic harp although he hadn't tried it. Again, he wasn't sure how Mary thought he would need all of these harps, but from her perspective it was part of the new life. He couldn't be a blues harp player unless he had the instruments. “That's fine,” he thought to himself as he put them away in a cabinet under the stereo, “but what do I do when someone asks me to play?”

Mary had also picked out a library that she thought Burt should have. From the details that old Gord had been told about the old Burt, he wondered if Burt read at all. Mary argued he would have to be able to at least provide a partial explanation as to why a college dropout had Ph.D. level knowledge, so avid reading was the answer. As he put the over one hundred books on the shelves he was amazed at the breadth of titles. Apparently he was a regular reader of prize-winning fiction; the titles included all the books shortlisted for the Booker prize for the last ten years. He liked biographies and even had a copy of the most recent biography of Steven Jobs. He had quite a collection of books on Eastern philosophy, supposedly, he figured, to explain his mystical teaching methods. Of course, he had most of the top books ever published on golf. He came across a 1964, signed copy of Jack Nicklaus's “Golf my Way.” And all of the books he put on the shelf were used.

He was impressed. “I might even read some of these for a second time!” he chuckled to himself. He stood back and admired the full bookshelves as Charlie McCoy's version of “Walkin' After Midnight” came on the stereo. He listened for a moment and wondered if he could ever get that good.

He moved on to the hardest part that he had left to last.

As Mary had promised, most of the materials that were stored behind his stereo wall at the house had been saved from the fire and ingeniously hidden in various ways in his large golf bag. She had told him the methods and he now started extracting them all from their hiding places. He had stored all of his ingredients in some sort of powder form so they could be indefinitely preserved. This made both the hiding and the recovery easier. His bags would have been given a cursory screening coming into Mexico, but since not many people smuggle drugs into the country the screening was not very thorough.

Combined with Mary's ingenuity in disguising things, all the things he had ever needed to fulfill his role with the Agency were here in the bag.

He had several requirements for the products he had used over the years.

First, they had to come from a natural source, mostly either a plant or an insect. The reason for this was simple. As organic products they had necessary and useful properties such as being dissolvable in water, often naturally occurring in the human body and designed by nature in the first place to kill or maim.

Second, they had to be something he could 'cook' to a higher concentration than normally used in a natural setting. Some of his extracts were deadly without manipulation but most required some basic kitchen chemistry to prepare.

Thirdly, the powders had to be disguisable as an everyday item, especially one that could be taken as a carry on item on an airplane. He had used antibiotic capsules, pain pills, and even foot powder as disguises in the past.

Fourth, they had to produce a naturally occurring collapse of some part of the human body that led to death in varying amounts of time. Some deaths occurred instantly while others could take as long as a week to transpire. The toxin had to be rendered undetectable in the human body by the time someone got around to doing a toxin screen on the body, if they ever did.

With these requirements as filters, through extensive research, sometimes travel to strange places and private experimenting, he had put together a collection of 24 poisons that he used to practice his trade and all were hidden in some fashion in his golf bag. The Advil was really Ricinus Communus from the castor oil plant. The deodorant Veratrum, the Corn Lily. The sunscreen was Puss caterpillar venom. The hand cream Oenanthe Crocata, Hemlock Water Dropwort. An energy bar was really Machineal sap. The handle of the golf umbrella contained the sap of Mexican coral snakes. The red tees in the bag were the genus Galerina of the little brown mushroom group. The Top Flite balls were actually Actonitium, Wolfsbane. A ball marker from the Moose Jaw golf course was Atropa Belladonna, Deadly Nightshade. And so on until he had all twenty-four spread out over the kitchen table. He knew what they all were by memory and now he just had to put them somewhere where they would be hidden and available. It would look odd if he put them all in the same place, so he spread them out, putting them in places in the apartment



where they would appear natural; golf with the golf stuff, medicine in the medicine cabinet until everything was in its place. He knew what it all was but he had a fleeting and humorous thought that there would be an interesting series of disasters if he were to suddenly get Alzheimer's and forget which one was the real deodorant and which one would kill you.

There was some comfort in having his materials around him after the events of the last few months. Now it made him think about why he even had them. He had told Richard he was through with that business, but the Agency had set him up down here in paradise for a reason other than his recuperation and his preparation for the Champion Tour Q School. They would contact him at some point and give him the details of a job. But for now he was just going to enjoy his new life. Reality could hit later.

It was dinnertime and getting dark by the time he was satisfied that his apartment was in order and he decided to walk down to Vulture's by the harbour to get a fish dinner.



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### **Part 3 - Chapter 24: Vultures**

The shock of hearing his name had largely worn off as she tried to figure out if he really was the Burt she once knew. She had spent most of the day working on the gardens behind the driving range in order to get a better look at him and to hear his voice. He had seen her and showed no sign of recognition, but she probably would not recognize herself she looked so different from the young girl who left California so many years ago. He passed right by her on his way to the range and they looked at each other, but he had

sunglasses on so she could not see his eyes. That was what would tell the story for her. She would never forget those eyes and while age and gravity can change a person, the eyes remain the person. Not just the colour and hue, but the kind of person they are seeps from the eyes. When she sees his eyes she will know.

She often stopped at Vultures after work before she headed to the casita. The owners, Jan and Frank, were a young Canadian couple from Calgary and she liked to hear them talk about home and hear news from the country she left behind so many years ago. They often had the bar TV connected by satellite to one of the Canadian cities so she could keep regular tabs on the politics, economy and weather back home. She even managed to watch a hockey game or two, especially during playoff time.

“Hola Maria!” Frank greeted her as she walked into the palapa-covered bar.

“Hola Frank. Cómo estás?” While they knew she spoke some English, Frank and Jan were working hard on their Spanish, so she spoke Spanish with them, correcting the odd word or grammar as necessary.

Vultures was a typical tourist type beach bar, with a palapa roof and open to the rolling surf a hundred yards away. A collection of a dozen or so tables and chairs were randomly placed on the smooth sand floor.

“Pacifica por favor,” Maria asked as she sat down at the bamboo bar. “Looks quiet here tonight?”

Most patrons of Vultures were either people who came off their yachts for a land meal or residents of the homes and condos around the golf course. The odd person came over from San Jose del Cabo, but with the abundance of good restaurants there, most tourists stayed and ate near their accommodation.

“Yeah, never much action here in November. It will pick up around Christmas,” Frank offered. “There are few parties on the boats, but other than that it’s pretty quiet. How are things with you? Anything new at the club?”

“Not much, just some new employees. What wonderful fish is Jan cooking tonight?” Maria had discovered that Jan was a great cook and, in fact, was a graduate of SAIT in Calgary, one of the best professional cooking programs in Canada.

“Manuel brought in some nice snapper so she is going to grill some of that for tonight.”

“Ok. I’m in...” Maria offered and stopped in mid sentence as Burt ducked under the edge of the palapa roof and walked into the bar. He paused for a moment to take in the surroundings and his eyes stopped for a second on Maria and turned to Frank.

“Hi, you serving dinner tonight?”

Frank replied in his own brand of Spanish and Burt laughed a friendly laugh and replied in English. “Ahhh, Canadian eh?” Burt announced as he offered Frank his hand. “Burt Van Royan. Most recently from Ottawa.”

“Frank Tisdale. Most recently from Calgary. Is my accent that bad?”

“Pretty much,” Burt replied, “But keep trying, you’ll get it.”

Burt turned to Maria who was sitting at the bar. “Hi, Maria isn’t it? I’ve seen you around the club,” he offered in Spanish as he took off the sunglasses he had been wearing when he came into the bar. He put out his hand. She took his hand and while she looked him in the eyes she held his hand longer than the usual handshake and when she realized that, she pulled her hand back like it had been burnt.

“Yes, and you are the new golf instructor from Canada. I watched you teaching that man to play hockey today.”

Burt laughed. “It’s Burt. Now if you could just tell me where I can get a sheet of ice?”

The wave of relief that Maria felt washed over her whole body and, like an adrenalin rush, changed her mood from somber to playful in seconds. This was not the Burt Van Royan she had feared. The face could be an aged Van Royan and the body shape was similar. But the eyes and the smile could never have come from Van Royan, no matter how he aged or matured. The eyes she saw now were not only blue, but also were kind and intelligent and led into a person who had a goodness that Van Royan could never achieve.

“Would you like a drink Señor?” Frank interrupted in his Canadian Spanish.

“A Negro Modela would be a good start,” Burt suggested, hoping that Frank could understand enough Spanish to get the order right. He turned back to Maria. “Your gardens are lovely. Where did you learn to do that?”

For the next hour, as they sat at the bar, Maria and Burt exchanged stories. Maria told stories about her time as a teacher and as gardener. She described the years when she

was studying horticulture at the university and how proud she was when she was awarded her Masters. As the beers multiplied she mixed lies with truth in ways that even confused her. She taught math and science, not English. She was born in Spain and came to the Autonomous University as a foreign student. She was never married and had no children. She loved music, especially old American blues music. She used to run marathons but developed a bad hip so she quit. She likes motorcycles and drives a Honda.

Much to her amusement she learned that he claimed to be originally from California but went to a small college in Montana on a golf scholarship. He didn't finish college and drifted into various business ventures until after his parents died in a boating accident. They left him a little money so he moved up to Canada to see if he could make a career in golf. He eventually received his CPGA teaching credentials and was a pro at a number of courses across Canada. When he realized he couldn't make much of a living at golf he became an insurance salesman and made enough money so he could now retire and pursue his dream of making the Champions Tour.

Dinner came and they moved to a table on the sand floor. She spit her tortilla soup across the table when he described his two years in Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan and how he played this weird course north of Regina one day. She heard that he learned his Spanish as a youngster living near the Mexican border and going across the border to party. She raised her eyebrows when he told her he had studied Spanish at Claphorn College before he left without getting his degree. Apparently he had a huge collection of blues music that she had to hear. He had been in a car accident a few months ago and his knee and face were still healing but he was back to normal. He did push-ups.

And after the fish they moved to tequila.

Maria could not remember when she had enjoyed an evening so much. His lies were certainly entertaining, but there was more than that. She really didn't know who he was, certainly not the Burt Van Royan he claimed to be, but she was getting to know the man he was and she liked him and was oddly attracted to him, whoever he was.

"So tell me how you learn golf with a hickey stick and a wet mop – I mean hockey..." She was beginning to slur her words just a bit and had a passing thought that she hadn't been drunk in twenty years.

"Are you interested in gulf – I mean golf?" They both laughed.

“My father taught me a bit in Spain when I was younger. I often thought that it would be interesting to take it up in my old age.”

“If it is old age you are waiting for you have quite a wait,” Burt offered as he raised his glass to toast her. She smiled, appropriately demurred by the compliment. “But if you truly want to try it again I’d be glad to assist,” he offered. “Just bring your own mop!”

This time they both fell off their seats laughing. They were the only patrons in the bar so Frank and Jan just watched with amused looks on their faces as the two of them drank and talked and laughed. It was now close to 10 pm and with no other customers they would have been glad to close up and go to bed themselves, but they just could not interrupt what they determined was special event occurring right in front of their eyes.

As Maria and Burt continued their animated conversation, they were now loudly debating the merits of Memphis vs. Chicago roots in modern blues music, there was a lot of yelling and whooping from the beach side as a group of four young men in their late twenties or early thirties, came staggering into the bar. Frank recognized them from breakfast the day before when they had come in off their yacht demanding some “real breakfast. Bacon and eggs. Not that Mexican huervos shit.” They were apparently a group of young stockbrokers from New York having a bachelor’s party on one of the father’s yacht parked in the harbour. As far as Frank knew the yacht had not left its mooring in three days. Maria and Burt were sitting on a table close to the back edge of the dining area, so at first the group didn’t notice them as they lurched into the small area and sat at a table near the bar.

“Tequila, beer and food, por favor!” a tall muscular young man with a brush cut hair yelled over to Frank. “And four rib eyes, medium rare. Fries.”

Frank looked over at Jan and she nodded. She would have to get the steaks from the freezer, thaw them and fire up the barbecue. It was late for this, but the revenue from four full meals, not to mention the drinks, was badly needed at this time of year. He pulled a bottle of 1942 from below the bar and four tequila shot glasses and took them over and put them in the middle of the table.

“Hey, you speak any English?” one of the others asked.

“Si, pequito, a leetle Seenore,” Frank answered in his best spaghetti western accent. Another of the group took a quick glance at Burt and Maria as they listened to Frank and

tried to choke back their laughter.

“Well, we were having a little argument back at the boat. Maybe you can help,” the large one suggested as he poured the tequila all around.

“Si, eef I can Seenore,” Frank replied.

“We wondered how long it was going to take before you Mexicans killed yourselves all off. Herb here is a statistician, and he extrapolates that at the rate of the current murders, Mexico will be empty in ninety-two years. Bob over there,” he pointed to another of the group, a tall man with a clump of brown hair hanging over his eyes and throwing back a shot, “he figures that if we just sent the illegals in New York City home it would take another hundred years! What do you think?” They all laughed as more shots were poured.

Burt went to get up from their table, but Maria put her hand on his arm and shook her head.

Frank just looked puzzled. “I don’t know Seenore. I don’t understand that extrapo thing. No one is keeling anyone here!”

The speaker just waved him away and told him to bring some beer. Frank backed away and went to the bar to get the beers while the group continued their party. Maria and Burt tried to continue their conversation, but the four intruders ruined the energy of the moment, so they just sat quietly and finished their fish and coffee while Jan served the men the steaks.

“Hey look,” one of them said as she came out with a tray of steaks. “A blonde wetback! You busy later honey?” he asked as he put his arm around her waist.

“No hablo Ingles Senior,” she said as she pulled away and put the steaks down around the table and hurried back behind the bar. Frank said something to her and she went back to the kitchen and when she brought out the plate of fries he took them to the table. The big guy with the brush cut pushed him away. “We want her to serve us,” he ordered.

“She’s not available,” Frank replied in perfect English. No one at the table noticed.

“Fuck off and tell her to get back here.”

Frank put the tray down on the table and walked away, ignoring the yells from the table for Jan to come back. The big guy started to get up and follow Frank but the guy

beside him pilled him down. "Fuck 'em John. Let's just eat."

He reluctantly sat down again. The party gradually became louder as they all dug into the food, the beer and the bottle of tequila. Apparently they were all members of some sort of mixed martial arts club and in addition to the bachelor's party this was their annual boys' excursion to some warm place where they played golf, sailed and partied. Much of the conversation was a debate on the strengths of one form of fighting over another, and which one of them was the best, and who could kick whose ass and what was the greatest martial arts movie ever. Burt and Maria stood up from their table and went over to the bar to pay Frank. Frank didn't say anything, just gave them a shrug and a "what can you do?" At the same time the guys collectively threw a bunch of bills on the table and began to leave.

The four men left the dining area by the beach side and Maria and Burt left by the parking lot side. Maria comfortably put her arm through Burt's and they started to walk back to the golf course. She hadn't thought anything through yet, but she did know she had too much to drink to drive the Honda up the East Coast Road.

The scream was loud and came from the beach side of the restaurant. Burt and Maria gave each other concerned looks and they both rushed back into the bar and out onto the beach. They quickly assessed the scene. Apparently Jan had gone out to empty the garbage at the side. One of the boys had noticed her and tried to make a grab for her. Frank must have tried to intercede and he was now lying on the sand with a bloody nose. The big guy was standing over him in a half martial arts-half boxing stance. "Come on fuck up; show me what you've got. Are all Mexican's wimps like you?" And he pranced back and forth in the sand with his buddies laughing and encouraging him.

Frank started to get up but Maria rushed to him. "Stay back Frank. I'll take care of this," she ordered. Jan came over and helped Frank up and they backed into the door of the dining area while, to Burt's surprise, Maria went and stood in front of the guy.

"Go home to bed young man," she ordered in heavily Spanish accented English. "You have embarrassed yourself enough tonight."

The punch was so fast even Burt had trouble seeing it. But Maria just gently sidestepped it and the fist hit dead air.

"You're so drunk you can't even hit an old lady!" one of the others yelled and they

all laughed again.

The man feinted with his fist and took a swing with his foot and Maria just deflected it with her own foot. She still just stood there looking at him. Suddenly he attacked with a fury and she went into a crouch and deflected every swing he sent her way and with one jab put him down in the sand with blood running from his mouth.

“Holy fuck!” one of the astonished guys exclaimed. Up to this point Burt had just watched with fascination while Maria handily put the big one down in the sand. He realized that her reflexes were incredible. He noticed one of the guys had quietly circled around behind Maria and clearly intended to hit her from behind. Just as the guy raised his fist to strike, Burt stepped over and with one kick to the knee the man was on the ground howling in pain as he held a dislocated kneecap. By this time the big guy was back up and the others had joined the fray and there were arms and feet flying as Burt joined Maria. Maria put the big one down permanently with a toe to the solar plexus and Burt used the Wing Chun multiple-fist hit to knock another down gasping for air. Soon there was only one left standing and as Maria and Burt stood in their unique but different martial arts stances, he slowly backed away. Gradually the others pushed themselves up from the sand and they moved down the beach away from the bar and restaurant.

The two of them stood there for a moment, neither knowing quite what to say or do, and then they turned to each other and gave each other a high five and broke into fits of laughter.

“That was fun,” Maria smiled at Burt.

“Nice quiet place you have here Frank,” was all that Burt could say and they all broke into laughter and the tension of the event was broken.

“How’s your nose?” Maria asked in English.

“Fine, just a tap ... I’ll be OK.”

“Do you think they will come back?” Burt asked.

“No, I don’t think so. I heard one of them say they are leaving on the early plane tomorrow so I suspect they will all soon be passed out on the boat. I’ll call one of my friends in the Policia and have them watch the boat. If they try and come over this way they’ll miss their plane with a stay in a Mexican jail.”

Jan gave each of them a hug. “I don’t understand how you did it, but thanks. Your



next dinner is on us!”

“It wasn’t anything,” Burt offered. “But would you do us a favour and not mention this to anyone?” Maria added an enthusiastic nod.

Frank and Jan agreed they would keep the event to themselves and only tell the police that some guys were annoying. They won’t say anything about the fight. That would raise too many questions for both Maria and Burt.

As they slowly walked arm in arm back to the golf course they both had many questions.

“Nice kick to that guy’s knee,” Maria offered. “Where did you learn that?”

Burt was limping visibly. His knee was not totally healed. Or maybe he was just getting old, he thought.

“Road House,” he responded. “You know. Patrick Swayze? Sam Elliot took out one of the bad guys with a sharp kick to the kneecap.”

Maria looked at him with a doubtful smile.

“How about you? You learn all that in gardening school?”

“Uma Thurman. Kill Bill.”

They both laughed and the questions were over as they walked quietly to the entrance to Burt’s apartment. Nothing was said, no invitation, no modest demurring, as Burt opened the unlocked door and they went into the living room. Burt punched in an old B.B. King album on the iPad, turned to her, bowed, put out his hand and they started to dance slowly to “The Thrill is Gone.” Before the song was over they were kissing and Maria tasted beer, tequila and warmth. The last time she was kissed was with Jose on the seventh tee box at the Puebla golf course and that was rough and full of adrenalin fueled energy. There was no warmth or affection in that kiss over two years ago, just an urgent need for both to wipe out the memory of the previous five minutes. This was different. It was gentle and passionate, warm and affectionate, vulnerable and open and she wanted with all her heart to return it the same way. She had a fleeting thought that none of this made any sense. She had only known him for a night. He had the name and history of one of the people she hated most in the world and she was long past the giddiness of love she figured. But the thought was very fleeting as they moved to the bedroom and slowly took off each other’s clothes, crawled into bed together and gently curled their naked bodies

together. She had not felt this safe for many years and with her head resting on his chest and the strains of “Stormy Monday Blues” in the background, they both fell into a deep sleep.



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### **Part 3 - Chapter 25: Life in Puertos**

Three things surprised Burt when he woke up.

The first was that Maria was already gone. Not even a note. Had she not felt the same thing as he had? The second was they had not made love when they went to bed last night and how wonderful it felt. They had fallen asleep curled up in each other’s naked bodies. He remembered thinking how good her body felt for a tall, lanky, angular, bony and muscular fifty-something woman. The third was that he was surprised at how much his body hurt. Not only had he taken the odd shot in the brawl last night, but also he was becoming increasingly aware of some isolated arthritic spots that were especially bothersome in the morning. His knee for sure, a couple of fingers, a shoulder he had broken skiing years ago and the ubiquitous back problems all seemed be flaring up this morning and reminding him that he would be fifty-nine in two months. He wondered if carrying off the fifty-two-year old part of this masquerade might not become the hardest part.

He crawled out of bed, pulled on a pair of shorts and began his morning ritual. He literally limped over and put the kettle on before opening the sliding door to his deck. Clad only in a pair of shorts he went out to the deck and went through his new morning

ritual of Hatha Yoga for the spying eyes that might be looking. After a Bodum of tea he would go into the bedroom and privately go through his Wing Chun exercises for half an hour before breakfast. After the yoga and the Wing Chun his body would be moving more or less normally. It was a breakfast of fruit and granola, anything to try and look fifty-two, and out to the range for his first lesson at 10 am.

Joanna and John were both on the tee waiting. He told John to just hit some drives to warm up while he started with Joanna.

“Good morning Joanna. Ready to change your life?”

“Ha, sure!” she enthusiastically responded, holding a 7-iron in her hand. “Do I get to use a golf club today?”

“Sure. We’ll play a game as well. But let’s graduate you from the mop to nothing first. Come and stand on the tee box like you are going to hit a ball.”

He took the iron from her and she stood facing him.

“OK. Now I want you to pretend you are standing at the starting box at the top of ski hill ready to race down. How would you stand?”

Joanna went into a relaxed crouch, hands out front holding two imaginary ski poles.

“Good. So the first thing I want you to do before each shot is to take this stance. I can describe what you are doing if you want, but you already teach it in skiing. Athletic stance, knees bent, shoulders a little forward and weight balanced over the balls of your feet. It is the same stance for hitting a golf ball, so just start with that.”

Joanna stood there bouncing on the balls of her feet.

“Now. Hang your arms down; just let them hang loose from your shoulders.”

Joanna complied and her hands hung down over her toes.

Burt took the club and handed it to her grip first.

“Keep your left hand in that hanging position and grab the club.”

She grabbed the club with her left hand.

“Now without moving the left hand or its hanging position bring the right hand over and grip the club.”

Joanna did it perfectly. She kept her left hand and shoulder position and lowered her right shoulder to grip the club with her right hand. She used a ten finger grip but other than that she was now in picture perfect position to swing the club.

“That’s all there is to it Joanna. You are now a golfer. Stand up, walk away and now come back and tell me the four steps to get ready to hit the ball.”

She turned away and faced him again.

“Racing stance. Arms dropped like a monkey. Left hand grip. Bring right hand over,” she announced as she repeated the moves.

“Perfect!” Burt announced as he put a tee in the ground. “Now I want you to take this stance, pretend you are swinging that wet mop and hit this tee.” He watched her do it several times. She was still awkward but had the basic movements down. “Do that for ten minutes and I’ll be back.” And he left her to go to John.

“Morning John! How were the movies?”

“Morning Burt. I watched them. I recognized five of them; the sixth I had never heard of.”

“It doesn’t matter who they are. What two things could you learn from watching them?” Burt asked.

“Well, first, you can have a very unusual swing and still be good at golf! I mean Arnold Palmer doesn’t look like the golf digest centre fold, but you can’t quibble with success.”

“Ok, that’s one. Good. That guy you didn’t recognize has the most unique swing of the ones I gave you to look at, but he has been called one of the most precise ball strikers of all time. I showed these particular golfers to you for two reasons. One is what you suggested. They have different swings, not the kind that would get described in Golf Instruction Annual. What they can teach you in particular is that it is important to find the swing that is comfortable to you, not for imaginary golf announcers. The second is that all four of these golfers make great use of their complete body when they strike the ball. They have shorter backswings but put the full right side of the body into the hit. Just like a good slapshot. That is what you need to work on, especially since like most golfers; your body looks more like The Walrus than Tiger Woods. All I want you to do is get comfortable before you hit. Stand at the ball the way you want to, not the way a golf magazine tells you. Then, pretend every shot is a slapshot. So try that for a while and see what happens.”

For the rest of the hour Burt went back and forth between the two, adding a

traditional grip to Joanna's lesson and only suggesting to John that he kick his knee into the ball as he hits it. Then he took them both out onto the golf course.

He told Joanna that for the next month of golf she was to tee up every shot, even those on the fairway, and to just pick the ball up when she had enough on any hole. He even told her to just throw it out of the sand trap once. The goal of her game, he told her, should be to have fun, not follow the rules. At the end of the round she gave him a hug and said she could hardly wait to get out again she had so much fun.

With John it was just getting him to loosen up a bit, play like an overweight 50 year old and keep his expectations in check. He actually was greatly improved and told Burt he could hardly wait to get out with his buddies. He asked if he could keep the videos to show his buddies back home.

Soon after these lessons, the requests for Burt as a teacher started to pour in, both from the ladies living around the course and the senior gang John played with. Burt even organized a ladies tournament using the set of new "fun" rules he had taught Joanna. Over the next three months Burt was as busy teaching as he had ever been in the V.P. job. He stuck to his basic instruction on stance, balance and rhythm and found that was good enough for ninety percent of the golfers who wanted some instruction. Doug was thrilled since the volume of both lessons and play on the course doubled over previous years. Burt found to his surprise he was enjoying teaching and even felt his own game was improving. "It had better," he thought. "May is fast approaching."

Things with Maria did not progress quite as fast or well.

Throughout the first day, while teaching John and Joanna and while playing a round with them, he kept looking to see if Maria was with the other gardeners, but he never saw her. During the next two weeks he only saw her once, watching him from a distance while he was having his own golf "workout" on the range. When he went over to where she was standing she had already disappeared. He even went to Vultures several times over the next month to see if she would show up, but Frank and Jan said they had not seen her since what they now called "fight night at Vultures". The idea of a one night stand was not foreign to him, but he wasn't sure what happened to them would even qualify as that. Even for a typical relationship brush off, totally ignoring him, even avoiding him, was unusual. However, it was now nearing the end of January and he was

busy with tourists so while he was curious, he soon retreated into his own challenges. Between his teaching and his own practicing he was simply too busy to worry about what had happened. He started seeing more of her around the club grounds as she did her job, but she never recognized his presence.

He woke up in the middle of the night a couple of months after they had met and was sure he heard the sound of her Honda over by the course driving range. He remembered Doug had told him she sometimes came and hit balls in the dark so he quickly dressed, crept down to the range and hid behind a palm tree in the dark. She had just arrived at the tee box and under the light he could see she had a full bucket of practice balls and what looked like a 5-iron. She started hitting quickly with no preliminaries or practice swings. Burt was so surprised that he almost gave himself away. Her swing was a funny one for sure and he understood why the staff member who saw it would say she was not much of a golfer. But he recognized the stance, the set up and the swing. A single plane swing. The club starting eight inches behind the ball. A crisp hit every time as far as he could tell. He watched until she hit the full bucket of balls into the dark void and went over to the tub of balls to get another one before he crept back to his room. A short time later, still wide awake as his mind churned over what he had seen, he heard the Honda disappear towards the East Coast Road.

The next morning he went out to the range just to verify his suspicions. The balls were picked up at the end of the day so the range was fairly clean except for the balls that she hit the night before. He walked out until he reached the 200-yard marker where to his astonishment he found one hundred fifty balls all clustered within yards of each other. It was as if someone had taken a couple of buckets, dumped them on the ground and had hit each other as they landed they scattered around. He thought for a moment and then walked back to his apartment, and before the day's lessons started, he sent an email to Mary. He called Doug and asked if he could borrow his jeep that night to go into town.

He waited until he saw her leave for the day and drive up the road before he climbed into the jeep and followed her. He didn't have to follow too closely since Doug had told him previously that her casita was at the point where the East Coast Road left the beach. He figured he could find that even in the dark.

Maria was confused. She had affairs before and they were fun and one or two were

serious enough to go on for a few months, but her secret, the events of her past and her emotions had ultimately sabotaged her potential for commitment. She had basically set up her whole life to be immune to a normal life and normal love. Her emotions were buried very deeply. But this liar from Canada had touched something. She didn't even know who he was and they had not even slept together. "Well, slept together but nothing else," she thought. "He is only here for a few months and I have a new life here now. I don't need to pretend that love exists anymore." So she figured that the most prudent attack on her confusion was simply to ignore him. Several nights she tried pounding out golf balls. She had discovered the very pleasurable habit of going to the range and hitting some balls. That had worked to clear her thinking before but all it did now was to get her thinking about him more and his publically stated goal to make the Champions Tour. And there was the fight. She had never seen anyone as fast as she was until she watched him that night. There were just too many unanswered and unresolved issues for her to simply leave it alone. Not the least of which was why some guy was trying to pretend to be the person she hated most in the world. She needed answers but had no idea how to get them so she just ignored him and went home every night to her casita. Maybe he would just go away.

Her other stress reliever was to drive the XL250 as fast as she could up the coastal road to her casita. Focusing on not going off the edge of the road into the sea had a way of taking her mind off things like strange men. And this night she drove faster than normal.

It was still a couple of hours to sunset and the road was empty as she roared, if a 250, two-stroke can roar, out of the parking lot and towards the East Coast Road. The first part of the road went along the golf course and around the empty lots and some multi million dollar homes that were built on the course. She drove slowly through the populated part and when she hit the end of the settled part she gave the Honda full throttle and the fun began. She was so focused on the road and the turns and gravel that she didn't see the jeep following her at a distance. When she was halfway to the casita she stopped, as she often did, at the edge of a portion of the road that looked down into a small bay where some fishermen had pulled up their boats. She took off her helmet, sat on the bike and enjoyed the scenery and the sound of the waves caressing the small

beach. She heard, rather than saw, the jeep behind her since there was a sharp turn in the road just before this place where she liked to stop. The sound was enough to make her turn towards the curve in the road behind her just in time to see the jeep fishtail around the corner and without slowing down head straight for her bike. A normal person would have been either crushed under the wheels of the jeep or sent careening down the steep cliff to the rocks and the beach below. Maria saw it all happening in slow motion and, as she looked the driver in the eye, she leaped sideways off the bike just before the SUV slammed into the XL and sent it over the cliff. The jeep sped away up the coast road, leaving her unhurt but fuming at the side of the road.

She had a fleeting thought the hit was purposeful, that the driver wanted to hurt her. "That's silly," she thought. "Who up here would want to hurt her?" She walked over to the cliff edge and stood looking at her bike spread out on the rocks thirty yards below. She looked up as she heard the sound of another vehicle approaching the corner. This one was coming at a much slower speed. As it came around the bend she saw that it was Doug's jeep and as it came closer she saw the man pretending to be Burt Van Royan was in the driver's seat.

"Need a lift, lady?" he said as he leaned over and opened up the passenger door. He saw the shocked look on her face as he climbed down from the jeep.

"I was almost killed. Some idiot in a jeep," she smiled. "Another idiot in a jeep. He hit my bike."

They both looked over the edge where the bike was lying in the rocks. "Shit. How did he miss you? You look OK. Well, you're not driving that home now," he observed. "Get in the jeep and I'll take you home."

Maria pulled herself up into the jeep and following her directions they reached the parking spot above the cabin in ten minutes. They silently walked down the steep path to the casita and Maria opened the door that joined the porch to the rest of the cabin and beckoned Burt inside. "I think I need a drink," she announced as she went to a cupboard above the kitchen sink and brought down a bottle of tequila. "Here. Pour us a couple and let's sit outside on the veranda."

Burt did as he was ordered. It was still light outside and the view over the Sea of Cortez was spectacular as the sun started to set behind them.



“Wow!” Burt exclaimed. “How did you find this place?”

“A long story,” she replied as she sat silently nursing her tequila.

Burt was not sure how to start the conversation they needed to have. He had to start with the assumption she actually did want his company and that there was some good reason for her ignoring him for the last two months. He started the exploration on some common ground.

“So tell me. Uma Thurman aside, what form of martial arts was it you were using that night at the bar?”

“Hwa Rang Do.”

“Ha what? I’ve never heard of it?”

Burt had indeed heard of it. It was one of the two ancient forms of martial arts the Agency taught its employees. He recognized it as the arts that his North Korean attacker had used. He had learned another form of fighting, from China rather than Korea, but he decided to let Maria explain it to him.

“I don’t know much about it except that it comes from Korea. I was taught it by an older lady who was a cook in the place I worked in in Puebla.”

Burt didn’t know how much to believe of what she was telling him.

“Road House and Sam Elliot aside. What kind of training do you have?”

“Wing Chun. It isn’t as obscure as your Ha Wa something but I have been studying it for a long time and actually was inspired to learn it by a movie. It is the form of martial arts that Bruce Lee used.”

“So which is better do you think?” she asked as she downed the last of the tequila in her shot glass.

“I guess it depends upon the practitioner, but I would put my money on Wing Chun.”

“Really?” she teased. “Let’s find out?” And she bounced up and jumped off the porch and laughing, took a stance on the flat sand ten yards from the porch.

“You can’t be serious? Look at me. I’m just and old man! What satisfaction could you get from whacking me around?”

“Quit the sandbagging. I’m as old as you are.”

“Ah, but much prettier. I’d rather make love not war,” he offered as he took a classic

Wing Chun stance opposite her.

“You had your chance!” and she took one of the thirty traditional “one step” attacks common to Hwa Rang Do. To her surprise he easily sidestepped the attack.

For fifteen minutes they sparred back and forth, alternately blocking each other’s jabs and kicks while sending off their own. They each had opportunities to inflict some kind of pain, but each held back. Burt knew from sparring at the Agency that the tall, balanced and narrow Wing Chun position that kept the elbows close to the body was a good defense against the more aggressive Hwa Rang Do attack, but had a fleeting thought that he was very glad she was not using a Jang Bang or staff. That would hurt. Both slightly out of breath but invigorated, they stopped.

“Shit, I’m too old for this,” Burt exclaimed with a laugh. “That was fun, but I think I need another tequila,” and he started to go back to the porch.

Maria laughed a little breathlessly as well and followed him back to the table and chairs on the porch. She poured them each a full glass of the Don Julio Anejo. “For an old man you’re not bad,” she offered. “How old are you anyhow?”

“Do you think our relationship has reached such a personal stage that I should share such secrets with you?” He paused and looked at her. “Fifty-two. You?”

“Same,” she immediately replied.

“Hey! We’re getting somewhere! Next question is mine!” He decided to jump right in. “Why have you ignored me for two months?”

She paused and took a sip of her tequila. “It’s not a good idea for me to establish deep relationships. We all have secrets we need to keep and if we enter relationships they only last if there is some degree of honesty. I’m sure there are things that you want to keep to yourself?”

“Maybe,” he offered. “So you ignored me because you were afraid of letting out some deep dark secret about your past? If that is the case wouldn’t the worse result simply be that I would just not like you anymore and our relationship would be over?”

She paused again before she answered as if she was only thinking of the answer now. “I don’t know why. We only knew each other for a night. But I think that in a perverse twist of logic I didn’t want our relationship to be over, so I decided not to start it.”

“Maria?” he reached over and touched her hand “It has already started!”

She pulled her hand away. “Yes, already started with lies and deceit and hidden secrets. Look me in the eye and tell me you had never heard of Hwa Rang Do before. You knew every move I was going to make.”

They just looked defiantly at each other across the table.

Burt broke the silence.

“OK. Are we going to start telling each other the truth now?”

She looked less defiant but didn't reply.

He continued. “Once we start absorbing each other's history and life's experiences, the knowledge will bind us together stronger than any lovemaking. It is history and the intimate knowledge of a partner that keeps more relationships together than passion or love. Do you want to go there? Maybe the secrets we imagine each other having are more palatable than the secrets we actually have?”

More than thirty years of hiding and subterfuge suddenly caught up with Maria. “I am at a point in my life where I need to find honesty. I'm willing to try and find it with you, if you are with me.”

Burt took a big slug of his tequila. “She has no idea what she is asking,” he thought. But he knew he could not go the rest of his life living a lie. Or at least living it alone. “How do we start?” he asked pouring another tequila for them both.

“Let's ask each other questions? Sort of like the truth or dare we played as kids? The answers have to be truthful, or else. You go first,” she offered.

“Or else what?” Burt asked rhetorically as he paused to think where he should start. He knew he was not ready to tell her everything and she was not ready to know, but any question he asked would reveal some detail about his past or his true identity. For a start he figured he could stay on topics that were part of his new identity.

“Right. Each of us has to answer truthfully? You agree?”

“Correct. I do.”

“OK. How did you learn to swing a club like Moe Norman?”

She looked up at him surprised. “You've been spying on me!” she announced visibly pleased. “When I was very young he came to a golf course near where I lived and showed me how to hold the club and swing. I've learned things from others, but he gave me the

basics. And ever since, golf has been a good walk spoiled.”

Burt figured that didn't give him much he could not have guessed. “Interesting. So you read Mark Twain?”

“Actually it was 'The Allens' in a 1903 book on lawn tennis. My turn now.” And before he could show his surprise at her knowledge of golf she continued. “What's your real name?”

He looked at her surprised. “What do you mean? My real name?”

“I know you are not Burt Van Royan. I met him once and I can assure you are a better golfer and a better person than he ever was. So who are you?”

Burt was surprised and laughed to himself at how pissed off Mary would be that her carefully crafted disguise was so easily found out. He was not quite sure how to respond or how much to tell her.

“I had another name in another life. My parents named me Gord.”

She threw him an exasperated look. “At this pace we'll both be dead before we ever learn anything. Maybe we could agree to answer with just a little more detail?”

“Alright. It's my turn now.” He took a sip of the tequila. “There is an old Newfy joke; you know what a Newfy is?” She nodded hesitantly. “Well, this Newfy guy was going to Spain for a holiday and he was worried that he didn't speak Spanish and couldn't get along so he asked a buddy who had been there for some advice. The other guy told him to “speeeak liiike thiiis – verrrry slooowly” and he would be understood no problem. So the guy lands in Spain and like a good Newfy the first thing he does is go to a bar. The waitress comes up to him and he says. “Iiiii woouoould liiike aaaa driiink pleeease.” The waitress looks at him surprised and says. “Aaaaaare yooou frooom Neeeeewfooundland?” And the guy answers equally surprised. “Yeeess. Iiii aaaam!” “Meeee tooooo!” she replies excited. The guy thinks for a moment and says to the waitress. “Buuut liiif Iiii aaaam frooom Neewfooundalaand aaand yooou aaaaare frooom Neeewfooundlaaand...whhhhhy aaaare weeee Speeeeakiiiiing Spaaaaaniish?”

Maria laughed so hard she spilled her drink and had to pour another.

“See here's my question,” he announced, suddenly quite serious. “If I am from Canada and you are from Canada – why are we speaking Spanish?”

For a moment Maria was so shocked she didn't know whether to laugh or cry. All

she could say was, “How did you know?”

“That’s your next question. I have a Ph.D. in Linguistics. I speak five languages fluently and would recognize a Canadian Spanish accent anywhere no matter how long someone had been pretending that Spanish was their first language.”

Maria switched to English. “It seems our questions tell more than our answers. You’re a professor?”

“Not quite.” Burt switched to English as well. “I have worked at a university but I just know languages well. From your English I would guess that you are a westerner. Manitoba or Saskatchewan?”

She ignored his deduction. “It’s still my turn. So you are not Burt and you are a Gord. So where are you from and how did you end up here with another man’s name?”

“That’s two questions. The short answer is that I’m from Ottawa. I work part time for the Canadian government and due to some work I did for them they needed to stage my death and put me in a “relocation” program with a new identity. I wanted to have a golf career so the Van Royan identity was perfect.”

She looked at him amazed. “Whoa ... too much information in one sentence. It raises more questions! But what happened to the real Burt?”

“Apparently he just disappeared thirty years ago so it was convenient for him to just reappear. He was involved in organized crime so we just assume is he buried in the Arizona desert somewhere.”

They were both silent for a moment. Burt couldn’t believe that he just told her about Gord and the Agency. This was crazy and going way too far too fast.

She broke the silence. “Well at least that is way too strange to be a lie. I’ve lost track of whose turn it is so why don’t we just forget the twenty questions? We’ve both been caught out on our forged identities and somehow we need to fill in each other’s historical blanks.”

“Is this what you really want to do?” he asked. He wasn’t sure he wanted to go much further until he knew more. “I agree that relationships can never be built on secrets and lies. But unless they are strong relationships they can also be destroyed by the truth. We already know things about each other that no one else, at least no one else down here, knows. I assume that you, like me, have a good reason for the subterfuge. What if we

each learn more and don't like what we learn? What do we do?"

"You mean it would be like the old spy joke? I can tell you but I'd have to kill you?"

Burt winced. "Hmm, what I mean is that I certainly feel something around you I have not felt for a long time, if ever. Do we know that our relationship is well enough developed, strong enough, to withstand more truth?"

Maria looked over at him, pushed herself up from the chair and walked over to him. She touched his cheek and reached down and kissed him. "Or maybe we could just work a little more at that relationship?"

He stood up and hand in hand like two school children they walked into her small bedroom.



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### **Part 3 - Chapter 26: The Truth Will Set You Free**

During the next two months, their relationship was displayed for all of San Jose to see. Maria often stayed at Burt's apartment and they had wonderful off days at the casita. She stopped hiding her golf skills and spent hours on the range and the course with Burt, getting back her old form while helping Burt find his. They even bought new twin Honda XL250s. On occasion they went further north up the road and had tacos and beer on the beach in Cabo Pulmo. Neither pressed the other for any additional biographical details than they shared that night at the casita, and both seemed content to live the moment. The secrets they already knew were only between them, and the conspiracy of lies that they shared was as much entertainment as it was relationship glue. They spoke only Spanish in public, to Doug and to the rest of the people around the resort. Maria was still the Spanish gardener from Mexico City who had the funny golf swing. Burt was still Burt, and just a Canadian golf teacher who was mad enough to think he could make the Champions Tour.

Their lovemaking was mature and satisfying. She experienced something more than just sexual satisfaction for the first time in her life, and he found to his surprise that he had left most, not all, of his dysfunction back in Ottawa. He fantasized that Mary and Richard had done something else to his body to make him return to fifty-two and that they secretly had a miracle cure for ED that they were not telling anybody. But they would have to have known that he suffered from it in the first place and that made him shudder. What ever was happening, it was working and if it wasn't for his aching knee, hands, shoulders and back he was actually starting to believe he was fifty-two.

Both would probably agree that it was on the golf course where they had their most fun, and by April they knew each other's games intimately. They played every day after work and they hit balls into the dark every night and when they kept score she won. Her shot making precision was breathtaking. She was also a good teacher; watching and helping Burt improve his own game.

Early in April, over dinner on the porch at the casita one night Burt raised the issue of the qualifiers. "So, do you think I am good enough to make it?" They had often talked about his aspiration for the Champions Tour.

"I think you have the skill now. Your putting is average. Without that belly putter you would really suck. The rest of your game is professional level as far as I can tell. But I have never played on the tour so how would I know. I do know that at that level the game is mostly played in the space between your ears."

"Bobby Jones right?" He guessed. They often traded golf quotes.

"Ben Crenshaw!"

"I am going to give it a try you know. The California Q School is in June so I'll go to California in May and practice some of the courses. Will you come with me?"

Maria didn't know how to respond. She would love to go away with Burt, or Gord, or whoever he was. They had long passed the point where they questioned their commitment to each other. But she only had a forged, and out of date, Mexican passport. It was good enough for civil purposes in Mexico, but it would never pass U.S. immigration. She had thought of applying for a real Mexican one but that would put her at real risk of exposure and probably jail for fraud or something like that. She didn't know what to do so she just stalled.

“We’ll see. I have my work here. Besides,” she asked as she grabbed his ass with one hand, “aren’t good athletes supposed to give up sex during competition?”

“Naw,” he responded with his own hand. “The priest coaches of Catholic high schools in Quebec thought that up. In the schools I went to it was mandatory to have sex before competition, darts, pool, bowling, football, doesn’t matter, sex is necessary. A required part of the athletic curriculum.” He changed the subject. “Do you ever think about how you are a little different than anyone else? I mean in the sports you play, golf, martial arts. Do you ever wonder why you are so good at golf? Ever wonder why you and I can take on a bunch of twenty-somethings?”

“Good looks? Talent?”

“Sure. Some of that I guess. But there is something else. Let me show you. Stand up.”

He stood facing her. “This is a little game we used to play where I worked. We called it palm slapping. Put your right hand out and put the palm on top of mine. The goal is for me to pull my hand out from under yours and slap the top of your hand. If I can do it I win a prize – a kiss from you will do. Let’s try it.”

As much as he tried he could not act fast enough to slap the top of her hand. This was actually a test the Agency used to find people like them people with special reflex skills. He had never paid much attention to the technical description of the syndrome; he just knew from conversations with Mary that it was an identifiable trait of many outstanding athletes. As soon as he saw Maria fight, and saw her hit a golf ball, he knew she had the syndrome and, in fact, had it to a far greater level than he did. If Richard knew her special skills she would be a recruit for sure. Over the past couple of months he had been researching the syndrome on line and now wanted to explore it further.

“Tell me. When we fight do you see things in a sort of slow motion? Can you actually see the golf club strike a ball?”

Her answer made him laugh. “Sure. Doesn’t everyone?”

“No Maria, they don’t. You have a special ability, a sixth sense in a way, called spatial recognition and you have a high degree of this spatial intelligence. It has been evident in some people, mostly great athletes, but it has only been recognized and formally studied in the past decade. A researcher at Harvard had a friend with it when she



was younger and was so intrigued she did her Ph.D. on the topic. It is now recognized that there are many with the talent; musicians, athletes, mathematicians, even debaters and speakers, anyone who needs an extraordinary sense of the space around them, someone who benefits from the ability to see things before everyone else does. It isn't that you see things in slow motion; it is that you see them faster than others. You have one of the most highly developed senses of space that I have ever seen. I have it as well, just not as much as you."

She listened intently. "What do you call it again?"

"Not me, the researchers. It's called spatial recognition or spatial intelligence."

"And you have it too?"

"I was chosen for my work with the government because I have it."

"What does it mean? Am I a freak? And what kind of government work needs fast reflexes? The bureaucrats I have met aren't known for their speed."

He ignored the bureaucrat comment. "It means nothing if you don't use it. But it does explain your extraordinary skill at Hwa Rang Do, and your ability to ride your bike faster than a normal human being and, most importantly, your special golf talents. One researcher defined spatial intelligence as the ability to grasp changes that are happening and anticipate the next change; the ability to make quick decisions; to size up all the relationships in a fast-changing environment and understand them; a heightened consciousness of surroundings and, both the intentions of the people and their anticipated actions. In Canada, [Wayne Gretzky](#) has been recognized as having the gift of spatial and situational intelligence. While you clearly have a special level of spatial differentiation or intelligence, you're not a freak. Probably half of the population has some measurably higher level of this ability; it is just only a small minority that have it to your, our, level and a smaller minority who actually use it in sports, music or something else."

"So why are you telling me this now?" she asked.

"No particular reason Maria, except that perhaps it is part of the two of us slowly dissecting our past and our present so we can grow our relationship. I'm guessing there is much yet we haven't shared, so maybe finding we have this trait in common will help us move forward?"

"Are you not happy where we are?"

“Indeed. These past few months have been amongst the happiest of my life. You can’t know what it has meant to be able to share my passion for music, for golf, for Ching Wung, for you. But I am done here in a month. What do we do? Just treat this as a summer fling and move on?”

She didn’t say anything and he didn’t add that, with his time running out, he suspected his assignment would come soon and he wondered how that would change his circumstances and their relationship. In the past he never stayed around very long after finishing an assignment and there is no reason this one, whatever it was, would likely be any different. Without either of them answering the question it became rhetorical and the conversation shifted to other conversations.

To Mexican violence? They agreed that drastic action needs to be taken in the drug wars. To Tiger Woods? She said he was a despicable human being to cheat on his wife and was finished. He said that Tiger would be back with a vengeance in 2013. To U.S. politics? They both laughed at the antics of the Tea Party and the Republican candidates. They watched “The Tempest” with Helen Mirren on her generator run entertainment system and they agreed that it was bad, well below Mirren’s usual standard. Then they went to bed with the sound of the Cortez surf and the warm April breezes quickly lulling them both to contented sleep.

Maria heard the sounds first, but with their special intelligences Burt wasn’t far behind. “Did you hear that?” she asked sitting up in bed.

“Sshh, yes. Some gravel rolled down the pathway from the road. Probably an animal or something. Stay here. I’ll go look.”

Burt was a trained agent. While he had a special, non violent, role with the Agency he had undergone annual “training camp” with other agents where he learned and practiced the tradecraft of a skilled field agent. The camp was run by NATO and had agents from every democratic country in the world, all with some degree of spatial intelligence and all with different roles in their countries. Most never had to use the things they learned and practiced. For instance, while Burt was a crack shot with a pistol he had never even held one outside of the annual training camp. And that event in the Korean washroom was the first time he had ever had to use the martial arts he was taught. All of the agents enjoyed the war games they played. Concealment. Stealth. Paint guns.

Great fun when the prize was a beer at the canteen when it was over. Burt missed the camps, so while tonight he was anticipating a wayward goat, he pretended for fun that he was back at the camp somewhere in the Adirondacks and he had just detected the “B” team trying to sneak up on his “A” team. On the balls of his feet, he moved silently out of the sea side of the porch and into the shadows of the building on the side opposite the path from the road. He knew what to look for in a raiding party. Not people, but shapes and shadows, a bend of light that looked out of place, a silence that was too oppressive, a subtle change in the wind pattern. So he went into high spatial awareness. They had taught him that with practice and concentration he could actually heighten his ability. He wondered for a moment how incredible Maria would be if he could teach her this skill.

The moment he started to concentrate he knew something was wrong. As he hugged the shadows of the building, his senses told him there were at least three or maybe four spatial anomalies around him that were either four black bears or four people. One was on or near the path from the road. One was approaching the back door from the path side of the casita; one was on the other side of the building from Burt. He could see feet when he bent down and looked under the stilt raised floor of the casita. He sensed a fourth but he couldn't place him. He carefully worked his way to the edge of the building. He looked at the back door and the path and was shocked to see a man slowly working his way down the path, holding a gun Burt recognized as a nine mm Glock. Suddenly this was not just a war game for Burt. For some reason he and Maria were under attack and he assumed that if the guy on the path was armed, so were the others.

“Shit,” he thought to himself. “These are not local robbers. Someone must have found out where he was and they were coming after him. Now Maria is going to be caught in the crossfire of his past.” His last distracting thought was, “I’m too old for this shit!” as he started to map out his plan in his head to take on three, maybe four, armed young thugs on an isolated beach in Mexico. He figured the one at the back door was his immediate concern so, in a low crouch, he slowly inched his way around the building. The gravity fed water tank was between him and the guy at the door so he was fairly hidden until he was six feet away and he could see the guy was concentrating on trying to open the door without making a noise. Burt quickly moved around the tank and with one brutal hit to the man's temple he was out. Burt caught him with one hand and the gun

with the other and slowly and silently lowered him to the ground. At least now he had a weapon, a Glock he was familiar with from his training. But there were still two, maybe three more to deal with. He glanced nervously up the path and he could see the shadow of the guy who had stopped half way down the trail. Burt figured he must have been designated as a lookout, so maybe he won't even come down here. He turned his attention to the one who was on the far side of the casita. He looked under the building again and watched through the building legs as the man climbed the three steps up to the porch. He had left the door open so this man would be able to easily and silently walk into the casita. Their plan was pretty good; one in by the back door, one by the front door and a lookout. Burt thought for a moment. What else would some professionals do? The suspicion of a fourth man niggled at him, but he had to move quickly to deal with the man on the porch so he crept around the side of the casita to approach the porch from the front. By the time he arrived he could see he was too late, the man was already somewhere inside the casita, armed and looking for him. He had to act quickly. He was starting to charge in and save Maria when he heard a thump and a groan from the living room, and the sound of someone and the gun hitting the floor. He realized with relief that Maria was not exactly helpless. He suspected the man would not wake up for a while. Suddenly another man moved out of the shadows and stepped into the living room.

“Of course!” Burt cursed to himself. “The fourth man, a backup to the one who entered. He stayed hidden in the shadows of the porch as the man yelled at Maria from the doorway.

“Stop!”

Burt couldn't see but he suspected Maria was either reaching for the gun or was going to give the other guy a second blow for good measure.

“Fernandez! I got her!” he yelled, probably at the guy who was supposed to come in the back door. Burt was struck with the realization that his presence was still a secret.

“Fernandez! Come in!”

Then he heard Maria. “I recognize you. You were the one who tried to run me off the road a couple of months ago. That was not an accident apparently.”

“Stay back lady. I know what you can do with your feet and hands. Fernandez! Where are you? Get in here.”

“What are you going to do? Kill me if I move? Isn’t that why you are here now?” Maria knew now that Burt was still a secret so she was stalling the man as long as she could.

“If you harm me you know that Jose will track you to the ends of the earth. All of your family’s heads will be found rolling down the middle of the freeway in Guadalajara!”

Burt was amazed at her tone and the conversation. "Who was this Jose?" he asked himself. "Heads rolling down freeways? They were here to kill her?"

“Ha, who do you think has sent us tonight? Soon you will just be another person buried without your head on a beach and....” were the man’s last words before a whack from Burt’s fist on his neck sent him to the ground, gun rattling out of his hand, knocked out cold and on the floor before he could finish his sentence. Burt surveyed the scene. Maria was standing in the middle of the living room with a relieved look on her face. Two men were out cold on the floor and one out cold by the back door and in trying to digest it all he forgot about the lookout at the road. Suddenly he saw Maria look past him towards the beach and before she even muttered a warning, before the sound of the shot reached him he rolled sideways and brought his own weapon up and fired. His double tap shot the man between the eyes and in the heart. There was no mistake when his training instincts took over.

And then there was silence. Burt lay on the floor for a moment and with a body that felt its full fifty-nine years, he moved to his hands and knees and stood up. “Shit, I’m too old for this.” He moved over to a still shocked Maria and they hugged each other for a moment as the adrenalin subsided.

“What do we do now?” she asked as she looked down at the two men on the floor and the one outside with a hole in his head.

Burt tried to think. “Look, these two guys and the one out by the back door will be out for a while. These are professional killers so they came here to do damage and there is probably someone waiting for a report. When these guys wake up they will know that he won’t want this to be public, so they will pick up their partner there and go home to their boss.”

Maria explained in an apologetic tone. “Burt, they were here to kill me. I know who

sent them and I know why. There are things I haven't told you."

"There are still secrets we both have Maria," Burt offered.

"Like how you can hit a forehead from thirty yards with a handgun?"

Burt laughed. "Yes, that is one of them. If it is any consolation this is the first time I have ever fired a gun at anyone. But let's not worry about that now. Let's just get out of here and go back to my place and figure out our next step from there. Whoever it was will likely deduce I was the one who helped you tonight and will come after both of us, but not likely in such a visible place as the golf course. Not tonight at any rate. I figure we have some time to figure out our own next step. Let's go."

They left the bodies where they had fallen and worked their way up the path to the road. The jeep that had tried to run Maria off the road was parked there. Burt took the keys and threw them over the cliff into the arroyo figuring that a walk back to town would slow them down even more. They straddled their bikes and quietly and slowly drove back to the marina and the golf course and hid both bikes under a tarp near the driving range. They approached Burt's apartment carefully but a recognizance showed nothing out of the ordinary so they went in. All was in order. They left the lights off.

They sat on the chesterfield looking out over the sea and the golf course. Burt poured them each a Bolera rum and they sat while the adrenalin further subsided and the liquor spread its warmth.

"There are things I need to tell you Burt," Maria quietly offered.

He leaned over and kissed her forehead. "Tomorrow, Maria, tomorrow." She rested her head on his shoulder and to his surprise she was asleep before she had finished her drink. "Everyone has their own coping mechanism," he thought, as he laid her head gently on the sofa pillow.

He wouldn't sleep for another hour at least. With nothing else to do he wandered over to computer and turned it on and was surprised to see that he had two email messages. With his new identity he had not had many people sending him messages. He opened up his mail, put on his reading glasses and saw that one was from Mary and the other from Richard. He opened Mary's first. Mary's was characteristically brief.

*"I think I have found what you were asking for. It took a while but all the*

*information you need to know is in the attachment. Hope you're in love!!*

*Love, Mary*

For the next hour he read both the attachment to Mary's message, and then Richard's memo. He was especially transfixed on the details in the attachment Mary sent. At one point he looked over at Maria and quietly sobbed to himself. After reading and rereading he took off his glasses and sat down on the chesterfield beside the sleeping Maria. Just as the sun started to rise over the sea in front of them, he had worked out his plan for the next 24 hours and he went back to the computer and sent a message to Richard and Mary. Then he printed one of the attached files and used the special disk he kept in the desk drawer to wipe clean the memory of the computer.



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### **Part 3 Chapter 27 The Assignment**

Marie woke shortly after dawn to find Burt sitting beside her with a fresh cup of hot coffee. "Good morning," he offered as he handed her the coffee. "How are you doing?"

She sat up and took a sip of the coffee. "Thanks. Now tell me last night was just a nightmare and didn't happen at all." She looked at him. "Did you get some sleep?"

"No. I had some things to do. Some plans to make. We have lots to talk about, but let's just get to the essentials right now." He pushed the print out of the attachment towards her on the coffee table. The attachment was a full missing person file on one Melinda McDougal. It included photos from Saskatchewan and from Montana as well as from the NCGA championship in California. There were statements from her father, Rebecca, Coach and others. There was also a full confession from Henry, Burt's caddy

describing the details of the assault. Apparently Rebecca had never given up trying to find Melanie and her most recent inquiry to the RCMP missing persons branch was only last month. Maria scanned the file.

“Shit. How did you get this? So you know everything?”

“Yeah, I thought all along you were a blond. Can I ask you some questions?”

Maria nodded.

“This was an awful thing to happen, Maria, but there is nothing I read in here that suggested you should have been the one to run away. So the obvious question is why you disappeared? But I’ll leave that for a later discussion. However, I noticed that in the interviews with your Dad he didn’t seem too worried. I don’t understand?”

“I let him know I was OK and when some time had passed I contacted him. We used to get together each year at a different Mexican tourist resort. One of the other employees at the estate saw me with him once and started a rumour that I liked older men,” she added with a chuckle. “But he was the only one who I contacted. I had few good friends, Rebecca my best friend and caddy, Coach, a high school teacher. Other than them, after my Granny died there was just Dad and me. He understood why I did not want to come back.”

Maria started to cry, and Burt wanted to ask her why she could not go back, why she thought that somehow all that happened was her fault and she had something to be ashamed of. Instead he just put his arm around her and she leaned on his shoulder. “It’s OK. We can talk more later. For now let’s deal with the current crisis.” Burt shoved a photo of Jose over the table to her.

“How do you know this man?”

She looked at the photo and shoved it back.

“We worked together at the estate. I knew him when he was a teenager and for a while before I came here I worked for him managing all the gardens of his estate in Mexico City.”

“Why is he trying to kill you?”

“I’m still trying to figure that out myself,” she offered. “I heard what that guy said about him sending them to get me, but he is the one who got me this job and gave me the casita to live in.”



“Were you lovers?”

She looked at him, suddenly annoyed. “No. We were not lovers. I saved his life once.” And she described the event at the golf course and the killing of the three cartel members. She left off the adrenalin-fueled sex right after.

Burt thought for a moment. “Isn’t there a pretty strict vengeance code in the cartels? Like; you kill any of mine, I’ll kill you and yours sort of thing?”

Maria didn’t say anything.

“So would not some bad people be after this Jose for the killing?”

“I’m not sure. I know he was into the drug scene, but he seemed to have some sort of protected status with the cartels. I don’t know why.”

“I do, but we’ll get to that in a moment. What I’m trying to figure out is why he is trying to get you, and do it in a public way so that all, or maybe just one, cartel would know that he did it?”

Maria suddenly sat up straight on the couch. “I think I get it,” she exclaimed. “You are right about the vengeance thing. The cartel would never let him get away with killing some family members, no matter how important he was. So he had to find a way to get the heat off him. Right after the killings he arranged for me to go into hiding here. And set me up in that isolated casita. The bastard. He was not giving me the property at all. He would get it all back after I’m dead. He probably said I was the killer, and had disappeared. Then, after a reasonable time had passed, he could tell them after an exhaustive search that he found me and he would take care of it. He would send them my head, literally.”

“That makes sense,” Burt offered. “He would be clean.”

Maria looked at him. “Burt, I know him. He won’t give up until I’m dead. He has killed many people.”

“I know all about him Maria.”

She looked puzzled. “Why would you know this person?”

“I’m supposed to give him a golf lesson this afternoon,” he explained.

“And then kill him.”

For the next half hour Burt told a shocked Maria the details of what he really did and who he really was.

“I kill people,” he announced.

“I saw that,” she replied.

“No, not like that. That was the first time I ever killed someone with that kind of violence. I am trained to do it, but that is not how I work.” He took her to the kitchen and pulled out some of his biological and insect weapons and explained how he used them to make a death appear natural. He explained that his assignments were Canadian, NATO, and host country approved and never involved collateral damage like women and children.

She asked if he had ever killed a woman and he just replied that women are capable of evil as well.

She stood up and walked over to the sliding glass doors overlooking the patio. “It seems we both have much to explain about our lives over the past thirty years, if we ever live long enough to share it with each other.” She looked over and saw the nine mm on the kitchen counter that Burt had taken from her assailant at the casita. “What? You’re going to shoot him on the putting green?”

Burt had forgotten about the gun. “No, that would not be very subtle would it? And it might make it difficult for us to get away. Besides, while a gun may be the only way I could shoot par, it would ruin my student friendly reputation as a teacher.”

He selected two items from his collection of herbs and toxins. “This item,” he explained picking up a tee marker, “is a totally non toxic biological. The name doesn’t matter to you. This one, he picked up a blue tee that was longer than any of the others, “is a toxin extract from a South American ant. In diluted form the Indians commonly use it as an analgesic. In concentrated form and ingested it will stop your heart in seconds and it will appear to be a massive heart attack. I’ll use this on Jose, but since we don’t want old Jose to shuffle off his mortal coil while we are still around I need a delay mechanism and here is where the plant extract comes in. When I stew the two together, the plant extract binds with the insect toxin and renders it harmless, so you could have as much of this bound together substance in your body and nothing would happen.”

Maria looked puzzled. “I don’t get it? You have a poison and you make it harmless?”

“Aha, it seems that the plant extract is dissolved in the human body before the insect

toxin. So the combined substance gets into the bloodstream and a week to ten days later, the plant extract dissolves and separates from the toxin and voila! – a dead body.”

“Are you sure you only studied linguistics?” Maria asked. “Did you figure this stuff out all by yourself?”

“Pretty much. I have studied biology. But most of this stuff...” he pointed to the array of materials on the counter, “I have just figured out by myself.”

“So how are you going to get him to eat this stuff?”

“He doesn’t have to eat it. I just have to get a few molecules, less than a drop actually, of the concentrated toxin into his body to work. That’s why I have this.” He separated a plain male wedding band from the paraphernalia. “Take a close look at this.” He handed her a small magnifying glass.

She scanned the ring with the magnifying glass. “There’s a small pin on the outside of the ring!”

“Right. I put the combined material on the wee needle. I put on the ring very carefully and I shake hands with our friend. He’s a cooked goose. And you and I get the hell away from here.”

“Have you done this before?” she warily asked.

“The poison, yes. The escape, not exactly. I’m usually just by myself and I blend into the crowd. His fixation on your death, and probably mine now, sort of changes that. None of the assailants saw my face, but since you and I are somewhat of a public couple around here it won’t take long for him to figure out I was the other party at the casita. It should make for an interesting golf lesson.”

“What do I do?” she asked.

“You start your gardening shift at noon. Pretend like nothing happened. I doubt that he would try something in broad daylight with all the staff around. Pack a bag, go to any very public place, the dining room for example, and meet me at the bikes at 8 p.m. Maria Jimenez will be leaving Mexico for good.”

“And you?”

“I’ve got some things to do here; my own packing, make some other arrangements, cook up my stuff. I don’t teach until two so I may even be able to catch a couple of hours sleep. If I can I’ll join you in the dining room. But regardless, bikes at 8 pm. The timing

is important. Shower and get dressed here now if you want and let's spend the day looking as normal as possible."

They gave each other a long hug and a lingering kiss.

"I know I love one of you," Maria offered. "I just don't know which one."

After Maria had showered and changed into some work clothes she kept at Burt's apartment she went into the clubhouse and had some breakfast with the cooking staff. She tried as much as she could to be normal, but she was sure she must have looked a wreck after the previous night. No one looked at her strangely or said anything until two bodyguard types walked into the dining room for their own breakfast and saw her with the staff. They looked at each other and quickly left the dining room.

"Game on," Maria thought to herself.

After breakfast she went into San Jose Del Cabo. Ever since she had been in San Jose she had dealt with one Notario who had set up her bank accounts, her personal papers and had made the deed transfer for the casita and the property. She asked him to write out and witness a simple will. In the case of death or disappearance for more than six months, fifty-one percent of the property would be left equally to Doug Hernandez and the six gardeners she had worked with for two years. The other forty-nine percent and the casita would be left to a Melanie McDougal from Bumstead, Saskatchewan, Canada. She gave him the latter's contact details. What was left of her cash after he took his fee and the deed transfer costs would be left to the women's shelter in San Jose.

"I hope you don't plan to die soon Senorita?" he politely exclaimed.

"These days in Mexico you could never be sure!" she laughed.

This took half the morning and she headed back to the course to get ready for the afternoon's work on the gardens. She checked to make sure the bikes were still covered and safe and went back to the public dining room for a coffee.

Burt spent the morning cooking his mixture. To do this he had to gently heat both substances separately to a boil and bring them together for a low simmer for two hours. "I should have been a chef," he chuckled to himself as he gently stirred the mixture. He was cooking a half-cup of the mixture even though he only needed to dip the point of the needle in the liquid, for no other reason than it was awkward to 'cook' smaller amounts. It wasn't hard to do and he had done it several times before. He had to be cautious of two

things of course. One was that he did not inadvertently touch either the original insect toxin or the mixture. It could be as deadly for him as for the intended victim. The second was the disposal of the unused mixture. He couldn't just flush it down the toilet. That would result in a whole lot of Roosterfish heart attacks over the next few weeks.

Fortunately once the mixture was cooked, it had a very short half-life and two hours after cooking it became completely benign and can be thrown into any garbage. Two hours would give him enough time to take care of Jose and the left over material would be harmless by the time anyone found it in his apartment.

By the time he was done it was noon and he gently placed the ring with the dipped needle on a paper towel on the kitchen counter. He wouldn't put it on until just before he went out to meet Jose. He had not slept for thirty hours now and he poured himself another coffee. He had some pills the Agency provided that were supposed to keep him functioning without sleep but he would hold off on those as long as he could. They worked, but the crash when you came off them was severe and he couldn't time things right now to ensure when that would be. He sat down at his desk and reread the attachment Richard had sent outlining his assignment. There was a brief explanation of why this person was marked for death. It was a perfunctory explanation that Burt figured they sent to agents like him so they would feel less guilt about being a cold blooded murderer. Burt never needed the explanation. Over the years he had come to trust the Agency, or whomever it was, who decided this had to be done. In most instances he had felt some satisfaction ending some of the lives. He supposed that a psychologist would have some fun with that feeling, but even in hindsight he felt the world was better without child prostitution ring leaders, torturers, mass murderers, and in the case today, a money launderer who supports a drug network that kills thousands of Canadians a day. Because that was what Jose Gorges did. He was the pipeline that all cartels in Mexico used to turn filthy U.S. dollars into legitimate Mexican assets. He didn't deal in the drug trade himself, but without him, every cartel that was currently killing each other off for more territory would have no way to turn their profit into personal gain. Killing him would disrupt the trade for months, maybe years. Because he had so many people on his secret payroll, the problem for the authorities, Mexican and U.S. alike, was that they could not prove he was not just a successful maquiladora. If there was a hint that any

government agency had killed him, the cartel revenge on the police, the Federales and other government agencies would be endless and bloody. He was a perfect target for Burt's special skills. The connection to Maria was a serendipitous issue and simply compounded the pleasure he would get in the elimination of this man.

He took the next hour to carefully pack a knapsack of his special herbs and toxins that he would take with him. He put the nine mm pistol that he had taken the night before, along with a satellite phone and a map of the East Coast Road into the knapsack and carried it down to the hidden bikes and put it next to his bike under the tarp. He figured he would not be back to his apartment before they left so he went to the dining room for some lunch before his two pm lesson with Gorges.



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### **Part 3 - Chapter 28: Gorges**

Maria noticed something was different as soon as she approached the dining room area. The whole San Jose area was not as busy in April as January and February and the golf course and its dining room were no different. But today the place was buzzing with activity. Serving staff were running in and out of the dining area and Doug was hovering over them barking directions and pushing people in different directions. As soon as she arrived at the door of the dining room and met the three, armed bodyguards she guessed what was going on. As soon as she walked into the room her guess was substantiated.

The room was mostly empty except for one table at the window overlooking the first hole of the golf course. At the table there were only two people, Jose Gorges and a young woman with a model figure and shimmering long blond hair who Maria didn't recognize. There were also another half dozen security guards strategically positioned around the

room. Maria's gardening outfit and a nod to the guards by Doug had allowed her to get past the guards at the door and as she walked across the room to the staff table in the far corner she felt the eyes of the guards follow her every step. She glanced over at Gorges, but he was too engaged in conversation with his companion to notice her. She felt a spasm in the pit of her stomach as she caught the eye of one of the guards. He had a bruise over the right side of his face where Burt had hit him, and as their eyes met, he stared at her for a moment and went over and whispered something to Gorges who looked up. He smiled at her as he said something to the guard. The guard came over to Maria.

"Mr. Gorges would like to talk to you," he ordered.

Maria looked over at Jose and smiling, he beckoned her over with his head.

She smiled her warmest smile in return. "Have a headache today you royal fuck up?" she asked the bruised man.

The cold look in his eyes told her the revenge he wanted. "I'll deal with you later bitch. Right now he wants to talk to you."

To everyone's surprise around her she switched to English and announced loudly for all to hear. "Tell him to fuck off. If he wants to talk to me he can find me right here."

The guard looked over at Gorges, puzzled at the response. His face froze and he motioned the guard back to his place and with one menacing look at Maria he moved away.

Gorges said something to the woman and walked over to the table where Maria was sitting by herself. "Mind if I join you?" he asked in English and sat down across from her without an answer. "My men told me that you had a group of friends with you at the casita last night. You into orgies now? Group sex maybe? Sounds like fun. Maybe you could invite me next time?"

Maria laughed, suddenly realizing that the four men sent to do the job last night would have to report they were overpowered by superior odds and not a woman and a ghost who none of them saw. Apparently no one had yet told him about her relationship with Burt, so he still had the safety of anonymity with Gorges and his people.

"Ah, you know what you say, Jose. You are as good as any half dozen other people. That would be true of it wasn't for your extra small penis."

“I make up for it with the size of my gun,” he retorted. “You can’t say no to me Maria, blondie, or whoever you are. You have nowhere to go and I own everyone here.” He waved around the room.

“Why Jose?” she asked in a quiet and pleading voice. “I saved your life.”

“It is just business Maria. It would be very annoying and interfering in my business to be chased all over Mexico by the Mendozas. Your headless body will clear the air. Sooner is better, but tonight, next week, next month, you will sacrifice your body for the good of my business. I own all of Mexico so there is nowhere you can go. But I would appreciate it if you did not kill anymore of my men. It’s not good for morale. Francisco over there was quite embarrassed by last night and he will want a special kind of revenge. His penis is quite a bit larger than mine.”

She stared him straight in the eyes. “Fuck off Jose. You are a weak, evil man and an embarrassment to all Mexicans. So just go and fuck yourself. Or her,” she nodded over to girl at the table, “ if you have paid her enough.”

He paused and stared back and smiled, shrugged his shoulders and stood up.

“Estas Muerto, Senorita,” he coldly announced as he nodded to the guard Francisco and got up to walk back to his table.

Maria sat quietly for a moment and thought what to do next. As Burt said, she was probably safe as long as she was around the crowds of the golf resort, but she had no illusions about her safety when she left the public places.

Burt knew Gorges was in the dining room as soon as he saw the guards at the door. He knew that neither of the gang who attacked Maria last night had seen him, but it would not take too much investigation for them to figure out he was the other participant in last night’s fun. He was under no illusions as to what would happen if he were recognized. He walked up the stairs leading to the door of the dining room and started to go in, but the guard at the door grabbed his elbow.

“Private function in there today. No entry,” he ordered. “Go somewhere else for lunch today.”

“It’s OK,” Burt offered. “I work here.” He tried to move past the guard but the man blocked his way and put his hands on Burt’s chest to stop him.

“I don’t care who you are. You don’t eat here today.”



Burt glanced over and saw Maria sitting at the table where the staff ate and wondered how she avoided the guard. They were probably on the lookout for her, so the guard's treatment of him like an ordinary citizen was a good thing. He saw Doug approaching from the office at the back of the dining room. He walked up to the guard. "It's OK. You can let him in. I need to introduce him to Mr. Gorges. Doug took Burt's arm and started to lead him over to a table where a middle aged Mexican was in deep conversation with a very young and beautiful woman. "Sorry about the guard; he is a very rich man and security needs to be tight. Besides, he owns this golf course so what can we do?"

As they approached the table, the man looked up and gave Doug a warm smile. Burt figured the man for his late forties. He was tall, a little over six feet Burt guessed and showing the paunch and blush of a wealthy life style. He had classic Spanish good looks with black wavy hair and riveting green eyes. Burt wondered again if he and Maria had been lovers. He returned his look and Burt instantly felt the penetration of a stare that was used to determining very quickly if this was a person to kill, love, or work with.

"Mr. Gorges," Doug offered, "This is Burt Van Royan, the finest golf instructor in Mexico. People are coming from all over the world to experience his instructional magic."

Burt put out his hand and Gorges took it. Burt wished now he had worn the ring, and held it for just a second or two longer while he looked into Burt's eyes.

"My pleasure Mr. Van Royan. If you can cure my slice this afternoon you will indeed be a magician!"

They all laughed. Gorges continued and motioned to Doug and Burt. "Won't you join me and my companion for a coffee? This is Helen Fiquentes, my personal assistant." Burt and Doug offered their hands to the lady and sat down opposite Gorges.

"So," Gorges started, "you teach golf with a hockey stick? And a broom or a mop?"

"I can see my fame has reached Mexico City. I'm impressed!"

"Don't be too flattered. I have my people research thoroughly anyone who I am in contact with. How is your knee coming along?"

Burt tried to hide his surprise. "Fine, the sea air is very recuperative. As for my teaching, if you have researched it you know I really only teach three things: set up;

balance and rhythm. The rest of the instructional stuff you read is to sell golf magazines and make people watch the golf channel. And yes, I will cure your slice for the rest of your life.”

“Very good! I have had many lessons, very expensive ones everywhere in the world and no one has cured me yet so I look forward to this afternoon! But tell me Mr. Van Royan, what brings someone like you here to San Jose and the Puertos? You should be teaching at La Quinta or some other fancy place? After all you were a junior champion once.”

Burt tried once again to hide his surprise. “You do your homework Senior. But my story is not complicated. I needed the money and the facility and the time. Doug and Puertos gave me all three. I’m hoping to qualify for the Champions Tour this fall. ”

“You’re Spanish is very good as well – for a Canadian.”

Burt wasn’t sure if that was a question or a statement so he ignored it.

“And you like Yoga.”

Again Burt ignored the question, but he now knew that he had been carefully watched and this man knew the things about Burt that were publically visible, including his relationship with Maria. He was glad now he had promised Mary he would only practice his martial arts in the privacy of his bedroom.

Gorges continued. “I’m told that it is good for older bodies. Maybe I should take it up. What do you think Helen?”

“Ah, but you are not yet old Jose! You still stretch very well!”

They all laughed again. Burt, a little too nervously.

“So Mr. Van Royan, when do you leave our country to chase your dream?”

Burt looked over at Doug. He hadn’t yet told Doug the exact date he was going but now was as good a time as any.

“Actually you will be my last lesson this season. I am leaving on the plane tonight.” That was closer to the truth than either of them knew.

Both men showed their surprise.

“I got a call from a friend in California last night and there is a tournament next weekend I should enter to see if I am ready to compete. Sorry to spring that on you Doug, but I just decided last night.” The truth again he thought.

“So you will only teach me one lesson? I hope it is a good one?”

“I assure you it will be a permanent fix to your golf swing. But if you two will excuse me I’m going to grab some lunch, do a little packing for tonight and set things up at the range. It was a pleasure to meet you Senorita Fiquentes. And Senor Gorges, I’ll see you at 2:30.”

He stood up, left the dining room and went into the kitchen to get a snack, never glancing in Maria’s direction and leaving Doug and Gorges in their own conversation. He noticed that the guard watched him carefully and spoke to another guard who followed Burt into the kitchen. They clearly knew something, but he suspected it was only a suspicion at this point or he would already have been taken care of. He grabbed a quick sandwich and went back to his apartment, the assigned guard following at a discreet distance.

Maria was shaken by Gorges’ comments. She felt the complete weight of the ruthlessness of the Mexican drug trade that simply trades lives for profit, and revenge for simply expediency. She was nothing more than the latter and she now wondered where she would be if she had not met Burt, the new Burt. She was aware she still did not know every detail about his life, but despite the fact he was just as much a killer as Jose, there was a core goodness that was touchable. Could a killer have core goodness she wondered? But this was conjecture for another time. Right now she had to get out of Mexico with her head attached to her body.

Burt had said to pack a bag, but all her belongings, except what she kept in a locker at the club, were at the casita. It made her wonder what she would miss if she could not recover it all and realized she had little in the way of possessions to show for thirty years in Mexico worth taking away with her. Her Mexican passport and other identity papers were at the casita; they were forgeries that would easily be picked up by U.S. or Canadian customs so they were all useless now. There was a photo album she would miss. It at least contained the happy memories of those years, the university days, the children, the friends, the Korean cook who was the closest to a mother she had had. But they were just photographs and the memories would not be left behind. She trusted Burt. She had no choice she guessed. But how they would get out of Mexico with all of Jose’s resources after her, and with no documents, was beyond her. He had said to meet at the bikes at

eight so she would be there. In the meantime she would do what he suggested and just carry on as if nothing had happened. Spend the rest of the day surrounded by her gardening co-workers and the bustle of the golf course. It would be during the night she would have to worry. She waited an appropriate length of time and followed Burt into the kitchen to get a sandwich, aware of Francisco's following glare.

Burt went back to the apartment again. He realized the ring trick wasn't going to work now. He had counted on being introduced to Gorges at the range and they would shake hands there. He couldn't expect a second hand shake and he could not guarantee he would have another opportunity to some way firmly grasp Gorges bare skin, so he need another way to get the toxin into the man. He knew the toxin could be absorbed through the skin, but there were two problems with that method; it had to be moist and the shelf life of the moist toxin was only two hours and after that it lost its effect. If he could somehow get the toxin onto one of Gorges clubs, and do it in the time window allowed, the moisture from his grip should be enough to allow skin penetration. He decided to gamble on this method. He poured some of the mixture that was in the fridge in a small bowl that he had prepared before, and carefully spread a tablespoon over the palm of his golf glove. It was now 1:30 so he had until 3:30 or so to get the mixture transferred to Gorges. The glove would protect him from the toxin but if he could grip one of Gorges clubs the glove should leave enough residue to do it work. He would only have to make sure that he gripped the club low enough to hit the spot where Gorges' non-glove hand would be placed. Satisfied that he had the solution, he put the glove aside and dumped the left over materials down the kitchen drain so a maid would not accidentally come in contact with anything toxin. He hoped it would have lost its potency by the time it hit the ocean. He took one last look around the apartment, carefully picked up the golf glove and left for the practice range.

Maria and her gardening team decided to work that day in the gardens directly behind the practice range. There were mostly cactus plants. They required constant pruning and weeding so the decision to work there on this particular day was not an unusual one. She was watching when both Gorges and Burt approached the practice facilities, one from the clubhouse and one from the direction of the houses overlooking the sea and the first hole. She noticed right away that, oddly, Burt was already wearing a

golf glove, but just dismissed it as his keenness to get at the lesson. Gorges was followed by his usual coterie of guards and one in a dark suit looked quite funny following him and carrying his set of Pings. They reached the first covered practice area at the same time. Maria looked around for the guard Fernandez but could not see him. Since she was fairly hidden behind a wall of flowering hibiscus she assumed he was one of the men the range with their boss and she just couldn't see him.

“Well Senor Teacher!” Gorges exclaimed. “You ready to fix my game?”

“No problem I'm sure. Let's see what you can do,” Burt ordered as he took a 7-iron from Gorges bag and handed it to him with the right, ungloved hand.

Gorges took the club and one of the three men with him put some balls down on the grass tee mat.

Burt interrupted him. “Look Senor Gorges. This tee box area is hardly big enough for the two of us. Do you think the suits could stand aside for just a few moments? I'd hate for one of them to get maimed by an errant back swing?”

Gorges waived the three men away and they stepped off the tee box teaching area. He used the toe of the club to put a ball in place and hit a seven iron. Burt saw right away both what was wrong and who had taught him to play. His swing looked just like Maria's although not as good or with the same result. It wasn't bad, but as he said in the clubhouse, he had a serious fade – slice. Burt figured he could fix that but he realized now there was more to the relationship between this man and Maria than he has been told.

“Hey, not bad. Not bad at all!” Burt offered. “You have a good swing. You have been taught well. And you have some athletic ability as well. You were probably a good football player in your younger days?”

Even a man like Gorges was susceptible to flattery before being told what he was doing wrong. “Yes, I was a star in our barrio league. I sometimes wondered what might have happened if I had pursued a football career.”

Burt thought for a moment about his own truncated hockey life.

“Well your swing is very similar to one of the top Canadian golfers who ever lived. He won many tournaments in Canada, but had an unusual swing, so whoever taught you taught you at least some elements of his swing.”

“Canadian, eh? I’ll be damned. A blonde Canadian!”

“Pardon?”

“Never mind. What do you mean unusual?”

“Well three things actually. First you swing in what we call one plane. Let me show you.” Burt put out his right hand to take the 7-iron club from Gorges and, gripping the club much harder and a little lower than usual, started to demonstrate.

“This is a classic two plane swing.” He swung the club in the traditional, hands below the shoulders, 45-degree angle between the arms and club shaft type swing.

“This is a single plane swing.” He swung the club with a straight line between the arms and the clubs shaft with no angle, and no change of plane in the back or forward swing.

“So, is what I do wrong? Do I need to change this?”

“Absolutely not. One of the most beautiful and athletic women golfers alive today uses elements of this swing.”

If he had been closer he would have heard an eavesdropping Maria chuckle behind the Hibiscus curtain.

“Well what is wrong?”

You don’t have spatial recognition Burt wanted to tell him, but instead he just offered some analysis. “As I said, there are only three things you need to work on to improve your game and you will be glad to know that none require a hockey stick or a mop.” Burt nodded to the hockey stick leaning against the back of the practice enclosure. He handed the club with his gloved hand back to Gorges. “First thing is your grip. You have a weak grip that will tend to bring the clubface back to the ball slightly open, or facing to the right. This doesn’t cause a slice in itself, but will push the ball to the right. Does that happen often?”

“Yes! I’m going right! Straight right!”

“Alright . Change your grip to this.” Burt grabbed one of his own clubs and showed him the thumb next to the hand type grip that Burt had been taught. He put his club back in the bag. “Now take a few easy swings.”

Gorges hit a half dozen balls and by the sixth try he was still slicing a bit but not pushing the ball right.

“Does that feel better?”

“Yes, I feel that I am hitting the ball more solidly for sure.”

“Good, that is your grip from now on. Now number two.”

Burt would normally have taught only one thing a lesson, but since there would not be a second he was going to give him the full treatment. Of course he realized for a moment this whole thing was bizarre. He was teaching a dead man how to play golf. But appearing as normal as possible might be important for their get away so he continued.

“Imagine that you are looking down at the ball from above and it is a clock face. The six is at your right facing the clubface and the twelve is at your left facing the target. You slice because you hit the ball at 5 o’clock. You should be hitting the ball at the 7 o’clock spot. One teacher I know used a baseball analogy; you should be hitting the ball to right field. So now keep the grip I just taught you and try hitting the ball at the 7 o’clock spot. Here, I’ll line the ball logo up to help you.” Burt put the ball on the ground with the Nike check mark at the 7 o’clock spot. With his first hit the ball flew straight and far.

“Shit!” Gorges exclaimed. “That’s fucking amazing!”

He hit a half dozen more and they all went straight.

“Change my grip. Hit the 7 o’clock spot. I got it. You said that there were three things wrong. What’s the third?”

“I think that’s enough for now. I’ll save the last hint and the most important until we meet again.” Burt carefully took off his golf glove and carefully placed it on the TV at the back of the teaching area and decided to do a little fishing. “Maybe next year when I come down to teach again you can get another lesson.”

Gorges paused and leaned on his iron. “Senor, I think it would be a good idea to teach me now.” Burt noticed him make an imperceptible glance at one or more of the guards at the edge of the practice area ten feet away. Burt had his answer.

“Oh, alright, but for this tip I do need the good old Canadian hockey stick.”

He reached over and picked up the stick and at the same time he saw a movement off to his right where the guards were standing. All three were moving towards him as Gorges moved off the tee box to get out of the way. Wing Chung was not as good with the bamboo stick as was Kwa Hang Do and a hockey stick was not a Jang Bang, but Burt figured it would be more than good enough to handle three unsuspecting thugs. His first

blow broke an arm that was holding what looked to be a .45 and the gun dropped to the ground as the man howled in pain. His second move was a jab to the throat with the butt end of the stick and another man went down choking for breath. Bruce Lee would have been proud of that one he thought. The third man was six feet away – too far to hit. The man had his gun leveled at Burt's head and he watched in slow motion as the finger curled around the trigger and started to squeeze. Burt leaned his head sharply to the left at the same time as he saw the man's head explode in a mass of red and the shot went far to the right. When he regained his balance he turned around to see that Gorges was running back to the clubhouse. He looked back at his attackers and saw that the last man who had fired at him had a shovel stuck in the middle of his head and Maria was standing over the man in an action stance. They looked at each other.

“Nice slash there,” she spoke English. “I can see why they threw you out of AA hockey.”

“Not too bad with a shovel yourself, master gardener. They teach you that in your Masters?”

“Standard revolutionary curriculum at every Mexican university. What do we do now? Did you take care of Gorges?”

“Yes to the latter. We clearly have to get out of here and soon. But I have to figure out how to leave this place and retain some anonymity. I don't think Gorges has given me away. And I would assume his gang will quickly clean up this mess. They won't want stories of dead bodies around their golf course. Gorges won't be a problem anymore in a couple of weeks.”

He looked down at the three guards. One was dead from the shovel. Another was slowly gagging to death from the fractured windpipe. The third was sitting on the tee box holding a mangled right arm, clearly broken at the wrist.

“What about him?”

Burt looked at the man. It was one thing to kill or maim in the heat of argumentative passion. Another to just kill. But if this man lived Burt was sure it would not be long before the wrong people in Mexico knew about him and Maria. The man's gun was lying on the ground only a few feet away and Burt hoped that he would go for it and justify his death, but the man just sat there with blood dripping through his fingers where he held



the arm. Burt moved over to the table and carefully picked up the golf glove and a roll of plastic packing tape they used to put on the faces of demo golf clubs. He leaned over the man and spoke Spanish.

“Show me your arm.”

The man warily took his hand away and Burt saw a clean break from the stick. He motioned with the glove and tape, placed the golf glove over the broken skin and gently wrapped the tape around the break to splint it in place. The man was still in pain but could now move without grinding bones.

“Go,” Burt ordered. “Tell no one about us.”

“Si Señor.” The man scrambled in pain to his feet and holding his right arm he shuffled off to the clubhouse.

Maria was incredulous. “You can’t be serious! You think one kind little act will earn his silence? He will be telling all to Gorges within seconds.”

“He can say all he wants to Gorges. Neither of them will matter in a couple of weeks,” he explained as he took out his cell phone and dialed.

“Hi Doug! Burt here. Listen Doug, I’m finished with Gorges and heading to the airport. I’m travelling light so could you send my clubs to me? I’ll text an address when I get to California and you can take the cost out of my last cheque?”

He paused to listen.

“I think he was very satisfied with his lesson. His future golf will be very different.

He listened again.

“Sure, I’d love to come back next season if you want me. Let’s keep in touch. Take care, Doug. Stay away from rich widows!” He hung up the phone and dialed again and waited a minute for the answer.

“Change in plans,” he announced with no greeting while he looked at his watch. “It’s now four. Six. Same place, same routine.”

He listened for a moment.

“Copy that,” and he hung up again.

“Alright. Let’s go. I have to leave first and look like I am going across the bridge to town and head to the airport, but I’ll branch off back to the East Coast Road when I can. The bike will manage an arroyo if it has to. You wait a bit and head out yourself. I’ll

meet you at that little Taco stand in Cabo Pulmo. They will be after you now, but they don't have anything that can keep up to you on a bike so we should have some time there before they catch up."

"Ok, get going. I'll be fine," she reached up and gave him a kiss. "See you soon. Be careful."

Burt walked quickly to the bikes hidden behind the range and ripped off the tarp. They were both untouched, as well as his knapsack. He put on his full-face helmet, the pack, started the Honda and casually drove out of the entrance to the course without any sign of Gorges or the other guards. He had no doubt that Gorges was somewhere organizing his gang for an attack on Maria.

When he arrived at the bridge he stopped and looked back over the marina to the golf course road and was relieved to see Maria's bike following in the distance. "She got away alright. Now if she could just keep ahead of the men long enough for us to make our escape," he thought to himself as he gunned the bike and headed over the bridge into San Jose del Cabo.

Maria had indeed escaped before Gorges could organize his men to go to the range and find her and Burt. They were coming out of the clubhouse as she raced out the gate and although she had a full-face helmet on, the men recognized her bike. Gorges shouted some orders and half a dozen men ran to two Hummers and started to chase her. Gorges stayed behind. He never involved himself in the violence if he could help it. The fact that Van Royan was ready for the assault on the range was a surprise since, from what he had learned the guy was just a has-been golfer and obscure teacher. He had to admit the guy was pretty good with a hockey stick and he picked up some good golf tips from him. Too bad he would have to die with Maria. Another lesson would have been nice. But he was Maria's lover and would be a witness to her death so he couldn't live. He hadn't been able to find out who was with her that night at the casita, probably a group of tourists who had now left Mexico with a story to tell to no one who mattered. Van Royan had probably been there as well so for that reason alone he should go. He hadn't seen Van Royan leave with her so he was probably back in his apartment packing in a panic. He called Doug.

"Hi Doug. Jose here. Great lesson this afternoon. That guy is as good as you say."

He listened to the response. “Yeah, well I’d like to leave him a tip personally before I leave and he isn’t at the range anymore. You know where he is?” He frowned as he listened to the answer. If the man was at the airport this would be much more complicated than he thought. “Thanks. I guess I’ll just tip him more next year! Bye.” He opened the phone again and dialed another number and described Burt and his bike. He finished the conversation with the order – “an accident.” Then he hung up and went to the bar for a drink. All should be done within the hour.

Burt decided to take the old road to the airport rather than the new bypass. That would make it easier for him to just keep going and head north until he could cut back to the East Coast Road. He quickly circled through San Jose Centro and headed towards the airport past businesses, gas stations, shops, stores and half a dozen stoplights. Soon he was outside of the commercial area and heading north on highway 1 past the airport. He was careful to keep to the speed limit and not attract the attention of a stray Policio. There was never a problem with the police in San Jose del Cabo. They were good men and women and a couple of hundred pesos for their children’s’ education fund were sufficient to be on your way. But this afternoon he had no time for pleasant conversation with a local cop, so he was surprised to see a police jeep pull out of the airport and follow him as he passed the airport entrance. He figured he could veer off on one of the arroyos that snaked its way from the mountains to the sea and he wouldn't be too far behind Maria.

Ten kilometers up the highway he picked one that looked promising and headed off the highway. He had checked his side mirror and saw that the police car was still behind him but keeping some distance. He was surprised when the police jeep pulled off the highway and began to follow him down the arroyo. “Not good,” he thought to himself. The arroyo twisted and turned its way through the desert but in most places was wide enough for a jeep to follow. He checked the side mirror again and saw that the jeep was now trying to catch him. He needed to shake the jeep before he hit the coast road so he gunned the XL up the side of the arroyo and headed through the desert. The going was rough but not impossible for the bike. He figured there was no way the jeep could follow. He was right; as he looked back he saw the jeep roll over as it tried to climb the side of the ditch and go after him. He could work his way back to the easier travelling in the arroyo, but he had no doubt the jeep driver was calling in some reinforcements. He had

no desire to have a run in with the Federales so he sped up the bike to the fastest speed he could safely go through the sand and headed as directly as possible to the coast.

As he connected with the coast road he checked his watch while he looked both ways on the road. It was now five p.m. He had lost a little time shaking the police jeep and he had no idea if Maria and her pursuers were past him. In fact he was not even quite sure how far up the coast road he was. Time was of the essence now if he was to make the six am rendezvous he had set up with Mary and Richard so he gunned the bike and headed north towards Cabo Pulmo as fast as he could drive. Ten minutes later he saw the dust of some vehicles in front of him and realized he was following at least two vehicles. Within a few moments he could see the two Hummers travelling quickly up the road. He now recognized that he was about eight kilometers from Cabo Pulmo and the road from this point forward was very rough and very twisty; good for a bike but bad for a vehicle so he could easily catch up to the vehicles. The way Maria drove he was confident she would keep well in front of them. They were probably calling in her location to others, maybe the police, but the road to Pulmo from the north was even longer so none of them would be able to get to Pulmo before they would. His problem now was how to get past them and catch up to Maria so the two of them could get to the rendezvous spot he had picked out. The road was narrow so passing would be tricky, but he suspected they were focusing on what was in front of them, not on what was behind. He could have the element of surprise.

There was a fairly straight section a kilometer ahead followed by a sharp left turn around a steep cliff over a small beach. He planned his move for this section of road and used his bike's agility to catch up to the trailing Hummer just as it entered the straight stretch and he accelerated quickly to pass the vehicle. He glanced at the surprised look on the driver, saw him urgently say something to his passenger and saw the gun come up as he sped past and approached the lead Hummer. The road was far too bumpy and the speed too fast for any accurate shooting so he was not worried about them hitting him. When he heard the sound of the shots he gunned the bike even faster and fishtailed past the second car. He was now in the lead and men in both cars were now firing wildly. He now had the bike going as fast he could and still keep control. He could see the sharp left turn a hundred metres ahead and he leaned over the handlebars hoping that some lucky

shot didn't find him or the bike. He assumed correctly that the Hummers would speed up as well and a quick glance brought a smile to his face. And then he was at the corner. He hit his rear brake, went into a controlled rear end slide to get pointed left, gunned the bike again and he was around the turn. He repeated the manoeuvre on the next right turn and he was around the sharp S bend. He glanced back just long enough to see the first Hummer go over the cliff and bounce down the rocks to land on the beach below. The second Hummer stopped for a moment while the occupants glanced down the cliff and then they sped around the S turn and were back in the chase; but he was far ahead now and by the time he hit Pulmo he would have at least a five minute cushion to connect with Maria and head to the pick up spot.

Within minutes he came around a headland, saw Cabo Pulmo a kilometer away and he hoped that Maria was on the lookout for him. She was. As he approached the village he could see her sitting on her bike beside the road and he simply slowed down enough to wave her on. Time was running out.

The spot he had picked was only a couple of kilometers past Cabo Pulmo. The small cove was largely hidden from the road and the protected beach was a popular spot for fishermen to pull up their pangas. Larger tourist fishing boats often cruised the shore in this region so one other fishing boat wouldn't attract much attention. He knew they would be right on time and only wait minutes before heading out into deeper waters. He sped through the village and just beyond Pulmo headed down the trail that led to the cove and the cliff above the beach. At the top of the cliff they both jumped off their bikes and took off their helmets.

"What took you so long?" Maria asked with a smile as she gave him a quick hug.

"Some of Mexico's finest tried to give me a speeding ticket. Let's go – quickly!" He glanced at his watch and saw it was 5:52. They should be able to see the fishing boat in a moment. They started to climb down the goat path to the cove but when they were in sight of the sea there was no boat to be seen. "Shit, where are they?" Burt rhetorically asked himself as they continued the scramble down the cliff. Suddenly they heard a shot from above and a bullet ricocheted off a rock beside them.

"Get down!" he shouted to Maria as another shot went wide of their location. "I didn't think they would make it this fast! They can't see us from up top. Watch the trail

to see if they start coming down.” Maria moved to get a good view of the trail while Burt took off his backpack and rummaged to find the Glock just as one of the men started to creep down the trail.

“One is coming!” she whispered. “And he has a machine pistol!”

This time he could see that the man did indeed have a machine pistol and the others probably did as well. That was bad in the sense that they could spray their location but good in the sense they weren’t very accurate from a distance so he had some advantage with the Glock. He had checked it earlier and confirmed he had seven shots left after the two he had expended at the casita so now every one of his shots had to count for something.

“Stay down and watch for the boat.”

He moved up the trail and hid behind a large rock where he would be hidden from the assailant but could get a clear look at a sharp corner as the trail twisted down to the beach. As soon as the man was in partial view Burt shot and the man went down without a sound. Burt thought for a moment about going and picking up the machine pistol that bounced a few metres down the path, but rejected that as too dangerous.

“The boat!” Maria yelled at him. “It’s coming!”

Burt turned to see a large tourist type fishing boat slowly come around the headland. It was too large to beach but even from a distance he could see the Zodiac hanging from some davits at the back of the boat and see that someone was already starting to lower it. At the same time he heard shouting from the top of the cliff so he realized there were at least two more men to deal with. It was something of a stalemate. The men could not get at them or get down the cliff without being exposed. But he and Maria could not run across the beach without exposing themselves to the machine pistols. Meanwhile the fishing boat was idling a hundred yards off shore and the small Zodiac was in the water and coming to shore with one driver and someone slumped over the gunwale. He heard some shots from above as someone tried to get the Zodiac but all that did was tell Burt the range of the pistols as the bullets hit the sand with a puff twenty yards from the water.

“We have to find a way to get to the Zodiac. I’m going to have to distract these guys up there while you get to the shore. It looks like you’ll be fine if you make the water. So when I say so run for the water.”

She wanted to argue but she knew he was right. This was his business not hers, so she waved, smiled and waited. He moved to get in position and nodded his head. As she sprinted for the beach he ran up the path and as he went around the sharp bend in the trail he saw the shooter stand up and level the pistol at Maria. Burt let out two shots before the man could shoot and Maria was safe, but he was now exposed on the trail as the second man looked down and aimed his pistol at Burt. His senses told him he didn't have the time to get his own pistol up in time and he knew he was going to die. He could see that the man was the one called Francisco and he could see the pleasure in the man's face as he knew he had the upper hand. This particular shootout was his to win. Then at the same time that Burt heard the shots from the top of the trail near the road, two bloody holes appeared in the middle of the man's chest. Francisco collapsed to the ground and the machine pistol rattled down the trail and landed at Burt's feet. He looked up the trail to see Doug standing there holding a .45 in a double-handed grip. Doug gave him a smile, a brief eyebrow salute, pointed two fingers in his eyes and pointed them at Burt. Burt smiled, mouthed a 'thank you' as he returned the salute and ran down the beach to the water. Within moments all three were in the Zodiac.

Without a word, Richard took the body that was slumped over the gunwale and dumped it over the side and to their shock Maria and Burt could see it was a headless body. "Hello Melanie," Richard offered his hand to Maria and nodded to the body. "It's too bad about Maria Jimenez; she was a wonderful person," he offered wistfully as he offered her his hand. "Get in and let's get out of here."

Within moments the Zodiac was stored on the davits and they were on the fishing boat, cruising out into the Sea of Cortez. Burt was delighted to find that Mary was on board and gave her a quick hug. Two other men were on board as well and were just introduced by their first names so Burt assumed they were agents as well. One drove the boat while the other stood in the stern looking around the sea and the beach for other threats. Maria and Burt were led down to a small living-dining area under the deck and the four of them sat while Richard poured them each a tumbler of scotch.

"Here Melanie. This will help the adrenalin subside," he suggested as he offered her the drink. So far there had been no explanations or conversation and while Burt was used to quietly accepting that things were under control, Melanie was clearly confused.

Richard started the conversation. "OK, first. If you are concerned, we did not kill that body we dumped off. She was a generous donation to the UCLA medical school for research purposes. Now she will serve our purposes of establishing Maria's death. Without a head and with your Mexican passport in her pocket it will just be assumed she was another drug kill."

Melanie looked relieved and started to ask a question, but Richard put up his hand and stopped her.

"Second. Here is your new passport." He handed her a Canadian passport with her photo and name, Melanie McDougal, Bumstead, Manitoba. It was two years old and leafing through it she saw that it had entry stamps for the U.S. and Mexico. "Here is yours Burt." And he handed Burt a similar passport but in the name of Oscar Schneider.

"Hey, this guy worked at the university!" Burt exclaimed. "He is long haired old hippy professor!"

"So are you," and he reached into a bag and grabbed a blond wig and tossed it to Burt. "You can't get out of the country as Burt Van Royan quite yet. Oscar here happened to send in his passport for renewal so we've just borrowed it for a couple of weeks. When you are done with it we'll send it back to him with a new one and no one will be the wiser; unless, of course, his wife takes a close look at his passport and wonders why he was down in Mexico for a couple of weeks. We figured that getting a passport from someone at the university would save you having to learn another background story,"

"A wig! I have to wear a wig!" Burt whined as he tried it on.

"Nice, you're prettier than me now," Melanie offered.

"Not likely," Richard countered. "But go into the head and use this to get rid of that black hair dye and you'll be even more beautiful." He tossed her a small bottle.

Mary interjected. "You need to look like your passport photo Melinda. We took a recent photo that Burt sent us and photo shopped it as much as possible to be the old Melanie.

Melanie looked accusingly over at Burt. "How long have you guys been working on this?"

"Ever since I first heard you speak Spanish."



“It wasn’t that hard to find you from the missing person reports from the late seventies and not hard to find out why you left,” Mary sympathetically offered.

“It was a long time ago and is long behind me. It will be good to be Canadian again.” She looked at all three. “Thank you.”

“You’re not home yet,” Mary interjected. “We still have to get you out of Mexico and established in California so Burt here can follow his golf fantasy.”

Richard continued. “We are heading across the Sea of Cortez to a place called San Carlos. It is a former fishing village turned into a small resort community of Canadians escaping winter and Phoenix folks escaping summer heat. There is one hotel and yesterday a very nice looking couple who look remarkably like the two of you checked into the hotel after driving down from Phoenix. If you look at your passports you’ll see that you came into Mexico yesterday. The couple went to the marina and went on a fishing boat for an over night excursion. The fishing boat will now drop them off in the morning and they will go back to the hotel and visibly walk through the reception area like the mid fifty-year-old lovers you are. You will spend two weeks at the hotel and enjoy the pleasures of San Carlos. They even have a golf course. If Burt here has done his work correctly, no one will be looking for you. You will drive back across the same border point you came in and drive to La Quinta, California.” He looked over at Burt. “You will be Burt again and you are entered into the California Champions Tournament qualifier starting May – three weeks from now.” Mary and Richard looked at each other and smiled smugly. “Any questions?”

Melanie only raised her eyebrows.

Burt took her hand. “Welcome to the Hotel California Melanie.”



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### **Part 3 - Chapter 29: Q School**

“Take a look at this Melanie,” Burt called from the deck as he looked up from his morning tea and the Globe and Mail on his iPad. The deck was on the fourth floor of a condo overlooking the seventh hole of the Cactus Springs Golf and Country Club near La Quinta, California and Melanie was in the kitchen chopping some fruit for breakfast. She came out onto the sunny, south facing deck as she wiped her hands on her apron and took the iPad from Burt.

*‘Mexican financier dies of a heart attack on golf course in Spain’* the headline read. The story went on to provide a Gandhi like obituary for Jose Gorges, *‘one of Mexico’s richest and most philanthropic citizens; chief financial advisor to the Mexican President and cabinet; the man who had brought manufacturing and jobs to most parts of Mexico; a breath of entrepreneurial fresh air in a drug tainted country; an inspiration to any young person in a barrio who dreams of pulling themselves out of a life surrounded by crime.’*

Maria snorted. “Seems to me he is going to be a better role model dead than alive.”

It was three weeks since their encounter with Gorges in San Jose del Cabo and a week since they had arrived in California after a wonderful two-week holiday, they called it their honeymoon, in San Carlos. “He was a tougher bugger than I thought. Or I didn’t get the mixture quite right,” he pondered. “But it seems to have worked at any rate.”

He took a sip from his tea. “Do you think that I’m ready? Do I have a chance?”

“That’s two questions. The first? You are as ready as you could ever be. You are a

good golfer Burt and I admire you for sticking to your dream. The second? You do realize only five golfers will get their Champions Tour card and there are a dozen ex-PGA tour card holders in the field this weekend?”

The qualifying tournament is a grueling four-day event that starts with 230 golfers vying for the Champions Tour card and only five getting full privileges and another five getting limited privileges. All two hundred thirty would have made it here on the basis of past victories or consistently good play through a myriad of regional qualifying events. Burt qualified for one shot at this because he was Burt Van Royan, a one time winner of the California junior championship, and not because he was Gord the winner of his club’s senior championship.

“I mean you have never played at this level. I think you are very capable of staring down a man with a gun leveled at your head, but you have no idea how you will respond to the pressures of such competitive golf.”

“And you do?”

“Yes, I was there once Burt. Some of it brings back some painful memories I still have difficulty leaving behind. But just being here and playing again like we have this week gets other juices flowing that are more pleasurable. The focus for this kind of competition is immense and I’m not sure you have been tested enough to make it happen.”

“Well, thanks for your honesty at least. We’ve three days before the start so let’s see what Mexico did to my game. Eat up, let’s go to the course.”

They had spent the days since they arrived playing the tournament course and their evenings discussing their future. The playing was clean and precise for both of them. There was no confusion or dissent that surrounded his or her special talents, although it was clear to anyone who watched that she was by far the better golfer. The Champions Tour qualifiers brought out a crowd of golf followers and a small group followed the two of them as they played. The crowd sometimes distracted Burt, while Melanie seemed oblivious to their presence, even the obvious fact that some of the crowd was far more interested in her golf than his.

By the third day of golf there was a growing crowd following their rounds, each checking their programs for the tournament and to Melanie’s surprise and pleasure, one

young girl even came up to Melanie after and asked for her autograph. There had also been some press contact and Burt had told them all he wasn't interested in any interviews or media coverage. He didn't want too many people to read about Burt Van Royan in the local paper, especially those who had presumed he was buried somewhere in the desert. The golf was good and Melanie was constantly helping Burt with his game and the only time she was impatient was when he seemed to lose his focus and scan the following crowd nervously. She guessed he was getting nervous that he might be discovered.

Their evenings were slightly different. They had decided, at least tacitly, that they were now a couple who would try and build a future life together. With the huge amount of historical baggage attached to each of their lives, which proved more complicated than they thought. Their time in San Carlos had helped, and the first thing they had discussed was the Agency and Burt's role. He explained what he did and why, and that it might be years before he could be called on again. In the meantime he could just go on with his life. To his surprise she seemed to accept this with little argument. The only touchy part came when she asked, "What is my role in this in the future?"

"That is more complicated." He had talked to Richard about this while they were still on the boat and he knew the choices. "That depends upon you. Without getting into the complications of each, you probably have three choices. You can just ignore that part of my life and leave me to do my job when called. You can insist that I stop this part of my life. Or you can be a partner in whatever we are called to do."

She didn't reply quickly. "As your partner would I have to kill someone?"

"Not necessarily. You would certainly be complicit. And once complicit you are in the game forever. If you want to go on with a different life you have to do it now, not later."

"I'll give it some thought," was her final comment up to this point, and they left the conversation about the moral privilege of determining who should live and die for another occasion.

Discussions about what lay beyond the next week or so were increasingly uncomfortable.

They had a final practice round on the Tuesday before the tournament and the preparation took their minds off other things. As his caddy for the event, Melanie focused

totally on the golf course, taking careful measurements and notes of yardages, trap and tree locations and the quirks of the greens. She had left the contact with the other golfers and the tournament officials to Burt. They had played with some of the other golfers over the last week or so and she had to admit they were good. There were some club pros who never quite made it to the big time. Some were ex-tour players past their prime but still competitively capable. Some had made it previously, had lost their card and were trying again. There was the collection of dreamers like Burt, most with decent amateur careers who had led other lives but felt that “with just a little practice” they could make the Champions Tour. She had never admitted it to Burt, but it didn’t take her long to realize he did not have a chance. He was good, but not in the league of these guys and she was worried he would be embarrassed or discouraged after the first day of play. She admired him for the commitment to his dream and on occasion thought wistfully of the thrill and focus of competition herself and was secretly enjoying the small crowd, mostly seniors like themselves that was actually following her, and not Burt. But this was his fantasy, not hers, and her competition days were long gone so she continued to focus on the character of the golf course and not the character of the fans.

At the end of the final practice round, as they came off the eighteenth hole, there was a small delegation from the tour organizers waiting to greet them. One came forward and offered his hand.

“Hi, I’m Jim Rockwell, from the Champions Tour organizing committee.”

He shook each of their hands and introduced the other three men he had with him. All were on the Champions Tour Board.

“Could we have a word with you two?”

He beckoned to a table and chairs on the outside lounge by the clubhouse and they walked over together. Melanie gave Burt a questioning look but he just shrugged and led her over to the table. Melanie noticed as well that one of the couples who had followed them around the course that day was standing near where they had dropped their clubs, holding pens and a program obviously waiting for Burt’s autograph. They looked vaguely familiar. She had seen many people over the past couple of weeks so everyone was starting to look familiar. They would have to wait.

After they sat down Rockwell pulled out a collection of papers and put them on the

table. “It’s concerning the application you filled out for the tournament.” He seemed to be talking more to Melanie than to Burt. “When you filled this out you never indicated your gender.”

Burt answered. “There is no place on the application to indicate your sex. I guessed you just assume that all applicants would be men. Is this a problem?”

“Well...” again he looked at Melanie and replied sarcastically. “You’ll have to excuse us for assuming that the winner of the men’s NCGA national championship did not wear a skirt to do it.”

“She didn’t,” a voice from behind the table interjected. “She wore a great pair of madras pants that looked like a pair Johnny Miller might have given to the Salvation Army.”

Everyone at the table turned around and Melanie could see the speaker was the woman half of the couple who had been following them around. By this time Melanie was thoroughly confused and the meaning of the conversation with the officials was lost as she slowly started to recognize the woman. Melanie got up from her chair and tears started to cloud her vision; she ran the short few feet into the waiting arms of the woman, both alternately laughing and crying.

“How the fuck are ya girl?” the woman asked.

“Still the potty mouth, I see,” Melanie hugged her again.

Rebecca pushed her away and looked over at her partner. “Melanie,” she offered, “this is my husband Horace.”

Melanie looked at him and the shock of recognition hit her again. “Horace? Now I know why you only wanted to be called Coach!” And she went over to him and gave him a hug.

It was Melanie’s turn and she turned to Burt. “Guys this is ... my partner.”

Rebecca interjected. “We know who he is. Hi, Burt. Good round today.”

“Thanks, Rebecca. But she’ll do better tomorrow.”

Melanie just gaped at him with her mouth open.

They had been ignoring the tournament officials but Jim brought them back to the conversation.

“That was a touching reunion of some sort I guess. But we are left with the fact that

all hell will break lose when the press catches on that the M. McDougal in this program,” He picked up the program from the table and waved it at them, “is a woman and she is trying to qualify for the Men's Champions Tour. Before you ask, there is no rule against a woman giving it a go, but we would only ask that you consider whether or not it is a good idea. Look what happened to Michele Wie when she tried the regular men’s tour.”

Rebecca took over and offered her hand to Rockwell.

"Hi. I'm Dr. Rebecca Johnston and I am her caddie. Look. You want to see hell in the press you just continue this bullshit about women not belonging here or any thought whatsoever of not letting her compete. This is 2013 friend. We even let black men into the clubhouse at Augusta these days. One day when hell freezes over they might admit a woman. This girl is going to kick some old guy's butt.”

She turned to a still very confused Melanie and in the old Rebecca bossy way just ordered them all, “Let’s go. We’ve preparations to make.”

They all stood up from the table and Burt took Melanie’s arm and led her away from the dumbfounded officials before she could say anything in front of them. When they were a safe distance away she pulled her arm away. “You have some explaining to do I believe,” she hissed.

“OK. But let’s wait until we’re back at the condo. We can discuss this there.”

She looked at him with a narrow stare and tightly clenched lips, nodded in agreement, got into the car and slammed the door behind her. For a woman with secrets, she did not like it when others had theirs.

Burt and Melanie drove together and Rebecca and Horace followed as they headed back to the condo only a few kilometers away. Melanie and Burt said nothing to each other on the trip. Melanie just stared out the window and even when they pulled into the parking lot she didn’t look at him and just slammed the door and stormed up the stairs, the others close behind her. Burt and Rebecca shared concerned glances as they entered the condo and Burt gave everyone a beer. The three of them sat down on the living room chesterfield except Melanie who stood in the middle of the room with her arms crossed.

Rebecca broke the silence. “It was my idea Melanie.”

“What was your idea?” Melanie shot back. “To bring back every memory I have spent over thirty years trying to erase?”

“We all learned after you left what happened to you,” Rebecca offered. “Everyone involved has paid in their own way; some are dead, others a living death. I’m a psychologist Melanie, and one of my research areas has been the effects and lives of woman like you who have experienced such an assault. Unfortunately there is no shortage of a research sample. Some never recover. They lead lives that are often shorter than they should have been, often full of addiction and continued abuse. Some seem to get past it and lead, at least on the surface, normal family and professional lives. Some seem to use various forms of defense mechanisms to parcel their bad experience into some distant and remote part of their mind and vigorously avoid anything that triggers the resurfacing of this memory. But whatever the coping mechanism they use, every woman who has been the victim of such sexual violence risks leading a life in an emotional void, never being able, or maybe never succumbing, to close relationships.”

Melanie slowly moved over and sat on one of the matching chesterfield chairs. Rebecca looked over at Burt and he nodded for her to continue.

“Melanie I know it has not been easy for you. Just the fact that you are able to be here back in California and even back on a golf course tells me you are either incredibly good at memory suppression or you are moving forward. The fact you have, I presume, entered into a satisfying relationship with a kind and loving man tells me it is more likely the later.”

Burt reached over from the end of the chesterfield and took Melanie’s hand.

Rebecca finished. “Melanie we all know that the act of competing will test the way you have coped in order to live a normal life after an horrendous experience in your past. But as your loving friend, and a psychologist, I am telling you that the only way you can now move on to a normal relationship and life with Burt, is to quit running from the past and to vigorously chase your future. By playing in this tournament you are doing the latter.”

Melanie was quiet while they looked at her waiting for a response.

The first thought she had was that “normal” might not be the most accurate description for life with a “killer”. But Rebecca was correct. She was probably a mixture of the caricatures that Rebecca described. She had escaped everything and avoided anything that brought back memories of that night. For over thirty years she had



responded to normal sexual urges, but had never, until now, established an emotional relationship with any man. Most of all she had learned over the past few months the healing power of her special relationship with both a loving partner and with golf. Maybe after a life of suppressed emotions and memories she was ready to move on.

“What do I have to do to ‘chase the future’ as you say?” she asked in a very quiet but resolute voice.

Burt resisted a fist pump and Rebecca continued.

“Well, two things actually. The first you are already doing. Face head on the part of your past that brings back the memories and you are doing that by being back out on a California golf course. Entering the tournament will bring full circle to that attack on the devils in your past. Secondly, start embracing the good memories and your wonderful talents. Melanie, I may have selective recall, but I seem to remember we had some good times in those days as well?”

Coach interrupted. “It seemed from my perspective all you two did the whole time you were at Clapshorn was have a good time – on the golf course and off!”

Melanie smiled ruefully for the first time since they had returned to the condo and admitted. “It is true. We did cut a little bit of a swath through Billing’s high society if I remember correctly!”

“And then there is your gift Melanie,” Rebecca continued. “I’ve spent the last thirty-five years looking for you and dedicated a significant part of my scholarly career to the study of what explains your special talents. We’re all so sorry you had to carry that burden yourself in those days, but there were so many good things that happened back then as well Melanie.”

“It’s true,” Burt interjected. “When I had someone do some research on missing persons and found your case, it was Rebecca who had kept the file active and constantly bugged the RCMP for any new information. As you’ve gathered, she is the Dr. Johnston I told you about who is the Harvard specialist in spatial relationship and awareness.”

Melanie just glared at Burt and turned her attention back to Rebecca.

“Horace, Coach, and I were ecstatic when Burt contacted me, and when he told me he was going to try for the Champion Tour I cooked up the idea of you trying for it. I applied for you and Burt had some friends somewhere who mysteriously helped out and

M. McDougal is now enrolled in the Champions Tour qualifier. Much to the chagrin of the organizers as you have seen. I wanted to contact you much earlier in Mexico, but Burt said that would be dangerous for you so we waited until you were here in California. What I was trying to do was to put you back into a circumstance where your special abilities could be used. The unhappiest people in the world are those with latent talents who ignore them all through their lives. We wanted to put you in a golf tournament where you will get the satisfaction of using your ability.”

Melanie looked at Burt and both of them laughed as they simultaneously thought about the fights they had, with each other and others, over the past six months.

“I think I can handle the testing of my “special” talents as you call them.”

“And we wanted to see if you could still play before we exposed ourselves, so to speak.”

They all waited while Melanie just stood there, arms crossed, a sullen angry look on her face as she scanned each of their eyes. After an uncomfortable moment of silence she settled her glare on Rebecca.

“And can I still play?”

This time Coach intervened with a snort. “Melanie, your game looks better than ever. As you might have noticed, you were starting to draw a crowd, not because you were a woman but because of your shot making. We were surprised the press hadn’t found you and even more surprised you hadn’t figured out something earlier. You might have noticed you were the only caddie who was playing? But regardless, you can still play Melanie.”

“What happens to you Burt? How do you explain ‘us’ to the press? What if we end up in the same draw?”

“I’ve withdrawn Melanie. For a number of reasons. The most important one is that I now know I am simply not good enough. I entered into this event under false circumstances and while the real Burt might have had a chance, the real me does not. I would be embarrassed.”

Melanie looked over at Coach and Rebecca as Burt referred to his ‘real’ self.

“It’s OK Melanie,” Coach offered. “Burt explained he was in a witness protection program from Canada. We’re OK with that and don’t need to know any more.”

“And that’s the second reason Melanie,” Burt continued. “As some colleagues pointed out to me a few weeks or so ago, my new identity would not hold up to press scrutiny if I was to actually make the tour. Someone would be sure to emerge from Burt’s old life and make things a little dodgy for me. So even though I’m sure I wouldn’t make it anywhere in this thing, it is just wise to back out.”

“But the same thing will happen to me Burt. I won’t even have to win to be a media sensation. I’ll have to explain the last thirty years.”

“Not really,” Rebecca offered. “You have escaped the world for over thirty years, but you haven’t done anything illegal or even extraordinary or press worthy. All you have to say is that you have not been in the golf world for a while. Travelling. Living abroad. You can even say you have worked as a gardener for large estates in Mexico. The press will only care about your golf now not where you have been.” She paused. “But it does mean you are stepping back into your life Melanie. That is the only decision you have to make. Are you ready to step back into the life of Melanie McDougal? And regardless of golf, you need to know we won’t ever let you leave our world again.”

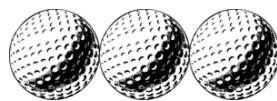
Burt stood up and walked over to her. “I’m sorry to have kept this from you Melanie, but I had to wait until Rebecca and Horace were here to help explain things. By the way, you haven’t noticed it, but Helen and Bob have been in your entourage as well and your Dad is on his way down to watch. Everyone in the world who loves you will be here to welcome you back to the world of Melanie McDougal.”

Melanie started to sob quietly and went into his arms. In a moment they were all laughing and crying. Melanie gave Burt a brief kiss and turned to Rebecca who was standing as well with a tentative grin on her face.

“Can I do this Rebecca?”

Rebecca reached over and took both of her hands. They looked at each other through tear-clouded eyes.

“Let’s go bust their balls girl!”



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## EPILOGUE

Wikipedia entry: "The Folly."

*"The "Folly" is the nickname for a golf course located near Bumstead, Saskatchewan, a small farming community 80 kilometers north west of Regina, the capital of the province of Saskatchewan, Canada. The registered name of the golf course is the North Saskatchewan Golf and Country Club. It was founded and built by a farmer, Dougal McDougal (1921-2012), in the late 60s as a nine-hole course and was expanded to eighteen holes in 1990. The course is unique in both its layout and its design. The regulation length course layout stretches along two sides of the North Saskatchewan River and at one point players must cross a bridge between the two sides of the river. The course provides sensational views over the Canadian prairies and the river.*

*It was both the effort of the builder and the design of the course that gave it the nickname the "Folly". McDougal did not play golf and knew nothing about golf course design and apparently built the course in his spare farming time on a whim as a distraction after his wife left him. As a result the holes represent the ultimate "target" golf, with no real fairways, just tee boxes, small landing areas in the middle of wheat or barley fields. He was a good farmer so he took more care with the greens than the rest of the course and they were carpet perfect, annoyingly undulating and well protected with berms and sand traps. In order to keep golfers from going into his fields to look for the inevitable errant ball he provided a bucket of balls on every tee box and landing area. This practice continues today and the green fee includes access to all the balls you want to hit at every hole. It is rumoured that Moe Norman once played the course in the early sixties when he went to Saskatchewan and won the Saskatchewan Open and the story is he had so much fun he laughed his way around the course. More recent pros have verified that a good sense of humour is needed to play the course. Dougal McDougal*

*passed away in 2013 and the course is now run by his daughter Melanie and her partner Burt Van Royan. He is a certified CPGA golf instructor. In 2013 she became the only woman to ever qualify for the Champions Tour in the U.S. ending up fourth in the qualifying tournament in La Quinta California in May, 2013. She had four top ten finishes in the 2013/14 season and has qualified for the 2014/15 season although she has indicated she will not be joining the tour, instead focusing upon teaching with her partner Van Royan. Together they travel the world giving free golf lessons and demonstrations to young people who would otherwise not be able to give the game of golf a try. Their other 'home' teaching course is the Puertos Los Barilles course in San Jose Del Cabo where they have brought disadvantaged children from all parts of Mexico for an introduction to the game of golf."*

The screen door slammed behind Burt as he returned from getting the mail from the box at the end of the driveway. As he walked into the kitchen he shuffled through the pile of letters and flyers and was halfway into the pile, throwing most of it into the growing pile of junk mail by the kitchen door when he came to a brown manila envelope. He put the rest of the mail aside and stared at it. They had been back at the Folly for a couple of years now and life was good. The course was being well managed by a team that Melanie's Dad had put together in his last years, so they had been free in their first year to follow her career on the Champions Tour. Rebecca had a good year, but after a sabbatical spent as Melanie's caddy, she had gone back to her research and teaching at Harvard and to her husband, children and grandchildren. Melanie just did not want to compete anymore. Golf was a wonderful part of her life but she hadn't found the deep satisfaction from simply playing again that she had hoped for. Perhaps most of all, after so many years living a lost life, she just wanted to be home at the Folly with Burt. Money wasn't a problem. The land Maria left to Melanie and the others had been sold to developers for over \$10 million. Burt seemed to have an unlimited source of funds from an overseas account somewhere.

Melanie had retained the old casita in the deal. So together they had established a golf school at the "Folly" and, with Doug's help, one at Puertos Los Barillas. Neither school had anything to do with tourists, neither the Saskatchewan type nor the Mexican

type, but rather both schools were free and focused upon young people who would not normally have the opportunity to learn the game. In Mexico the school was for the children of Mexicans who worked at the Cabo golf courses or on construction around the courses. In Saskatchewan the school was for children from the farm communities. They had decided they would spend the winters in San Jose and the summers at the Folly. “Not a bad life for a retired university VP,” Burt often thought to himself. They were able to keep in shape after he and Melanie had built a small gym in an old out-building on the farm where they practiced their martial arts together. At their ages it was getting harder and harder to stay in top shape, but it was even more important that they keep trying. Burt's arthritis was becoming an increasing burden. They had also put together a little golf show to entertain the children and their parents where they did things like hit balls off the top of pop bottles, hit balls backwards and hit fades and draws at targets designed like clowns with large open mouths. In one part of the show Burt lies down and puts a tee in his mouth and Melanie hits shots from the tee. Melanie was very talented at these games and seemed to like them better than actually playing matches. She would challenge any golfers in the crowd to games involving driving accuracy and other shooting challenges. She often made the famous Moe Norman challenge that she could hit a post two hundred yards away with her driver before anyone could sink a forty-foot putt. There was always some arrogant male golfer in the crowd who she relished embarrassing.

But best of all, they hadn't heard from the Agency since they had been dropped off by the boat in San Carlos.

Until today.

The manila envelope had only a return address, written in what Burt recognized was Richard's handwriting “The Hotel California.”

“Melanie,” Burt called as he ripped the top off the envelope. “You'd better come in here.”

Melanie was wiping her hands as she came over to the kitchen table and he dumped the contents of the envelope on the table.

It contained four items.

## **Note To The Reader**

**For advice with your golf game email Melinda at [talonlakepress@gmail.com](mailto:talonlakepress@gmail.com)  
or twitter at [@melindagolf](https://twitter.com/melindagolf)**

Thank you for choosing to read The Sand Trap. I sincerely hope you were entertained! Whatever your experience with this book, you could entertain me in return with your feedback. It is only through learning about the experiences of readers like yourselves that I can improve my efforts at story telling. You can send comments to:

[Talonlakepress@gmail.com](mailto:Talonlakepress@gmail.com)

Thank you in advance for your help!

D.G. Marshall

## **About the Author**

D.G. Marshall was born in Canada in 1949 on a farm just outside of Horning's Mills, Ontario. Recently retired after a long career in Post Secondary Education, Dr. Marshall has lived and worked in Ontario, Manitoba, Alberta, the Northwest Territories and St. Lucia in the Caribbean. While a published author of academic articles, this is Marshall's first full-length fiction. Marshall has been married for forty-one years, has two sons and three grandchildren. He spends part of the year at a cottage near Rutherglen, Ontario, and the rest of the year in Calgary, and various warm places..

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